EVENTS

INFORMATION

Spike Island

PAUL SIMON RICHARDS
QUASI-MONTE CARLO
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An essay by Esther Leslie

Light belongs to everyone – it is there shining down on us, sometimes. We have good fortune if it is sunny and the light nourishes our body and brightens our world. There is often not enough light. The rich have all the light they want: vast chandeliers or recessed lighting systems, panoramic windows, and the chance to jet off at will to the South of France or some Paradise Island, in search of sun and sea. Light encircles them on multiple high-end reflecting surfaces, glossy, twinkly. Light is possessed by diamonds, crystal tableware, highly polished marble floors, expensive granite kitchen tops or designer tiles, the polished metal of the casino wheel, the shiny bronze of the celebrated sculpture – not possessed by them really, brought into being by ranks of cleaners and polishers or by well-angled light sources whose rays bounce off the hard matter, producing a glare that would banish far all grubby fingers, all who are thieves of light, rather than its chosen golden children. Light scatters off beautiful clear water, the type of water – blue and placid, and dramatic when necessary – that suffuses the marketing of the best life imaginable, the one led idly and dislodged from routine intention and attention. But light, its rays, its bouncing reflections, its scattering, and water, its ripples and mirrorings, can be simulated in computers, added as photorealistic touches to make an unreal room a real-enough room, to make a swelling wave accurate in its physics and seemingly devastating to life's stability, like the sea typhoon that almost drowns Moana in the Disney animation. Simulated light and liquidly flowing movements can conjure an unreal kitchen through which gushes a waterless sea transporting a ray fish, the rays of light visible as shimmer on its non-body, as pools of silver that delude. It can summon a bright atrium in which shoals of gun-metal fish cluster and twist in the airy light, buoyed by never-existing currents. What a difference lighting makes – so they say in tips on how to best show off your flat on a home rental website. Sell it to the light seekers: 'Brightness can affect the entire mood of the photo'. And if you have water in view, be sure to show it off. Such reflecting brilliance draws us to the thumbnail photos that are flicked through in a stuttering rhythm at the start of *Quasi-Monte Carlo*. In the images, brilliance bounces off enormous continental pillows, brilliance seeps in through large windows, brilliance sparkles on the Med, brilliance pools on parquet floors, brilliance caresses the curves of coffee pods or emanates from screens. Brilliance can be adjusted in an option on a drop down software menu. What brilliance is the brilliance whose source is mechanical-mysterious? Just how much indirect light, result of complex algorithmic calculations of global illumination, is needed to make this seem plausible, and desirable, for who doesn't lust after that glossier image, the one in which there is no dirt, just pure immaterial materiality, the shimmering product of ray traced light?

Quasi-Monte Carlo has its light seekers. A woman who wishes to leave a flood-damaged, mouse-ridden, cowboy-botched house to sunbathe on a 'dream holiday' on the Mediterranean with her partner. This trip to Monte Carlo is impeded by cash flow crises and an inability to plan ahead.

There are accidents and misunderstandings – for example, a spillage of beer, small replication of the water outage at home. These flows of liquids punctuate the flow of life. Such accidents might lead on to something else, or not, something wanted or not. What is the flow of this video? What focus is the right one? What will come into the light, and why? A liquescent spill, an experience of light, these accidents and lucky and unlucky breaks combine to make up a life (and this video), the name of a random collation of events, factors, circumstances, outcomes. And on the way to making life, or taking time out (while the builders and administrators work hard in the background), what is put before us, or before the sun seekers appears as just propositions – which option, which menu, which Airbnb rental, which bathroom remodelling, which dream of a life, which throw of the dice or spin of the wheel to pin one's luck to, which lucky charm, which view, which place to place the focus?

