

# THE DARK SIDE OF THE SIMS

Researching The Sims' extent of satire of stereotypical American suburban life from a dark play perspective.



Sophie Krenn

Utrecht University

New Media & Digital Culture

Supervisor: Ingrid Hoofd

*To Hannes and Traude.  
Because if it wasn't for you, these pages would be blank.*

*- Sophie*

## **I. ABSTRACT**

The Sims is a computer game that simulates the daily life of a stereotypical American suburb. The player has to manage the sim's life by performing typical daily tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, and taking care of its social circle, its career, and starting a family. The player is the author of the sim's story. However, not only does the player tell a story, the game does, too. But what story does it tell? This question has been a topic of discussion for some time. Since its release in 2000, the game has been examined by a substantial number of scholars. Investigation of the existing discourse on The Sims raises the question of whether the game has a satirical subtext. This thesis joins the academic discourse on The Sims and its satirical subtext, while adding a new perspective: the fact that the game can also be played in a vicious manner, whereby sims are tortured and killed. This thesis provides a new interpretation that this kind of dark play is the key to understanding The Sims' satirical subtext, while answering the research question: *To what extent does The Sims express satire of stereotypical American suburban life from a perspective of dark play?* A textual analysis, which includes transgressive play, demonstrates how the game can be understood as a parody of the stereotypical American suburb and the conditions existing therein. By revealing the dark narrative, the game viciously communicates the satirical message that the pure image we have of the suburban life is merely a circulation of images and has lost touch with "the real".

## **II. KEYWORDS**

The Sims – Satire – Dark Play – Simulation – Hyperreality

### III. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest thanks go to the supervisor of this thesis, Ingrid Hoofd. Her constructive feedback and enthusiasm to discuss the topic allowed me to take this research to the next level. I appreciate her attention, uncountable *koffies verkeerd* and the significant amount of time she invested in me. I also want to acknowledge the support I received from the Krenns, who are my backbone and who reminded me of my perseverance when I almost forgot about it: “Wie du schon von Batman’s Butler Alfred weißt: why do we fall? So we can learn to pick ourselves up.” Furthermore, my thanks go to Vance H. for his time, effort and input. And last but not least, Jorik Weustink, for keeping my mood upbeat throughout the writing process and for making me believe that I can achieve anything I want to.

Thank you.



## **IV. TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1. A Note on Theory – The Academic Investigation	9
<b>2. MIGUEL SICART: THE SIMS AS AN EXPRESSIVE OBJECT</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1. Ideology and The Sims	10
2.2. The stereotypical American suburb	11
2.1. Late Capitalism and The Sims	12
2.2. Interim Conclusion: Sicart and The (ideological) Sims	12
<b>3. SATIRE: THE WHAT AND HOW</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1. The What: An Illustration of the Term	14
3.2. The How: Narrative in The Sims	15
3.2.1. Gonzalo Frasca: Simulation vs. Narrative	16
3.3. Interim Conclusion: Satire in The Sims	17
<b>4. DARK PLAY</b>	<b>18</b>
4.1. The Formula of Dark Play	19
4.1. Not Dark, not Happy	20
<b>5. ANALYSING THE SIMS</b>	<b>21</b>
5.1. Reading and Playing the Game	21
5.2. Revealing the Dark Side	24
5.1. Revealing the Satire	28
<b>6. CONCLUSION: FROM HAPPY HOMES TO KILLING-BOXES</b>	<b>29</b>
6.1. Suggestion for Further Research	30
<b>7. BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>31</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Several months ago, I had a conversation with colleagues about computer games we played in our childhood and teenage years. Soon our conversation focussed on *The Sims* (Maxis 2000), a computer game in which the player leads an avatar through daily life. We had all played it, but not in the same way. When one of my colleagues mentioned how much she loved caring for her avatar's children and earning significant sums of money, another colleague said he preferred allowing them to drown or starve to death. The conversation rapidly shifted from sharing childhood-stories to a discussion of deeper meanings hidden within the game. This incident sparked my curiosity, leading me to further investigate *The Sims*.

*The Sims* is a computer game that extends over four generations. The basic game-set of *The Sims* involves placing the player in a generic suburban environment at the start of the game. The player is provided with a certain amount of money ("*simoleons*") and can create one or more avatars, named *sims* (singular. *sim*), and either place them in a pre-built house or start building them a home from scratch. The player has a god-like perspective over the household, having to manage typical daily tasks, such as cleaning, cooking, fitness and going to work. In addition to these responsibilities, the player also creates the "story" of the sim by, for example, developing romantic relationships with neighbours, deciding to build a career or start a family – somewhat reminiscent of a soap opera with the player as author. However, the player can also virtually abuse and kill their sims, turning the sims' story into something unexpectedly dark. The game's environment, primarily the sim's household, reminds one of a stereotypical representation of an American suburb as seen in television shows or novels: standalone-houses, yellow school busses and taxis, and the possibility for intimate relationships with neighbours.

Since its release in 2000, a large number of scholars have explored the game. Play scholar Miguel Sicart goes as far as to call the game "probably the most famous ludical product in the academic world" (Sicart 2003, 1). As the theoretical investigation in this thesis demonstrates, scholars exploring *The Sims* commonly link the gaming environment to American suburbs. Thus, when the game is closely analysed within an academic discourse, findings commonly point to the game's allusion to life in American suburbs (Pearce 2004; Frasca 2001; Herz 2002). Within this discourse, the degree of satire of the game is a recurring and intensively

discussed topic. Some claim that the game promotes certain behaviours, and can thus not be read as satire. Others, however, do read it as a satirical statement. As an example, game designer and scholar Celia Pearce writes that the game has a strong satirical subtext, which cannot be influenced by the player, and thus ironically criticises the consumerist aspect of life in an American suburb (Pearce 2004, 150). This subtext, she explains, is that the sims need things to make them happy. However, over time, the things begin to own the sims: a larger house makes the sim happier, but it also requires more cleaning. You can then hire a maid, but this requires more income. Therefore, the sim must work more to earn more money. With more money, the sim can afford bigger, better things – and so it continues (ibid., 150). From another perspective, game designer and researcher Gonzalo Frasca states, “I met some people that firmly believe that The Sims is a parody and, therefore, it is actually a critique of consumerism. Personally, I disagree [...] I am not able to find satire within it” (Frasca 2001). Frasca suggests that the game is designed in a way that makes it difficult to enjoy playing unless – in Frasca’s words – “you buy a lot of stuff” (ibid.). He writes, “certainly, the game may be making fun of suburban Americans, but since it rewards the player every time she buys new stuff, I do not think it could be considered parody” (ibid.). This thesis agrees with Pearce’s argument of The Sims having a satirical subtext, and therefore contradicts Frasca, who cannot find satire within the game. My reasons for agreeing with Pearce and disagreeing with Frasca are illustrated during the course of this research.

