*sim*ulated interiors: unreal estates and *the sims*

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abstract

This essay explores the complex theoretical and psychological landscape surrounding the digital interiors within the *The Sims* video games. *The Sims* is a popular life-simulation video game, first released in 2001 by Maxis with several sequels and hundreds of additional content packs produced by EA Games. The distinctly 'unbuilt' and 'unbuildable' interiors within the digital world of *The Sims* are seen to have a strong emotional and atmospheric pull, consequent to the insecurities inherent in contemporary housing markets. The essay aims to reveal cross-pollinations or 'leakages' between *The Sims* interiors and the volatile, financialised interiors typically occupied by the contemporary subject. It does so through both theoretical discussion and a more narrative interrogation based on the conflict between the author's real-life eviction from their house in Sydney, Australia, resultant from a current housing crisis, and their construction of a virtual simulation of their once-home. This essay comes to find that these 'leakages' may be a mechanism through which we might elaborate our understanding of, and relationship to, interiors in our increasingly digitised and mediatised present. It argues that life simulation games like *The Sims* may impact, or have impacted, user and inhabitant perceptions of the secure interior, and may act as proxy-interiors in the face of housing crises.

keywords

interiors; video games; real estate; simulations; domesticity

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On my first day of university I followed an introductory script in my classes that was neurotically crafted to be playful and charming: 'My name is _____, and *The Sims* made me want to be an architect.' I expected laughs, but I received knowing nods. *The Sims* simulates life—bodies, friendship, work, world, and home. I spent countless hours playing *The Sims* during my upbringing. I always created characters in the same way. My *Sims* had straight brown hair instead of my orange curls, were thin and tan rather than soft and pale, and wore high heels while I sat, seven years old, playing *PlayStation 1* in my Grandma's spare bedroom during the school holidays. I would rarely *live* my character, though—my focus was the home. There is a childhood wonder in the space-of-one's-own. The bedroom, the treehouse, the cubby, the secret lair: all involve ownership of an interior and its atmosphere. Digitised, these spaces have infinite potential beyond a child's material world, speaking to adult lifestyles of dinner parties, work, and sex. The secure interior, though, is increasingly unattainable outside one's imagination.

This essay involves a narrative exploration of the complex theoretical and psychological landscape surrounding the DIY digital interior of *The Sims*. *The Sims* is a popular life-simulation video game, first released in 2001 and rereleased in multiple editions and permutations. While the ostensible aim of *The Sims* is to create characters and control their lives, the construction, decoration, and renovation of their homes is, for many, the primary goal, with players often dedicating days to this process and eschewing the 'live mode' gameplay of their Sims altogether.[1] As such, the distinctly unbuilt and unbuildable interiors within the digital world of *The Sims* can be seen to have a strong emotional and atmospheric pull, which can be explored in tandem to that of real-life interiors. Notably, this essay interrogates this connection in relation to housing insecurity resulting from current global housing crises, including that in my home city Sydney, Australia. Through this, it aims to reveal leakages between *The Sims* interiors and the volatile, financialised interiors of the real estate market.

one's own

The Sims was developed by game designer Will Wright, co-founder of *Maxis Games*.[2] Following from the resounding success of the *SimCity* franchise, first released in 1989, Wright created various other simulation games in which the timeline is infinite and the player is 'God.' It wasn't until 2001 that Wright zoomed in to the domestic interior. He cites the move from 'city-simulation' to 'life-simulation' as a response to losing his house and possessions in the 1991 Oakland Firestorm—refurnishing and decorating each room in his house became a provocative foundation to recreate the American lifestyle digitally.[3] *The Sims* was released in 2001 and, despite the initial trepidations of *Maxis* at producing a game with such a quotidian focus, it was extremely well received by the general public.[4] Even so, while *The Sims* has been a veritable cultural sensation for almost twenty-five years, it has garnered few academic treatments. After all, video games are rarely given the time of day in the academic institution and, for *The Sims*, the assumption of frivolity is only further evidenced by its necessary banality and, of course, its feminine associations. A 'digital dollhouse,' *The Sims* has long attracted girls and women in lieu of the typical male users who dominate the gaming world.[5]