The couple get to Monte Carlo only in duvet-dreamt images, induced by hypnosis, and one of them will challenge – and intensify – the sun with his pale body, once it is smothered in luminous sun cream and he scatters crystals of rainbow water that further reflect off a bottle of fizzy drink. The amassed sun worshippers will reach for their sunglasses against this strange dreamy light. On this unjourney to the sun, to sparkling water and highly polished marble, to an iridescent luminescence, the light of dreams and good fortune, there are interruptions, or interference patterns. A hypnotist appears now and again, dressed sometimes in a fabric with a haphazard scattering of dots, a reminder of the jittering dots that mask and cushion her fuzzy first entrance and also of the underside of the ray fish who flies around an imagined-space of prosaic computer labour whose walls are stippled likewise with random dots. Sometimes the hypnotist wears a dress with a pattern that radiates a moiré effect, the dynamic fuzz of a seemingly third pattern that arises out of two arrays that are very close in form, but slightly rotated or of a different pitch. The moiré's appearance here is perverse – digital photographers and film-makers are more likely to eliminate such unintended, unwanted visual outcomes that arise, for example, when a delicate pattern on the recorded subject meshes with the pattern on the camera's imaging chip. *Quasi-Monte Carlo* affirms the zing of moiré, originally an effect of watered silk, as the hypnotist stands against a background of Vasarely-style op-art stripes. The video holds onto it as it radiates from the hypnotist, like an aura, and her earrings and finger rings too bend back and curl environments, interfering with the image plane. One time, she is obscurely set against a fizzing zebra striped effect around the edges of the image, a jiggle of light that seems to swaddle the mind, impeding the passage of the surrounding world into perception, in order to better conjure an image, the image whose presence she is to induce in her clients, one that falls between, outside of, through dully banal and infantilising UK daytime TV shows and the glitzy elegance of the European jet set. In a digital camera, calculations appear as zebra lines on the in-screen image, warding against too much light, or over-exposure. Here, as she makes efforts at hypnosis, excessive light, light's interferences appear to allow access to the image-space. To assist this entrée, the hypnotist recites enigmatic directions, urgent telegraphic communications, leading not to a place, but to the generation of an image, to the making of an image, which might, in the manner of

regression, bend back time and ask those watching to be their earlier selves, or many selves or fragmented selves.

The hypnotist presides over the illogic proper to montage, an absurdity native to editing, that of smashing together long periods of hard work and long distances – labour and physics. This confection called video can take revenge on these exertions and constrictions – curving time, segueing discrete images – say of roulette wheels, computer fans and aircraft tyres. In this unpredictable universe (ours and the video's), reference is made to a high-dimensional algorithm that attempts to compute the unforeseen from randomness, for in Monte Carlo the Grand Casino became a generator of random numbers to feed algorithms of prediction. In time, such chance numerical configurations come to nourish computer statistics and physical modelling, such that uncertain systems might be simulated, pre-envisaging everything from fluid movements to oil reserves, transportation of particles through matter, as in nuclear reactions, as well as degrees of riskiness in volatile businesses. Excited by the energies of random association, in this video words shower like fireworks, a gobbet of syllables cascading in various directions: ray, stop, cache. This verbal multiplicity, the puns, foster the image. The image arrives from random provocations. Light shimmering on mussel shells, cocktail shakers and Pastis bottles invites a dream of luxury, and it will extract its essence from the quasi-material, surfacing as a ribbon of pink brilliance and transmuting into a shoal of swirling non-fish. It is a matter of luck if we can take the image for the reality, or if the image suffices, if the media is not offline just when we need it, if modellers – be they builder, sculptor, dolls house maker, knock-offs caster, puppeteer or CGI animator – model well or draft what we think we want, if the face hallucinated (by us, by the algorithm) is the right one, the attractive one, the true one. To reveal the image we really want is risky, a word, by the way, of uncertain origin – the safest guess being that it derives from the ancient Greek for cliff, and so signals the hazards of sailing along the rocky coasts of the Mediterranean, in low light, no doubt. Paul Simon Richards' video risks a lot, but when it comes to risk calculation there are plenty of algorithms to help manage it.

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BIOGRAPHY

Paul Simon Richards (b. 1981, UK, lives and works in London) studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London and holds a MA Philosophy from the University of Greenwich, London. Recent solo exhibitions include *L*a*b*, Arcade, London; *Love's Hidden Symmetry*, AND/OR, London (both 2016); and *Voices* at Nile Sunset Annex, Cairo (2015). His work has featured in group exhibitions at venues such as The Showroom, London; Frieze Art Fair (with Lucky PDF), London; Galerie kunstbuero, Vienna; Jerwood Space, London; and Modern Art Oxford, Oxford; and film festivals such as the BFI London Film Festival, Experimenta section.

In 2017, Richards was selected by FLAMIN Productions to make his video work *Quasi-Monte Carlo*, and in 2015 he was awarded the Fokus video prize, Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen.

CREDITS