Investigation of the existing discourse of The Sims’ satiric extent reveals that scholars primarily focus on the game’s players taking actions that lead to a “successful” or “happy” sim. These actions are then taken as reasoning for or against satire of American suburban life. Thus, for example, when a consumerist gameplay is used to argue for or against satire in The Sims, the author focuses on actions taken by the player that align to a consumerist outlook; thus making the sim develop its skills to find a good job, earn a high salary, and buy a lot of stuff<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the sim does become “happy” from this type of gameplay, however scholars neglect the fact that The Sims can also be played differently. It misses a crucial possibility: namely that players often do unexpected things in games (van Vught and Glas 2017, 8). Making the sim “happy” is not the only way The Sims is played. Players also intentionally

---

<sup>1</sup> An example of such is Celia Pearce’s work *Towards a Game Theory of Game* (2004).

“torture” and “kill” their avatars. It may be surprising, but an investigation into the topic demonstrates that torture and death commonly occur in *The Sims*.

I’d never torture a sim, but I do kill incompetent service sims and annoying townies quite a bit, but they always deserve it.<sup>2</sup>

Silver16 2009

The type of gameplay in which players virtually torture or kill their sims is related to the concept of *dark play*. Briefly, dark play is a gameplay method occurring when the game’s theme and content create an environment in which deviant, controversial, and tasteless actions are possible (Linderoth and Mortensen 2015, 15). I elaborate on dark play in chapter 4. In the course of this thesis, it becomes clear that dark play does not solely refer to the player taking actions motivated by dark intentions, but also refers to the game’s structure, as a system with rules, which allows the occurrence of dark play. As video game scholar Espen Aarseth writes, “[g]ames are machines that sometimes allow their players to do unexpected things, often just because these actions are not explicitly forbidden” (Aarseth 2007, 132). In other words, leading a “happy” (possibly consumerist) life is not the only story that is being told in *The Sims*.

Game scholars Jasper van Vught and René Glas argue that dismissing the dominant play style yields new insights (van Vught and Glas 2017, 9). If *The Sims* models stereotypical American suburban life, then the occurrence of dark play in the game permits a new interpretation of satire in *The Sims*. Therefore, I introduce dark play to the discussion of *The Sims*’ possible expression of satire. I argue that this approach has great potential to recognise satire in this life-simulating computer game and allows for new interpretations, since dark play in *The Sims* with regard to satire is currently an unexplored topic. This thesis thus examines the research question:

*To what extent does The Sims express satire of stereotypical American suburban life from a perspective of dark play?*

---

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 4., dealing with dark play, presents further examples of players telling their dark stories.



The research question addresses the subject of research as *The Sims*. This term includes all four generations of the game. In case a specific generation of the game is mentioned, the precise title and release date will be named. The textual analysis will focus on *The Sims 4* (2014), for reasons introduced in the analysis' methodology section.

Satire can influence the behaviour of individuals and, consequently, even of society, and it is therefore a relevant topic. Satire in *The Sims* would not be a reoccurring topic in the academic discussion if the satirical aspect of the game were irrelevant. Megan LeBoeuf describes satire as a powerful tool with the purpose to point out deficiencies in human behaviours and the resulting social issues: "What better tool than satire exists for voicing criticism in these unstable times?" (LeBoeuf 2007, 1-2). Satire is a tool of social criticism, with the purpose to draw attention to serious issues (Kishor Singh 2012, 68). Thus, the investigation into whether *The Sims* expresses a satirical message extends beyond scholars arguing over the details of a game, but rather revolves around exploring whether the computer game criticises a specific society, lifestyle, or behaviours. If this is the case, the game goes beyond entertainment, making a social comment. *The Sims* has something to say, and we should listen.

### **1.1. A Note on Theory – The Academic Investigation**

*The Sims* is a recurring topic in a substantial number of discussions within the field of game research. According to Sicart, this interest is due to the game's intention to function as a social simulator. The developer, Will Wright, defines his product as beyond a "software toy" – as a representation of life (Sicart 2003, 1). "This game proposal attracted the attention of all kinds of cultural researchers for its possibilities and ambitions" (ibid.). Undoubtedly, exploration of the academic discourse on *The Sims* demonstrates that the game has aroused the interest of many scholars (e.g. Herz 2002, Linderoth and Mortensen 2015, Mosberg Iversen 2005). However, three scholars have sparked my interest in particular: Gonzalo Frasca, Celia Pearce, and Miguel Sicart, whose specific approaches in analysing *The Sims* have shaped my interest.

Sicart sees the game as a representation of an ideology, which links *The Sims* as a computer game to ideologies – a profound basis for placing *The Sims* in the context of American suburban life and recognising its expressive power. Pearce discusses the narrative importance

of computer games and how, in the case of *The Sims*, the players actively participate in creating the game's narrative. Inclusion of the player in this process can lead to dark play in *The Sims*, giving the game's satirical message complexity and depth. A discussion of the game's narrative would not be complete without also incorporating Frasca's work on simulations, as it reveals how a player experiences satiric messages within games.

## **2. MIGUEL SICART: THE SIMS AS AN EXPRESSIVE OBJECT**

When discussing a computer game as a meaningful object, leading game studies theorist Miguel Sicart must be named. He repeatedly argues that games are more than media with the purpose of entertainment. He contends that they are moral objects with meaningful values (Sicart 2006, Sicart 2009). In his work, *Family Values: Ideology, Computer Games & The Sims* (2003), Sicart discusses games from the perspective of this research: *The Sims* as an ideological expression of contemporary western cultures, depicted in *The Sims* as American suburbs (ibid., 2). Sicart thus demonstrates that *The Sims* has the ability to express social commentary and, furthermore, that this commentary concerns stereotypical American suburban life. The following section first discusses the ways in which Sicart links *The Sims* and its ideological value, followed by a discussion on how this relates to American suburban life, and finally expounds the concluding comments that Sicart presents about *The Sims*.

### **2.1. Ideology and The Sims**

As a theoretical framework to discuss *The Sims* as an ideological game, Sicart uses concepts described by the French philosopher Althusser in order to first define "ideology". According to Sicart, these concepts belong to one of the most comprehensive approaches to ideology and its structures (Sicart 2003, 3). Althusser makes a distinction between two State Apparatus: The RSA (Repressive State Apparatus) and the ISA (Ideological State Apparatus). The first, the RSA, is the direct repressive force of the State. The ISA, on the other side, is a subtler means of repression. Norms are determined by the State but are ultimately addressed to the individuals privately (ibid., 3). An Althusserian example of ISA is school: "an institution controlled by the State, that helps preserving the ideology of the state by building the individual's subjectivity according to the proposals of the state" (ibid., 3). In other words, the State constructs norms /rules according to which individuals behave. This is

how the State essentially forms behaviours: through the reaction of the individuals to said norms and rules. Ideology, then, is “the representation of the relation between the individual as a subject and the larger social structures” (Sicart 2003, 3). What makes this definition so interesting, according to Sicart, is the fact that in these terms ideology is a subconscious structure (ibid., 4). He writes, “[s]ubconsciously, ideology rules our representation of the world and the relations we establish with this representation” (ibid., 4). Why is, according to Sicart, Althusser’s description of ideology relevant for *The Sims*?