My attraction to *The Sims* was twofold: I always aspired to be an architect, and I always wanted a place of my own. As a child, I loved books where little girls had clubhouses, forest cabins, or a *Secret Garden*.[6] I decorated my room obsessively from a young age. My childhood best friend Erin and I shared the nesting bug, but while hers was induced through emulation of her mother's homemaking skills, mine was developed in lieu of it. My parents couldn't care less about domestic beauty, and to this day when I visit, I often bring several warm toned lightbulbs to surreptitiously replace their Cool Sun 400W fluorescents. Erin and I became *Sims 2* obsessives when it was released, playing for hours each afternoon. We restlessly snatched the mouse from each other, back and forth, to arrange pixelated furniture and test wallpaper schemes. We

downloaded bootleg carpets and kettles from 'mod' websites, which were full of custom objects built by other users, embedding them into the game with cheat codes so well memorised they may as well have been tattooed on the backs of our freckled hands as we typed: *testingcheatsenabled True, motherlode, motherlode, motherlode, motherlode*.[7] The house was a constant project. I would occupy it for days, *pan-zoom-rotate*, perfecting the interior. My *Sim* houses gave me an early taste of material aspiration for a dream home.

build, buy, live

Uniquely, the first *Sims* game included a recommended reading list intended to 'enhance' the user's understanding of the game and its intent.[8] Several of the texts in the reading list deal with psychology, game theory, or romance, though all through an extremely analytical or scientific lens. Most of the architectural references in the list are fundamental organisational texts, including the famous educational volumes *A Pattern Language* by Christopher Alexander and *Architecture: Form, Space & Order* by Francis D. K. Ching.[9] Another, *Housing by Lifestyle: The Component Method of Residential Design*, considers a method of modular design in which houses are organised systematically through highly controlled component parts according to one's particular demographic needs.[10] One text on the list caught my eye in particular: *Home: A Short History of an Idea* by Witold Rybczynski.[11] In *Home*, the author relays a history of trends and developments in interior styling. The book works from a largely Western and an apologetically bourgeois perspective, but, after all, so does *The Sims*. The game has typically emulated North American contexts in its landscapes, lifestyles, and domestic stylings, and homeownership and consumption are necessitated in the gameplay. Rybczynski organises the history of the interior through categories including nostalgia, privacy, and delight to develop a lineage for today's domestic priorities with a focus on 'comfort,' which is understood in the text as the dominant characteristic or ideal of the contemporary dwelling. The author's act of dissecting and categorising the factors that contribute to seemingly intuitive ideas like home and comfort is reflected in *The Sims*, where character satisfaction is assessed according to specific criteria like 'environment' and calculated through a points-based system.[12] Comfort is proposed in *Home* as a result of both interior adaptation, like the development of private bedrooms and centralised heating, and the development of objects towards leisure and pleasure, like the design and placement of furniture. Rybczynski's general contention is that the development of the space-of-one's-own and objects of leisure have brought comfort and, with them, contemporary domesticity.

Practices of domestic occupation through objects have been well explored in both sociological and architectural literature. Architect and theorist Iñaki Ábalos, for example, describes the 'phenomenological inhabitant' of domestic spaces, who pursues a 'scalar breakdown' of the hierarchy in the house, wherein occupation as a practice of interior intimacy becomes on-par with the house as structure.[13] In this reading, the house is understood as but a shell to hold objects, simply an infrastructure demarcated by property lines. The real domestic experience of Ábalos' 'phenomenological inhabitant' takes place through a continual negotiation between oneself and one's objects within the shell.

This negotiation between the inhabitant and their possessions is vital for creating a sense of home, especially when one's shell is insecure. Objects allow one to 'territorialise' one's interior where necessary, to provide a sense of 'ontological security' where the constancy that might otherwise represent home is under threat.[14] In lieu of the security of ownership, it is common to engage with 'homemaking practices' that 'include embodied interactions with material objects that, in turn, create social meaning; turning a dwelling into a home.'[15] That is, through interior work like cleaning, painting, or decorating, tenants or others

in precarious living situations are able to create a 'place of privacy and security where [they] can exercise autonomy over their dwelling.'[16] Security, here, is inseparable from the idea of comfort. The feeling of domestic security and the practice of nesting are intertwined.

The aforementioned reading list has a disclaimer that all included texts 'are filled with provocative ideas; *Maxis* disavows any responsibility for encouraging deep thought.'[17] This tongue-in-cheek quip reflects assertions from Wright that *The Sims* was intended as a satire of homemaking culture, wherein consumption reigns supreme and objects of desire that might at first produce joy impolitely obsolesce.[18] In Wright's view, the continuous practices of construction, decoration, and repair that define *The Sims* plainly represent the perpetual, fruitless tasks defining the lives of the contemporary consumer. Some, however, contest the efficacy of Wright's claim of satire, or at least its functional relevance in the context of a gamified simulation—for many, interior creation within *The Sims* is not a metaphor, but rather a great, great comfort.

the dollhouse

My partner, my two housemates, and I were recently given three months' notice of eviction from our house in Sydney. While this situation is distressing, it was hardly a surprise. Our house might seem run-down and regular to most, but the Australian housing market is currently extremely inflated, leading to widespread rent hikes and evictions across most capital cities.[19] The landlord is planning to renovate the house and sell it for 2.3 million dollars. As I write this, we have two months left on the lease. The house is a two-storey terrace, also sometimes known as a rowhouse or townhouse, so an interior is about all it has, one of many interiors slipped between high Federation brick walls that stumble down the hill like the drunk teenage revellers we hear from our window on a Friday night. We have lived here for five years, and we have heavily nested. Objects, paintings, and furniture, as well as the residual smells of meals cooked and cats held, have stratified into something gentle—a warm enclosure. I feel soft here, pliable. Friends of mine have fallen in love in this house. I have screamed and cried after I knocked the chilli oil off the top of the fridge, scrambling around the liquid and broken glass in my underwear to clean it up, only to end up rubbing it like a hot polish into both the unsealed slate floor and the fresh cuts on my fingers. I sit on my bedroom floor as the sun streams through the balcony doors, on the dining table with friends and cigarettes, on the toilet on my phone. I will miss this house, which has become my own, yet after putting $200K in his bank account over five years of renting, my landlord doesn't remember my name.

I don't claim precarity for myself—I'm a yuppie who only toys, conceptually, with artistic poverty. Like millions of people, though, I do operate at the whims of a volatile, financialised housing market that does not permit me to mortgage my way to a secure future on what I earn. This is a common experience in Australia, reflected in hundreds of articles, papers, and reports from the past decade detailing an increasingly global housing crisis. An article from *The Australia Institute* noted that the average Australian dwelling throughout the 1990s cost 9.5 times the annual household income. This grew to 13.5 times the average household income in 2020, only to rise to 16.4 times in late 2023.[20] A recent report produced by *Everybody's Home*, a campaigning body comprising several hundred affordable housing and charity organisations, includes data from 1528 survey respondents on personal experiences of the housing crisis. Of the group, 98% noted their concern for the housing crisis, and 67% attributed that concern in part to uncertainty about the future.[21] This uncertainty and subsequent feelings of insecurity are well-understood to negatively impact mental health.[22] My housemate has only lived in Sydney for eight years but has bounced from sharehouse to sharehouse nine times due to evictions and rent increases. While he might be the end of both his tenure and tether, these experiences would seem like child's play to those who experience extreme precarity at

the very edge of the social support net. The current social housing waiting list for New South Wales, Australia, is sitting at 59,671 households as of August 2024.[23] In truth, I'm lucky to have been able to form such a bond with my interior over time—*thanks landlord, I'm ever so grateful!*