If we accept that ideology is a structure that is a part of our [subconscious] and that is modelled by the power institutions, then we can accept that part of those modelling instruments are cultural artefacts. Therefore, some computer games can be considered as an ISA as long as they represent the representation of the real conditions of existence in our cultures.

Sicart 2003, 4

Sicart thus presents a compelling argument that certain computer games can be considered as ISA, as they represent the ideologies of existing cultures. *The Sims*, he writes, represents social life in modern societies, making it a cultural artefact, a representation of the world we live in, and thus an ideological medium (Sicart 2003, 4).

## **2.2. The stereotypical American suburb**

As already touched upon in the introduction, the modern society represented in *The Sims* is a stereotypical representation of an American suburb. Multiple scholars make the connection between the game and stereotypical American suburbs (Herz 2002; Pearce 2004; Frasca 2001; Lauwaert 2010). But what is this stereotype of an American suburb? By considering other representations of this environment, it is possible to identify the recurring clichés. What do the following have in common: American television comedy-drama *Desperate Housewives* (2004), American drama film *American Beauty* (1999), American animated sitcom *The Simpsons* (1989), the Comedy Central television show *South Park* (1997), and American television mockumentary sitcom *Modern Family* (2009)?

The environment is an amicable neighbourhood consisting of freestanding private homes. The neighbours are in close contact – either in a friendly or conflicting relationship. Facilities such as the workplace and school are rarely seen, and the private family households are the subject under scrutiny. Complicated relationships, mysteries, love / hate – the

neighbourhoods are teeming with dramatic storylines. The Sims coincides fully with this representation: freestanding homes, relationships with the neighbours, and the subject of interest – the private family home. The environment represented in The Sims is congruent with the reputedly used stereotypes of American suburbs. Therefore, linking the game to American suburban life is a logical conclusion. Returning to Sicart, this section has demonstrated the expressional value of an ideology in The Sims. It is now necessary to formulate the time context in which this ideology takes place.

### **2.1. Late Capitalism and The Sims**

Sicart argues that the ideological setting of The Sims' is in the late capitalism era. Late capitalism is the period in history where the capitalist scope has changed the focus of power recipients: instead of powerful States, the power is now embedded in globalised markets. Consequently, the economy replaces the State's role as ideology-determining institution. As an abstract institution, late capitalism permeates the social and cultural layers of western societies (Sicart 2003, 5). The ideology of late capitalism maintains an optimal economy. Recalling the Althusserian ISA, capital allows the ISAs to remain powerful. Ideology accepts superficial revolutions provided they do not threaten economic power (ibid., 5). This aspect of an ideology is essential for this research because, consequentially, a representation of such systems must also be flexible and allow for small revolutions, without capitalist dynamics being influenced (ibid., 5). Sicart defines The Sims as a reproduction of the ISA of late capitalism (Sicart 2003, 5). He describes the game as "a flexible ideological surface that is patterned by a structure that contributes to the survival of the society it simulates. To keep the structures, the user (the individuals) must be offered the illusion of free will" (ibid., 5). The Sims is thus a reproduction of late capitalism in that it is flexible and allows revolutions to take place, which is why the user must have the illusion of "free will". The users can accept or decline the capitalist rules. However, the ideologies will remain in place and capitalism will continue to exist.

### **2.2. Interim Conclusion: Sicart and The (ideological) Sims**

In the second half of his work, Sicart analyses The Sims with regard to his theoretical framework of ideologies and late capitalism. For this research, however, the value of discussing Sicart's work does not lie in the precise outcome of his analysis. Instead, it is

found in Sicart's convincing case that *The Sims* as a computer game has the power to express complex ideas about societies and ideas existing in these societies. He demonstrates that a game proposes a relationship with its player that is reminiscent of the relation between ISA and the subject. *The Sims*, he writes, is a revolutionary attempt to represent a society in a digital environment, and the game is thus a system that has the power to subtly spread ideological ideas of the environment represented (Sicart 2003, 10-11). With reference to the research question – to what extent *The Sims* expresses satire of stereotypical American suburban life when introducing dark play to the discussion – it is now clear that *The Sims* does offer an expressional aspect towards American suburban life. However, this is not the final aim of the research, as the goal of this thesis is to investigate the extent of satire of the game – from a dark play perspective<sup>3</sup>.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify why the satirical extent of *The Sims* warrants exploration. By recalling the examples provided of other representations of American suburban life, such as *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, or *American Beauty*, it is demonstrated that entertainment objects have been used to satirise the American suburban lifestyle. A writer critically reflecting on the film *American Beauty* states that the film asks you to “look closer at the home lives of your seemingly happy [neighbours], who appear to have it all, whatever it all may be: families, a nice home, a good car, careers” (Hayes 2015), and must therefore be viewed as satirical of the represented lifestyle (ibid.). *The Simpsons*, with their recurring derisive episodes of e.g. obesity, alcoholism, relationships with neighbours, school-struggles etc. have also been recognised as satirical of American suburban life (Henry 2012). In *The Power of Ridicule: An Analysis of Satire* (2007), Megan LeBoeuf writes about the Comedy Central television show *South Park*:

Over the years, it has transformed into a powerful satirical work, known for airing episodes about current events mere days after they occur [...]. The subjects of critique are incredibly varied and usually very controversial, attacking both conservative and liberal views on society.

LeBoeuf 2007, 12

---

<sup>3</sup> The reader might become impatient regarding the dark play perspective of *The Sims*. However, the research should not rush into this topic. Dark play is soon introduced in chapter 4.

The examples given are self-evident, exposing their own workings. The Sims has proven its power to express ideas about stereotypical American suburban life; the extent of its satire is thus a topic that will not be overlooked. The following section therefore introduces satire into the research in order to create an understanding of how satire can occur in a computer game such as The Sims. This is needed to set the framework of analysis, investigating the extent of satire using theory on dark play.

### **3. SATIRE: THE WHAT AND HOW**

As a first step, before discussing satire in The Sims, the term “satire” must be further defined for understanding how satire can exist within a computer game.

#### **3.1. The What: An Illustration of the Term**

Satire bears a long history; the ancient Romans used humour in their plays to provide mild social critique, which is now referred to as satire (LeBoeuf 2007, 2). The classical philologist Gilbert Highet suggests that satire usually occurs in one of three forms: *monologues*, *parodies*, and *narratives* (Highet 1962, 13-14). In a *monologue*, the satirist addresses the recipients directly. They state their view of a problem by trying to impose it upon the public. This form can be excluded for this research, as The Sims is not one person imposing their view onto the recipients. Simply because of the form in which it is played, The Sims is not a monological satire. In a *parody*, the satirist takes an existing work, which was created for a serious purpose, and then render the work ridiculous by, for example, exaggerating its purpose. The Sims does not *per se* mock or ridicule another work, but it could be read as a mockery of the stereotypical representation of American suburban life. A closer reading of the game, as discussed in chapter 5., will demonstrate how The Sims could be read as parody. The third form of satire is the *narrative* – a staged satire, in which the satirist does not appear at all, in the form of stories. Rather, the author communicates the satirical idea (e.g. view of a problem) through the storyline, which then must be interpreted correctly by the recipient (Highet 1962, 13-14). As Highet purports, this form of narrative does not need the presence of the satirist; the satirical idea is expressed indirectly through the storyline, which is done “by showing an apparently factual but really ludicrous and debased picture of this world” (Highet 1962, 158-159).