Even so, my dream home—that is, a house that is truly mine—seems both unbuilt and unbuildable. *The Sims* allows those without the means to have their own home to vicariously experience domestic creation and comfort, and of course, aspiration. This experience is discussed on multiple online forums dedicated to *The Sims*:

> 'I have downloaded ALL of the Australian Suburb Houses, I am in love with them, just what I would like to own in real life. *sigh*' (2008)
>
> 'I made a dream home and a goal apartment for me and my partner. It makes me feel so hopeful.' (2020)
>
> 'Just having a house in general is giving my sim the life I could only dream of.' (2024)[24]

As suggested in an online lifestyle magazine, 'you don't need a vision board, a five-year plan or even decent credit; a laptop, PlayStation or Xbox will do.'[25] One can play at the impossible interior bliss of accumulation, decoration, and housework, yet stay in bed: 'The game provides a virtual outlet for domestic signification.'[26] Indeed, one of the 'aspirations' to choose from in *The Sims 4* itself is 'Home Renovator', which requires a pricey home and an oddly specific number of windows [Fig. 01]. Conversely, the very immateriality of the unbuilt *Sims* interior is also part of its appeal. *The Sims* allows accumulation without material burdens. It allows a complex and dramatic interior life, *drag-drop*, rotate, and the ease of having a broken oven or ugly painting disappear without a logistical trace.

Figure 01.
The 'aspiration' pop-up window in *The Sims 4*, showing the 'Mansion Baron' aspirational goal set, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

These acts of consumption and care-by-proxy present in *The Sims* have precedent. In the 'Domesticity' chapter of Rybczynski's *Home*, he describes a type of simulated interior care that emerged in Dutch society in the seventeenth century.

> The Dutch affection for their homes was expressed in a singular practice: they had elaborate scale models built of their houses. These replicas are sometimes—inaccurately—referred to as dollhouses. Their function was more like that of ship models, not playthings but miniature memorials, records of dearly beloved objects. They were built like cupboards which did not represent the exterior appearance of the house. But when the doors were opened the entire interior was magically revealed, not only the rooms—complete with wall coverings and furnishings—but even paintings, utensils, and china figurines.[27]

Rybczynski is describing an object that is less a dollhouse and more a devotional tool: a memorial to the interior that gives it life beyond its destruction

Figure 02.
End-of-lease photo of my house, now an empty interior, 2024. Image by the author.

Figure 03.
My front hall, simiulated, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

[Fig. 02]. I decided to create my own, using the favoured medium of my childhood. I downloaded *The Sims 4* and began to build my soon-to-be-lost house in an impossible approximation of itself. On first glance, it is eerily accurate [Fig. 03]; however, one soon encounters kitchen cupboards that are rotated and stacked to resemble a washing machine, and several long, thin benches that are scaled small to form the top rod of a quasi-clothing rack held up by two rotated easels. Every artwork on my walls is imprecisely emulated using layered posters. Random trinkets and clutter are piled on the mantle—a mute representation of my complex arrangement of found treasures. For me, striving for accuracy has become an obsession, but daily, my *Sim* will begin to feel unbearable discomfort at how poorly decorated her house is—the objects available on *The Sims* that best approximate those in my house are often shabby and mismatched, adding few, if any, 'environment' points to my *Sim*'s overall wellbeing [Fig. 04]. As I've worked on the model in the past weeks, I've become disorientated in my own home, encountering objects not yet represented in my memorial and having to quickly jump back into the game to sketch them in using cheat codes and miscellaneous junk. If you leave all the doors open in my (real) house, you can sit on the toilet and get a sliver of a view through four rooms, out the front door, across the street and into the neighbour's hallway. I tried in vain to emulate this bizarre experience in *The Sims*, but the pixelated walls kept snapping rudely to the unwieldy construction grid. My *Sims* house is less a description and more a love letter: a false replica, an impossible *dearly beloved*.