As a result of Hightet's forms of satire, *The Sims* could be understood as a parody of stereotypical American suburban life, where the satirist is distant from the actual message, and expresses the satire in the story as told by the game. This consequently means that the extent of satire lies in the narrative of the game. Arguing that, in case of *The Sims*, the satirical message is expressed through narrative requires a description of the narrative of the game, as not all games tell stories in the same way. The following section therefore discusses the narrative form in *The Sims*.

### **3.2. The How: Narrative in The Sims**

In *Towards a Game Theory of Game* (2004), Celia Pearce begins by stating that the first and most important aspect of computer games is that they revolve around *play*, not around *story*. Literature and film have a storyline, but in games, everything centres on the player experience (Pearce 2004, 144). This fundamental fact, she writes, allows us to view the narrative in a play-centric context, rather than in the storytelling form. The key to a play-centric narrative is that it remains incomplete to allow room for the player to develop said narrative (ibid., 144). This type of narrative is referred to as *emergent narrative*. Emergent narratives are “not pre-structured or pre-programmed, taking shape through the game play, yet they are not as unstructured, chaotic, and frustrating as life itself” (Jenkins 2002, 128). In other words, the narrative changes throughout the game, through the actions of the player, rather than through a pre-programmed storyline. However, the narrative is also not entirely random. In fact, as Media Studies scholar Henry Jenkins argues, “the game does not open a blank screen” (ibid., 128).

The designers of the game incorporate rules into the game that predetermine the actions that can be taken. Pearce describes this as “structured play” (Pearce 2004, 144). There is a structure in the form of i.e. goals, obstacles, consequences, penalties, and rewards, which guide the player to take specific actions (ibid., 144). If the satire lies in the narrative and the narrative emerges through the actions of the player, the game's rules and restrictions that form the actions become the object of interest. This references Sicart's work on *The Sims* as ISA. Much like the State that executes norms according to which individuals behave, *The Sims* designs rules and restrictions to which the players react and eventually learn in-game behaviours. The player is thus semi-free when building the narrative; the game moderates the player's actions / behaviours that consequently build the narrative. The satire of American

suburban life thus exists in the narrative that the player constructs as a product of and a reaction to the game's rules and structure. The extent of satire lies in the possible actions with narratological consequences.

This correlation between narrative and actions taken by the player compels incorporating Gonzalo Frasca's work *Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology* (2003). To discuss narrative, especially narrative within a computer game, would be incomplete without acknowledging that *The Sims* is a *simulation*. The classic narrative provides information audio-visually; the simulation adds the reaction to stimuli. Simulation adds depth to how the narrative is experienced by the player.

### **3.2.1. Gonzalo Frasca: Simulation vs. Narrative**

In his work, *Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology* (2003), Frasca explores how games provide authors with tools of conveying opinions and feelings through simulation (Frasca 2003, 1). He describes simulating as modelling a (source) system through a different system, which maintains the behaviours of the source system (ibid., 3). The game becomes a model of the simulated environment. With regard to *The Sims*, the game is the model-system based on a stereotypical American suburb (the source-system). The model-system simulates the source-system by incorporating the rules and behaviours of the source (ibid., 3). A textual analysis of *The Sims*, discussed in chapter 5., will demonstrate which rules and behaviours of stereotypical American suburbs are modelled in the game.

According to Frasca, the key-term of simulation is behaviour: the simulation does not only model audio and visuals, but also models reactions to certain stimuli (such as actions taken by the player) (Frasca 2003, 3). This can be compared to a film of an airplane versus an airplane simulator. The film of an airplane can show, for example, the landing of an airplane, how the speed is reduced, what it sounds like etc. The airplane simulator, however, allows manipulation of the landing. The one interacting with the simulation can experience the rules of what inputs lead to what outputs in order to land the airplane (ibid.). Or, in Frasca's words, "simulations are not just made of sequences of events but they also incorporate behavioural rules" (ibid., 6). Thus, the simulation can convey ideas, which are well hidden inside the model of the source-system, not as information but as rules (ibid.). Frasca refers to those who define those rules as *simauthors*. They define what actions can be taken and what their



narratological consequences are. Here the link between narrative and simulation becomes more precise: the narrative is the consequence of actions taken within the simulation. In the case of *The Sims*, this indicates that the narrative is constructed by the player taking actions within the simulated stereotypical American suburban environment, but the actions rely on the behavioural rules within this environment designed by the simauthors.

What makes a simulation especially interesting is that the one interacting with the modelled system becomes part of it. Simulations are thus real, existing objects that can be experienced within the real world that they augment (Lister et al. 2009, 44). Simulation is a theory of the real and the virtual imploding: how images, communications and media usurp the role of the “real” (Lister et al. 2009, 39). French theorist Jean Baudrillard suggests that the sheer proliferation of television screens, theme parks, computers and shopping centres, and the saturation of everyday life by images so thoroughly mediated and processed that the connection with the “real world” seems lost, epitomises a simulated world – a hyperreality where the artificial is experienced as real (ibid., 40). The stereotype of American suburban life is thus a hyperreality that results from the way in which life in American suburbs is thoroughly represented.

### **3.3. Interim Conclusion: Satire in *The Sims***

I have argued that *The Sims* as a computer game extends beyond entertainment purposes and must be seen as a meaningful object with the ability to express beliefs about American suburban life. Therefore, the game may have, as do other representational forms of stereotypical American suburbs, a satirical content. Chapter 3.2. has demonstrated that this satirical content would then be expressed through the narrative of *The Sims*. Furthermore, *The Sims* is more than merely a representation; it is a simulation. By interacting with the simulation, the player of *The Sims* experiences *The Sims*’ satirical message by learning about the rules of the game and its response to stimuli. A textual analysis, illustrated in chapter 5.2. will add depth to these findings by identifying rules and response to stimuli in an actual playing scenario.

Satire communicates social criticism to draw attention to issues in society (Kishor Singh 2012, 68). Even though satire is packaged in a fun medium, it does not aim to be funny, but to make fun of. As Raj Kishor Singh writes, satire criticises society by exposing its stupidity

and shortcomings (ibid., 69). Furthermore, he states that satire is a vicious form of expression that uses fictional characters that represent real people, exposing and condemning their corruption (ibid., 68). Satire is thus not funny and upbeat (even if concealed in a “fun” medium such as a game), but its mechanics are vicious, highlighting vices and shortcomings. It might be *dark play*, therefore, that brings out this vicious aspect of the game. I propose, that the extent of satire in The Sims thus lies in this very notion: the game being played darkly. A textual analysis of the game will examine this proposition in chapter 5., however, first theory on dark play shall finally be introduced to this research.

#### 4. DARK PLAY

When examining related Internet blogs, countless examples can be found of The Sims players who have created dark narratives by virtually torturing or intentionally killing their sims. Here a small selection:

I'd never torture a sim, but I do kill incompetent service sims and annoying townies quite a bit, but they always deserve it.

Silver16 2009

One time I killed a sim by drowning. Then I made everyone show up to his funeral in swimwear.

Toasterpoodle 2015

I'd say look at their personalities and aspirations. A lazy pleasure sim will feel neglected without a couch, and a serious, active neat freak won't be happy locked up in a room full of trash and dirty dishes with no way to clean or get rid of them, especially if they have a playful and sloppy sim as a roomie. Personalised torture is the best kind of torture!

Anotherjyana 2010

I made a guy who was a compulsive neat-freak. Put him in a really surreal little house with a wedding buffet and a hamster or something, deleted the door. Eventually he went insane from lack of cleanliness and depression over his little rodent friend dying, and starved to death once the banquet rotted.

Vsanna 2015

My prison filled with slave-artists was pretty grim. Everyone got a single cell, bed, toilet, sink, artist easel. There was a warden that lived above them on the ground level

(all the cells were underground of course), who cooked for them, but they could only eat if they were turning out sellable art. Most of them went insane and died.

Jones 2015

These stories demonstrate that creating dark stories and torturing or killing the sims is a possible way to play the game. The type of gameplay chosen by the players illustrated above is related to the concept of dark play. To arrive at a clear understanding of what is meant by “dark play”, the following section illustrates what is meant when using this term.

#### **4.1. The Formula of Dark Play**

The term dark play varies in precise definition from scholar to scholar. In *The Dark Side of Game Play* (2015), game scholars Jonas Linderoth and Torill Elvira Mortensen discuss these various forms of the term<sup>4</sup>. Due to its overarching nature, Linderoth and Mortensen identify the recurring elements of different forms of dark play and conclude that dark refers to “content, themes, or actions that occur within games that in some contexts would be problematic, subversive, controversial, deviant, or tasteless” (Linderoth and Mortensen 2015, 15) (i.e. drowning a mother of two in the backyard pool and letting everyone attend the funeral in swimwear, see Toasterpoodle 2015), adding that play “refers to the fact these matters occur in a game” (Linderoth and Mortensen 2015, 15). This thesis picks up on Linderoth and Mortensen’s definition as it focuses on the relation between game and player. It therefore treats dark play as a method of gameplay occurring when the game’s theme and the game’s content create an environment in which dark actions are possible.

Linderoth and Mortensen’s illustration of dark play refers to three different aspects: a game’s *theme*, its *content* and *actions* players take. Together they build the space in which dark play can occur in a game. Nevertheless, a game’s *theme* is not to be confused with the genre of a game. While the genre categorizes the game in an industrial context, this thesis treats the theme as the overall story of the game. The theme places the game in the context of a larger story, which has the potential to then create the ideal storyline that the player must realise

---

<sup>4</sup> I.e. Richard Schercher, describing in 1988 dark play within performance studies as concept of situation where not all players are aware of the fact that they are playing (Linderoth and Mortensen 2015, 14). Or grief-playing – a type of gameplay where the player takes pleasure in intentionally disturbing the game experience for another (ibid., 13).

(Juul 2001). In *The Sims*, this theme is life in a stereotypical American suburb. The *content* available for play is shaped by the overall theme of a game (Linderoth and Mortensen 2015, 18). Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc and Robert Zubek use the term game mechanics to describe what this thesis treats as game content: “various actions, behaviours and control mechanisms afforded to the player within a game context” (LeBlanc and Zubek 2004, 3). These mechanics form the particular components of the game (ibid.). As an example to clarify this, a WWII-themed game leads to content such as strategy planning or attacking enemies. In *The Sims*, the content consists of managing daily life and building a narrative. The theme and the content create the space in which certain types of *actions* are possible (Sjöblom 2015, 96). Hence, the possible actions of a game are all actions that can be taken within the game’s environment emerging from the game’s theme and content. With reference to the WWII-themed game example, where the content could consist of attacking enemies, the actions would then be the killing of an opponent.

Thus, theme, content, and actions by the player are not to be treated as discrete entities, but they are closely connected. The interdependencies amongst them allow a game to result in dark play. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman illustrate a concept that connects all three elements: *the space of possibility*. “It is the space of all possible actions that might take place in a game, the space of all possible meanings which can emerge from a game design” (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, 67). The game’s theme and content create the space for all possible actions, connecting the three elements of possibility for dark play. This space of possibility is a crucial factor for understanding how dark play occurs in a game. As for *The Sims*, the space of possibility does not appear dark *per se* – telling a story within a wholesome American suburb. Regardless, as the examples of dark play given above demonstrate, players do take dark actions leading to dark narratives. This is because games are not stable objects but are under constant negotiation by the players (van Vught and Glas 2017, 9). And these players explore, push, and bend the game’s dominant rules and they transgress the dominant play styles (ibid.).

#### **4.1. Not Dark, not Happy**

What is it about *The Sims*’ space of possibility that enables dark play to occur? Culture and games scholar Sara Mosberg Iversen (2005) claims that a game seeks to motivate player-activity through the construction of challenges. These challenges are constraints experienced

by the players that subsequently inform them of which tasks and actions *must* be taken. A cut-in scene is a prime example – it provides the player with a challenge while informing the player of necessary actions (“the gold has been stolen, kill the thief and return it to our dungeons”). However, in *The Sims*, the game does not have strict challenges communicated to the player that *must* be acted upon. The challenge of *The Sims* is rather simple: lead a life in a stereotypical American suburb by taking actions that slowly permit a narrative to emerge (ibid., 6). It is thus reasonable to claim that the game’s dominant play style is not to kill and torture one’s avatars. However, the game also does not prohibit the player from doing so. If torture and death were not intended to be part of the gameplay, the game would not incorporate dark actions into its rules and mechanics. Sicart writes that games are “activities in which agents engage with a system designed to encourage the achievement of certain goals with predetermined means” (Sicart 2009, 193). The goal of *The Sims* is to build *any* narrative and not necessarily a *happy* one. Dark play can and does occur. It exists within *The Sims* and it deserves to be acknowledged when interpreting the game’s satirical extent. I argue that analysing *The Sims* from a dark play perspective permits one to draw new insights into the interpretation of the game’s meaning. In order to do so, I conduct a textual analysis acknowledging and including transgressive play as a possible play scenario.

## **5. ANALYSING THE SIMS**

There are three main findings so far in this thesis: firstly, satire of stereotypical American suburban life can be expressed through the emergent narrative of *The Sims*, possibly mocking the stereotypical representation. Secondly, this emergent narrative consists of the sum of dark actions taken. These dark actions are some of all the possible actions available to the player within the game’s environment. Thirdly, factors built into the game, such as rules and mechanics, predefine which player behaviour is possible. These findings lead me to conclude that, in order to learn about the extent of satire in *The Sims*, the game’s space of possibility, together with its rules and mechanics, must be analysed.