realism and the real

In a somewhat masochistic turn, the common desire among many for realism in *The Sims* has led to expansion packs and mods that seek to exacerbate wealth inequality, housing insecurity, and cost-of-living crises in the game itself. *Sims 4: For Rent* (2023) is a $50 expansion pack that allows players to create multi-residential developments, become landlords, and evict tenants in arrears, or alternatively pay a simulated rentier *Simoleans*-per-

Figure 04.
A view from the stairwell, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

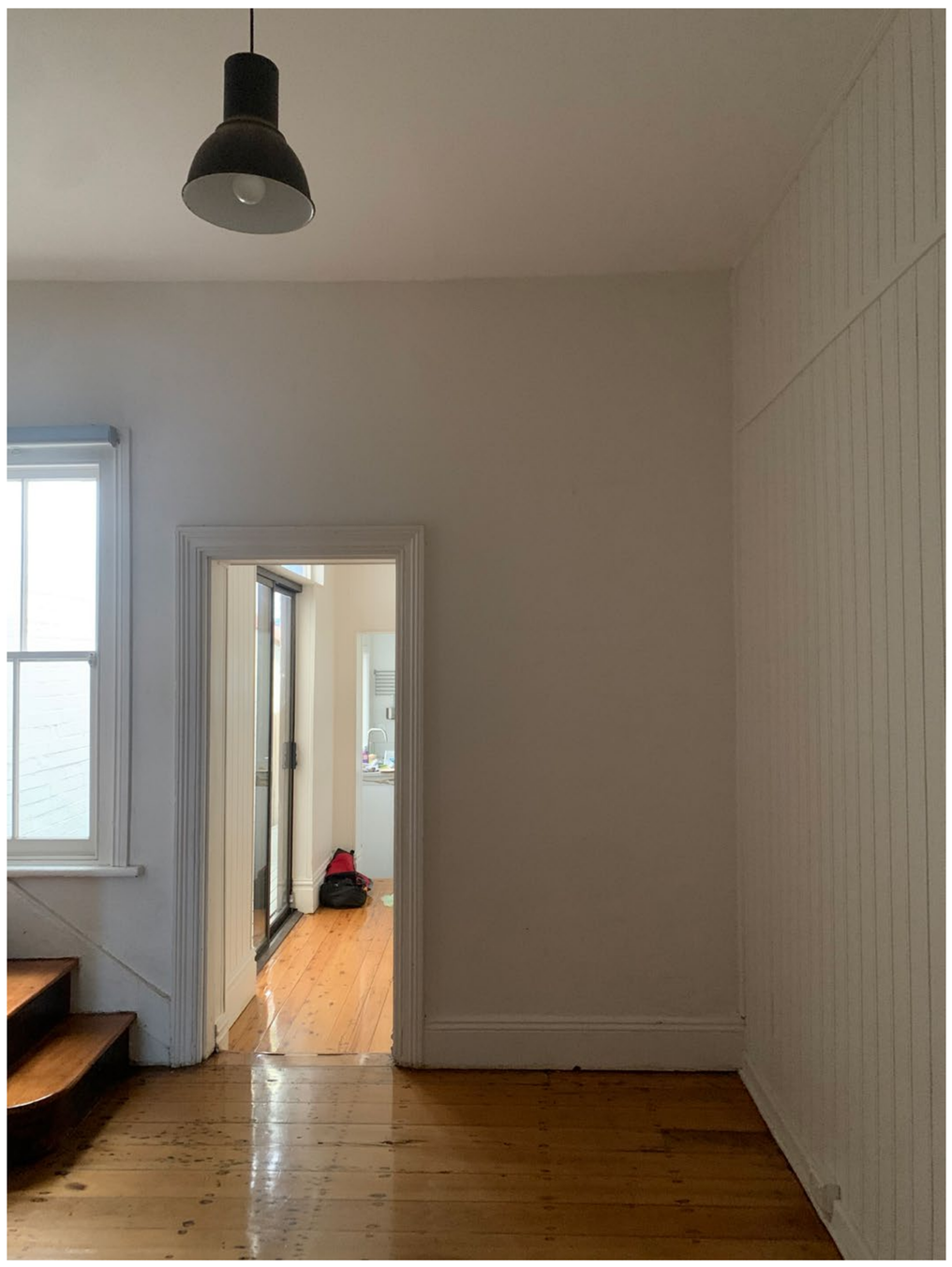

Figure 05.
End-of-lease photo of my living room, 2024. Image by the author.

square-metre each month. Similarly, the object-only expansion pack *Tiny Living Stuff* (2020) provides space-saving furniture for downsizing, including fold-down Murphy beds that can kill your *Sim* instantly if they malfunction. A handful of user-created mods allows one to drastically increase all lot prices across the game, multiplying them by one hundred or more to provoke a more lifelike and immersive living experience.[28] One creator suggests combining this mod with another to allow the player to take out a mortgage on their now exorbitantly priced digital property. This creator's motivation to produce increased realism hits very close to home:

> 'I live in Melbourne. Our city is about the 6th most unaffordable place in the world to buy a house—with the median house price going above $1 million dollars during the 2021 lockdown. So really, this game still is on easy mode.'[29]

While it may seem bizarre that 2485 gamers have downloaded mods to reproduce something as bleak as a housing crisis, media theorist Ann McGuire suggests that *The Sims* functions as a 'degenerate utopia', a 'distilled extrapolation from the social' in which the destructive norms of our reality—property ownership, consumption, hierarchy—are intensified and reinforced rather than dismantled.[30] Through ease of gameplay and accessible cheat codes, the user is granted a position of power within the proxy world. This facilitates 'a space for pleasurable engagement and immersion' akin to a utopian fantasy, without the material disadvantages, insecurities, or risks of one's reality.[31]

In her paper on the relationship between the housing crisis and the game *Animal Crossing*, which boasts similarly quotidian themes to *The Sims*, Emma Vossen argues that the game facilitates the 'fantasy of homeownership, of stability.'[32] She notes that she is constantly 'decorating and redecorating [her] Animal Crossing home as an act of control more than anything else in the game.'[33] As such, Vossen observes the game is 'playing into, and maybe even capitalizing

Figure 06.
My *Sim* watching a world on fire in my living room, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

Figure 07.
End-of-lease photo of my stair, 2024. Image by the author.

on [...] larger desires to fantasize about a middle-class stability that feels otherwise unattainable.'[34] This escape to the mundanity of stability through the practice of decorating precisely mirrors what could be seen as the large appeal of *The Sims* in its excitingly banal building and gameplay [Fig. 06].

Mckenzie Wark writes similarly on *The Sims* in her book *Gamer Theory*: 'the game itself works as an escape from the agony of everyday life, where the stakes are real and uncertain, to the unreal stakes of a pure game.'[35] Unlike 'pure game', though, 'The Sims lends itself to play that transforms it from a world of number back to a world of meaning.'[36] That is, the themes and practices asked of the user in *The Sims* run close to reality, drawing the user into real life and the real life into gameplay [Fig. 07]. The outcome of all these threads is a coming together of both *world*-making and *home*-making. In *The Sims*, one can not only embed oneself within a degenerate utopia but also engage in the (dis-)embodied practice of immaterial nesting. The user can engage in both escapism and _____*scape*, absence and presence.

We can see here several skins, within which we can see several *interiors*. Within my street lies walls, within which I lie, reclined, laptop resting precariously on my skewed knees just as I rest precariously in my once-home. Through the tender membrane of the screen, I project my aspirations into a degenerate utopia that will accept them gladly. Then, *Build, Buy, Live*: I must create a new place to be *within*, *drag-drop*.