### **5.1. Reading and Playing the Game**

The choice of method emerged from the theoretical findings of this thesis: the object of analysis must be the game’s space of possibility and how it allows the player to create a dark narrative by taking devious actions. I am confident this method facilitates answering the

research question, and the findings contribute to the discourse on satire in *The Sims*. The method of analysis chosen for this thesis is a *textual analysis*. Games scholar and developer Clara Fernández-Vara strongly advocates this method in *Introduction to Game Analysis*, as it allows systematic examination of the games (Fernández-Vara 2014, 4). She suggests that “the foundation to a more sophisticated discourse on games is to understand them as *texts*” (ibid., 5). The term “text” does not only refer to the written word but also to “expressive media”, such as paintings, sports, broadcasts, and games. In this sense, a game is an expressive medium through which the designer communicates a message to the player (ibid. 6). “Text” is thus to be understood as an object that generates meaning by expressing messages to the recipient. The textual analysis then allows one to interpret said meaning.

Textual analysis incorporates the players and their actions into the investigation, making it an expedient method for the research topic of this thesis. In Fernández-Vara’s words, “the game is not really a complete text without a player that interprets its rules and interacts with it” (Fernández-Vara 2014, 7). Furthermore, the textual analysis allows one to explore how the game allows certain types of interactions, and in the case of this research, dark actions (ibid., 15). To achieve this, Fernández-Vara suggests examining the formal aspects of the game. The formal aspects include the system of the game and its components (the rules, the control schemes), and how the system is presented to the player (interface design, visual style) (ibid., 16). These are the “rules and mechanisms” I refer to in this thesis, as well as the game’s theme and content. Conducting a textual analysis thus means to first explore the rules, the control schemes, and the interface design of *The Sims*. This enables me to identify the game’s space of possibility. As a next step, the integration of dark play must be recognised: why does dark play occur and how does dark play contribute to the interpretation of the game’s extent of satire?

In order to provide a meaningful analysis, I must play the game. Fernández-Vara argues that playing the game oneself is a crucial aspect of performing a textual analysis. Only by actually playing the game can one understand how it works and how the game reacts to stimuli. “Grabbing the controller or the mouse is still essential to gain insight on how the game works” (Fernández-Vara 2014, 29). Van Vught and Glas suggest in their work, *Considering Play: from Method to Analysis*, that reflecting on the type of play is appropriate for the research’s angle when studying games (van Vught and Glas 2017, 15). As my research

investigates the extent of satire in The Sims from a dark play perspective, I must play darkly. As this is not The Sims' dominant play style, I will conduct the textual analysis by going *against* the dominant play style. This method is called *transgressive play*. Players submit to the rules and mechanisms of a game. They are therefore no longer completely free, but do have the power, however, to decide how to react according to these rules (Aarseth 2007, 130). Transgressive play is when a player rebels against, as Aarseth describes it, "the tyranny" of the game. It is a way of regaining a sense of identity through the mechanisms of the game itself (ibid., 132). With the textual analysis, I will therefore recognise the rules and mechanisms of The Sims, and then intentionally ignore them, rebel against them, just as many others do. Van Vught and Glas make a convincing case when they contend that this approach – taking actions that deviate from the dominant play styles – allows one to produce new interpretations of the game, which could not have been achieved otherwise (van Vught and Glas 2017, 9). The textual analysis will therefore contribute to the academic discussion on satire in The Sims by shedding light on its dark side.

It must be noted that this approach does not study enough plays to make a universal claim regarding The Sims' extent of satire. The analysis focuses on a specific aspect of the game and therewith disregards players that do not take any dark actions. The analysis can also not represent every player who does take dark actions. Fortunately, making a universal claim is not the goal of this analysis. A textual analysis allows one to embrace the indeterminacy of the game, making any personal experience a valid contribution when interpreting the text (van Vught and Glas 2017, 13). The results of the analysis allow for an interpretation of the game's expression of satire that can be activated once the player is involved. By analysing the game's rules and mechanics, I can identify the space of possibility. Through transgressive play, I can understand why dark play occurs even though it is not encouraged by the game and, as a result, provide an interpretation of The Sims' extent of satire.

The Sims extends over four generations, with numerous extension packs and spin-offs. Certainly, I would prefer to analyse each version to generate the most accurate results. Unfortunately, this would extend the limit of this research somewhat. I therefore focus on one The Sims generation: *The Sims 4* (2014). There are two reasons for this: firstly, this is the latest version of The Sims, representing most accurately our contemporary time. Secondly, in the scale of this research, by focussing on one version (instead of all versions), I am able to

provide a more detailed analysis. I will be able to comprehensively identify and illustrate the space of possibility, the game's formal aspects, and the occurrence of dark play. I acknowledge that performing an analysis of all generations would deliver more grounded analysis results. However, due to the reasons named, I will not do so.

## **5.2. Revealing the Dark Side**

As Fernández-Vara suggests, conducting the textual analysis comprises identifying the game's formal aspects. These aspects can be grouped according to how vigorously they impact the player's flexibility of interacting with the system. Fernández-Vara describes aspects with high impact as control schemes that leave little to no room for adjustment. Aspects with lower impact are the methods by which the game presents its system to the player – i.e. through visuals and design (Fernández-Vara 2014, 15-16). As previously illustrated, when discussing *The Sims* as an ISA, Sicart demonstrates that the computer game embodies the representation (hyperreality) of existing conditions in the represented culture (Sicart 2003, 4). *The Sims*' formal aspects therefore mimic facets that exist in the stereotype of American suburban life. However, the simauthors do not choose random aspects they wish to mimic, but, as Gonzalo Frasca argues, they apply certain aspects of the hyperreal to the game in order to convey ideas (Frasca 2003, 6). Apropos of *The Sims*, I identified and grouped its formal aspects, defining them as *strict rules* and *loose rules*. The strict rules are the mechanics of how the player *must* take actions. These strict rules surface through the game's space of possibility. The loose rules are the promotion of actions to the player by obtrusively presenting specific action-possibilities, thus the mechanics of how the player *can* take actions. The space of possibility consists of all actions that the player can take within the stereotypical American suburb. When interacting with objects and other sims, players are restricted in what they can and cannot do.





Image 1: The “action-circle”: the possible actions displayed to the player. Source: own screenshot.

The screenshot above depicts the actions available to the player. It appears when the player clicks on an object or another sim. Any interaction the player wants to have with any object or any sim is initiated by choosing from this *action-circle*. The available actions constantly change, as they adapt to the sim’s *emotional state*. When clicking on the treadmill while “happy”, the player can choose the action “exercise”. However, when the emotion is set on “angry”, the player can only choose the action “rage-fuelled run”. Images 2 and 3 below indicate the variety of actions, predefined by the sim’s emotion:



Image 2: Possible actions of “angry” sim. Source: own screenshot.



Image 3: Possible actions of “flirty” sim. Source: own screenshot.