In turn, this process can be seen to operate in reverse. Property markets are increasingly gamified, and we are all chips in this game. In *Gamer Theory*, Wark poses *The Sims* as a perfect allegory, or in her stylings, an 'allegorithm,' for all the capitalist evils involved in its making—from worker exploitation at EA games to the extractivist mining involved in building game consoles or computers. In short, 'the "great game" of colonial exploitation.'[37] In his book *Being and the Screen*, media theorist Stéphane Vial discusses the well-understood commercialised gamification of everyday processes, such as

Figure 08.
Walls automatically dissolve for a better view of my dollhouse and doll, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

Figure 09.
My Sims bedroom, complete with a pile of (clean) laundry on the bed, 2024. Screenshot by the author from *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts Inc., 2017).

Figure 10.
My bedroom, now empty, 2024. Image by the author.

consumption practices (like spinning the Temu wheel) and communications (like Tinder). He extends this to suggest a transverse phenomenological and ludic flow between the digital and real: that through the 'ludogenic' potential of the digital, our 'experience-of-the-world' flows into it, and ludic qualities can leak out, distilled through gameplay.[38] Social media, for example, can be understood as a gamified social space, in which images of interiors become part of a financialised process of dopamine activation. This, in turn, leaks out into real space, with private interiors emulating public images, eliciting in the inhabitant a similar chemical comfort—that of achieving a spatial aspiration. I noticed this 'leaking' after a few evenings of building my Sim interior—walking around my real house, I began to feel disassociated, like a wax doll right-clicking objects and obediently fulfilling bodily requirements.

Wark's 'great game' is always modding itself. Once based in real space, real estate is increasingly fragmented, algorithmic, and atomised. Architecture theorists Frichot and Runting write on the 'proptech' sector, in which inhabitation and ownership seem almost otherworldly:

> The fractionalized, blockchain-enabled real estate products of the proptech sector are less buildings, though, than instances of financialized capital, atomized. The real estate on offer targets the immaterial satisfaction of existential needs by feeding a speculative impulse: you are invited to partake in the real estate game not at the scale of property measured in square meters, but by way of infinitesimally small chunks of circulating capital pegged to spatial products elsewhere. Just one click and you can share with your virtual and anonymous community in the ownership of an apartment in Rio de Janeiro, a condo in Miami, a pad in Manhattan. This is a mood-altering architecture that is available in micro-doses. You inhabit its spaces mentally, in fleeting and snatched moments of screen time.[39]

Eerily immaterial, *proptech* operates on a similar temporal scale to a simulated interior. It's hyper-stimulating and infinite. It gratifies a new need brought into our lives through the flow of the feed: the comfort of speed, of the new, of property as something you can delete and create and recreate without the shackles of the physical.

Working with the digital is rife with paradox, as we wade our way through to a semblance of the concrete. Somehow, my Sims house is both comfort and terror. It is both false and impossible, yet more real than my home in that it purports to be mine and will remain mine two months from now. It is both within and without my control, and it is both built and unbuilt [Fig. 09 & Fig. 10].

conclusion

I was never a benevolent omniscient in the Sims—after all, once the house was done, I quickly grew tired of my character and was ready to begin a new bout of placemaking. So, a virtual murder-suicide: the quintessential *Sims* interior is one without doors and windows. The one in which one's character declines at three-times speed, all their status bars dropping into red, regressing into pissing on the carpet, going mad with loneliness, slowly starving, all while waving their hands at you, *God*, to save them. This might sound wickedly violent to the uninitiated, but it was just another banal evil of procedural gameplay. Trapped within their perfect and impossible interior, the Sim takes only a few weeks to die. In the game of life, the house always wins.