The emotion of the sim changes autonomously. The player has little to no influence on how the sim is feeling. The emotion changes at random moments, often in situations where the sim is beyond the control of the player, such as during sleep or while at work. This recalls Sicart’s work on ethics in computer games, that a game can purposefully be programmed to motivate the player to take certain actions (Sicart 2009). The game predetermines what actions are possible, as the player must always choose one of the actions available in order to play the game. Especially interesting is how the game deceives the player into believing the action taken is a result of free will; the substantial number of ever-changing choices imply that the player is in control of what actions are taken. However, the game fully governs which actions are possible and at what point of play they are presented to the player. This illusion of free will confirms Sicart’s argument, that *The Sims* is a flexible ideological surface that offers just enough illusion of free will to keep the structures of the system in place (Sicart 2003, 5). The action-circle in *The Sims* thus makes the player believe they have control over the game, when the player is nothing more than an interactor with a carefully crafted system of rules and mechanics.

The space of possibility is the *strict rule* of what actions are provided to the player, leaving little room for adjustment. No other actions can be taken except those presented in the action-circle. The *loose rules* on the other hand, are rules presented to the players – not as what they have to do, but of what they can (or should) do. They constitute the dominant play styles of the game. *The Sims* strongly promotes two facets of the game: that the sim should be social and that it should work.

After having created a household and built a house, the everyday-life of the sims will start. Thereafter, several other sims – “neighbours” – will appear and ring the doorbell. The game thus ensures that the player interacts with several avatars and builds a social circle within the first playing hour. Throughout the game, “friends” continuously call, asking to come over to “hang out”. Furthermore, new avatars with whom the player has not yet interacted will repeatedly appear on the sim’s property, allowing the player to easily acquire new contacts. Similarly, the game encourages the player to have the sim pursue a career. The player needs simoleons (in-game currency) to purchase necessities such as food or to pay for electricity. Working becomes a necessity when wanting to provide for the sim. Furthermore, merely working to pay for basic needs appears to be insufficient; the game repeatedly reminds the player through push-notifications that the sim should acquire specific skills in order to be promoted.

Initially, my sim’s story developed naturally in the direction as promoted through the game’s loose rules – I made my sim work hard and interact with many other sims. However, I eventually became dissatisfied with this storyline and bored with only working and socializing. Abandoning these play aspects, however, has consequences: more push-notifications when “Lara” has missed work, more phone calls when “Lara” did not groom her relationships. I became aware of being guided by the game’s loose rules and therefore lost the illusion of free will I perceived at start. Irritated by the game pushing me to do certain things, I began to act in opposition to it, exerting my control over the development of the game’s emergent narrative. Instead of working and socialising, I “broke into” other sims’ houses or locked neighbours into small rooms so that they could not go to the bathroom. In short, I started to “rebel”, to transgress the game’s dominant play styles. By revolting against them, I was able to reclaim my apparent free will. Ultimately, this dissatisfaction was the turning point for my narrative to become dark. Starting with rather minor dark actions, I eventually turned the narrative to torture and death. I began to push the boundaries further – instead of merely locking neighbours in so they could not use the bathroom, I kept them locked up even longer, waiting to see what happens if they were not able to eat. “Lara’s” narrative turned from being a hard working socializer to trapping and starving neighbours. The trapping in “killing-boxes” was part of my sim’s narrative. Once this storyline bored me, I proceeded to create a new, wholesome household, and the game allowed me to do it all over again.



Image 4: “Killing-Box”. Source: own screenshot.

### 5.1. Revealing the Satire

As discussed in the course of this thesis, The Sims is a model-system based on the stereotype of American suburban life as source-system. The model-system represents the source-system by incorporating certain rules and behaviours of the source (Sicart 2003, 3). The analysis illustrated and discussed in this chapter now allows the identification of rules and behaviours The Sims incorporated from the source-system. These are the *strict and loose rules*, as defined in the previous section. The *strict rules* build the space of possibility. When taking any sort of action, including actions that lead to a dark narrative, the player is limited to a set of options. Due to the many options, the player perceives free will while actually being restricted by predefined possibilities. The *loose rules* are a first indication of the satirical message within The Sims. As Gonzalo Frasca argues, the modelled rules are not randomly chosen but are intentionally incorporated into the game to convey ideas (Frasca 2003, 6). The analysis has clearly demonstrated that working on one’s career and social circle, being constantly pushed by the environment to do so, are norms of the stereotype incorporated into the game. However, the fact that the game chose to model these rules of the source-system does not yet reveal an expression of satire.

In order to fully examine satire in *The Sims*, the player must be considered. *The Sims* as a computer game is a simulation, meaning that the reaction to the rules carries as much meaning as the rules themselves (ibid., 3). At game start, I first followed the loose rules, but eventually I rebelled against them. As the analysis has demonstrated, the game gives the player the illusion of free will. However, it eventually demonstrates to the player that the alleged free will is nothing but an illusion by repeatedly pushing the loose rules onto them, and by restricting their actions through the strict rules. As a result, the player revolts and the emergent narrative starts turning dark. In chapter 3., I illustrated that satire can be expressed through the narrative of a computer game. I then proposed that, in case of *The Sims*, the expression of satire is revealed by the integration of dark play into the narrative. The analysis now allows me to offer an interpretation of *The Sims*' expression of satire: *The Sims*' narrative tells a story, a dark and vicious one. It exposes the shortcomings of the rules and norms existing in stereotypical American suburban life. As Raj Kishor Singh states, satire is a vicious form of expression that uses fictional characters, which denote real people, by exposing and condemning their corruption (Kishor Singh 2012, 68).

## **6. CONCLUSION: FROM HAPPY HOMES TO KILLING-BOXES**

*To what extent does The Sims express satire of stereotypical American suburban life from a perspective of dark play?*

The findings offer a new interpretation of *The Sims*' satirical message: *The Sims* reveals what happens behind closed doors in the seemingly wholesome stereotypical American suburb. From a happy family to homicide, from a happy home to killing-boxes. The game joins the distribution of the hyperreality of American suburban life by using existing conditions of the representation, where wealth and sociality are firmly positioned in the absolute foreground. However, it then allows the player to act against these conditions. It is a parody of the stereotype and the conditions within. Recalling Baudrillard, by making dark narratives emerge, the game viciously communicates the satirical message that this pure image we have of the suburban life is merely a circulation of images, so thoroughly mediated and processed that their reality has lost any connection with "the real", even though we as players partly treat it as such. *The Sims* as a game surpasses the boundaries of the computer screen. It is a simulation of a system, of stereotypical American suburban life to be precise,

which can be experienced by the player beyond the walls of their own home. Rules and behaviours of the represented world can be trained into the player, thoughts can be guided, and satire can be expressed. In conclusion, *The Sims* expresses satire of stereotypical American suburban life to a great extent when investigating it from a dark play perspective.