While the housing crisis seems set to continue amid increasing global uncertainty, examining new practices of fabricating interior space—however unbuildable—provides insights to the vital role that housing security plays for the contemporary inhabitant. In this context, and in our current condition in which we are straddled between the physical and the digital, the 'leakages' explored in this essay can be seen as a means to expand and elaborate 'the interior' and our relationships to it through the digital membrane. We can see through these 'leakages' that life simulations can act, or be made to act, as proxies of secure interiors, and thus, have potential to be further explored both in research and in the player's personal entanglements with digital worlds.

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All efforts have been made to contact *Electronic Arts*, the copyright holders of *The Sims 4*, to obtain written permission for the images included in this essay. The images are screenshots from *The Sims 4* taken by the author of digital interiors constructed by the author, and are used in the spirit of *Electronic Arts'* definition of 'fair use' of their intellectual property.

author biography

Miriam is a graduate of architecture working and reading on Gadigal land. She is interested in history, the internet, and the uneasy relationship between space and markets. She is currently practising independently and writing for publication. She also works between research, teaching, and editorial work at the University of Sydney, the University of Newcastle, and the University of Technology Sydney.

notes

1 'Live mode,' 'build mode,' and 'buy mode' are the three primary types of gameplay in *The Sims*. 'Live mode' is a running simulation, while 'build' and 'buy' modes pause the simulation for purchasing objects, building, renovating, or rearranging objects.

2 Maxis Games [Electronic Arts Inc.], *The Sims* (2000), PC.

3 John Seabrook, 'Game Master,' *The New Yorker*, 29 October 2006 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/11/06/game-master> [accessed 30 June 2024].

4 Elise Favis, 'How The Sims Navigated 20 Years of Change to Become one of the Most Successful Franchises Ever,' *The Washington Post*, 4 February 2020 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/video-games/2020/02/04/how-sims-navigated-20-years-change-become-one-most-successful-franchises-ever/> [accessed 2 November 2024].

5 Zachary Palmer, 'Moderating Masculinity in Women-dominated Digital Spaces: Men and Masculinity in *The Sims* 4 Online Community,' *Sociology Compass*, 17.11 (2023), p. 2, doi:10.1111/soc4.13144.

6 Francis Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (Oxford University Press, 2020 [1911]).

7 For 'mods,' see Julian Kücklich, 'Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry,' *The Fibreculture Journal*, 5 (2005) <https://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/> [accessed 27 June 2024].

8 Electronic Arts, 'Appendix 2: Reading List,' *The Sims TM: A World Unto Its Own* (game manual) (Electronic Arts, 2000), p. 89.

9 Christopher Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (Oxford University Press, 1977); Francis D. K. Ching, *Architecture: Form, Space & Order* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1979).

10 James Wentling, *Housing by Lifestyle: The Component Method of Residential Design* (McGraw-Hill, 1990).

11 Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (Viking, 1986).

12 'Environment' is one of several motives or needs of a Sim, which can be satisfied through accruing points in gameplay. In some versions of *The Sims* the motive is known as 'room.' Other motives include 'hunger,' 'hygiene,' 'fun,' and 'bladder.'

13 Iñaki Ábalos, *The Good Life: A Guided Visit to the Houses of Modernity* (Editorial Gustavo Gili, SA, 2001), pp. 100–01.

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15 Bronwyn Bate, 'Making a Home in the Private Rental Sector,' *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 21.3 (2021), p. 374, doi:10.1080/19491247.2020.1851633.

16 Bate, 'Making a Home in the Private Rental Sector,' p. 374.

17 Electronic Arts, 'Appendix 2: Reading List,' p. 89.

18 Telegraph Magazine and Jason Hill, 'Sims like Us,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 December 2004 <https://www.smh.com.au/technology/sims-like-us-20041218-gdkc7w.html?> [accessed 15 October 2024].

19 The Senate and the Community Affairs References Committee, 'The Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia: Interim Report,' The Commonwealth of Australia, September 2023 <https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/RB000177/toc_pdf/Theworseningrentalcrisisin Australia.pdf> [accessed 1 November 2024].

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