### **6.1. Suggestion for Further Research**

The investigation of *The Sims* from a dark play perspective allowed for an investigation of satire in *The Sims* within an original framework. By conducting a textual analysis, insights were gained into the game's structure and emergent narrative, allowing me to make sense of the game and eventually to answer the thesis' research question. To accomplish this, I linked different theories, which eventually allowed me to construct a framework of analysis: examining a computer game's formal aspects that have narratological consequences and identifying how these lead to the manifestation of dark play. While constructing this framework, I aimed to identify dark play in *The Sims*, a game whose dominant play style is upbeat, not dark. Due to the specificity of the topic, my method might be limited to this particular thesis. I therefore suggest an investigation of the applicability of thesis methods for other games when studying dark play. Perhaps satire can be identified in more games when studying their narrative – even if they appear to be upbeat and happy.

Another interesting extension of this research would be to include a player study. Fernández-Vara argues that keeping a critical distance is necessary when engaging in critical game analysis (Fernández-Vara 2014, 28). However, the limitation of a textual analysis is that critical distance is almost impossible (*ibid.*). Fernández-Vara thus encourages to (also) allow someone else play the game. (*ibid.*, 28-29). It would be interesting to add participant observation to this study, and see whether and how dark play occurs by examining multiple play behaviours. As mentioned in chapter 5, the aim of this thesis is not to make a universal claim, but to interpret meaning. A participant observation would therefore not be an appropriate method for this specific thesis. Regardless, I do propose it for further exploration on this topic.

## 7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aarseth, Espen J. 2007. "I Fought the Law: Transgressive Play and the Implied Player". In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2007 International Conference: Situated Play*. Tokyo. Accessed August 8, 2017. <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/07313.03489.pdf>.
- Anothereyjana. 2010. "Favorite Ways to Torture Sim?" In *Modthesims.info*. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://modthesims.info/t/421896>.
- Boellstorff, Tom. 2012. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fernández-Vara, Clara. 2014. *Introduction to Game Analysis*. New York: Routledge.
- Frasca, Gonzalo. 2001. "The Sims: Grandmothers are cooler than Trolls." In *Game Studies* 1 (1): Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/frasca/>.
- Frasca, Gonzalo. 2003. "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology [www]." *Ludology.org*. Accessed June 15, 2017. [http://www.ludology.org/articles/VGT\\_final.pdf](http://www.ludology.org/articles/VGT_final.pdf).
- Frasca, Gonzalo. 2003. "Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology." In *The Video Game Theory Reader*, by Mark J.P. Perron and Bernard Wolf, 221-235. New York: Routledge.
- Henry, Matthew. 2012. *The Simpsons, Satire, and American Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hight, Gilbert. 1962. *The Anatomy of Satire*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Hunicke, Robin, Marc Leblanc, and Robert Zubek. 2004. "MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research." In *Proceedings of the Challenges in Games AI Workshop, Nineteenth National Conference of Artificial Intelligence*. California: AAAI Press.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2002. "Game Design as Narrative Architecture." In *First Person. New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, edited by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Jones, Jamie. 2015. "14 Funny, Sadistic, and Appalling Things Gamers have done in 'The Sims'." In *BuzzFeed*. Accessed June 15, 2017. [http://www.buzzfeed.com/jamiejones/worst-things-gamers-have-done-in-the-sims?bffb&utm\\_term=4ldqpgp#.qczeG110m](http://www.buzzfeed.com/jamiejones/worst-things-gamers-have-done-in-the-sims?bffb&utm_term=4ldqpgp#.qczeG110m).

Juul, Jesper. 2001. "Games Telling Stories? A brief Note on Games and Narratives." In *Game Studies* 1 (1): Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/>.

Kishor Singh, Raj. 2012. "Humour, Irony and Satire in Literature." In *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)* 3 (4): 65-72.

Lauwaert, Maaïke. 2010. *The Place of Play: Toys and Digital Cultures*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

LeBoeuf, Megan. 2007. *The Power of Ridicule: An Analysis of Satire*. Seniors Honors Projects, University of Rhode Island.

Linderoth, Jonas, and Torill Elvira Mortensen. 2015. "Dark Play. The Aesthetics of Controversial Playfulness." In *The Dark Side of Game Play: Controversial Issues in Playful Environments*, by Torill Elvira Mortensen, Jonas Linderoth and Ashley ML Brown, 12-26. New York: Routledge.

Lister, Martin, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant, and Kieran Kelly. 2009. *New Media: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge.

Maxis. "The Sims 4". EA Games, 2014

Meijer Drees, Marijke, and Sonja de Leeuw. 2015. *The Power of Satire*. Vol. 2. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Mosberg Iversen, Sara. 2005. "Challenge Balance and Diversity: Playing The Sims and The Sims 2." In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 International Conference: Changing Views – Worlds in Play*. Vancouver: Simon Fraser University. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/06276.10020.pdf>.

Pearce, Celia. 2004. "Towards a Game Theory of Game." In *First Person: New Media As Story, Performance, and Game*, by Noah Wardrip-Fruin, 143-153. Cambridge: MIT Press.



- Salen, Katie, and Eric Zimmerman. 2004. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Sicart, Miguel. 2003. "Family Values: Ideology, Computer Games & The Sims." In *Proceedings of DiGRA 2003 International Conference: Level Up*. Copenhagen: IT University of Copenhagen. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/05150.09529.pdf>
- Sicart, Miguel. 2006. *Computer games, players, ethics*. PhD dissertation. Copenhagen: IT University of Copenhagen.
- Sicart, Miguel. 2009. *The Ethics of Computer Games*. Boston: MIT Press. DOI:10.7551/mitpress/9780262012652.001.0001.
- Silver16. 2009. "Fun Torture Methods for Sims." In *forum.thesims3.com*. Accessed June 28, 2016. <http://forum.thesims3.com/jforum/posts/list/49670.page>.
- Sjöblom, Björn. 2015. "Killing Digital Children: Design, Discourse, and Player Agency." In *The Dark Side of Game Play: Controversial Issues in Playful Environments*, by Torill Elvira Mortensen, Jonas Linderöth and Ashley ML Brown, 91-111. New York: Routledge.
- Toasterpoodle. 2015. "What is the Worst Thing you've ever done in The Sims Series?" In *Reddit*. Accessed June 15, 2017. [https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/30r118/what\\_is\\_the\\_worst\\_thing\\_youve\\_ever\\_done\\_in\\_the/](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/30r118/what_is_the_worst_thing_youve_ever_done_in_the/).
- Vsanna. 2015. "What is the Worst Thing you've ever done in The Sims Series?" In *Reddit*. Accessed June 15, 2016. [https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/30r118/what\\_is\\_the\\_worst\\_thing\\_youve\\_ever\\_done\\_in\\_the/.cs](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/30r118/what_is_the_worst_thing_youve_ever_done_in_the/.cs). PhD dissertation. Copenhagen: IT University of Copenhagen.
- van Vught, Jasper, and René Glas. 2017. "Considering Play. From Method to Analysis." In *Proceedings of DiGra 2017 International Conference*. Melbourne. Accessed August 8, 2017. [http://digra2017.com/static/Full%20Papers/56\\_DIGRA2017\\_FP\\_Vught\\_Considering\\_Play.pdf](http://digra2017.com/static/Full%20Papers/56_DIGRA2017_FP_Vught_Considering_Play.pdf).