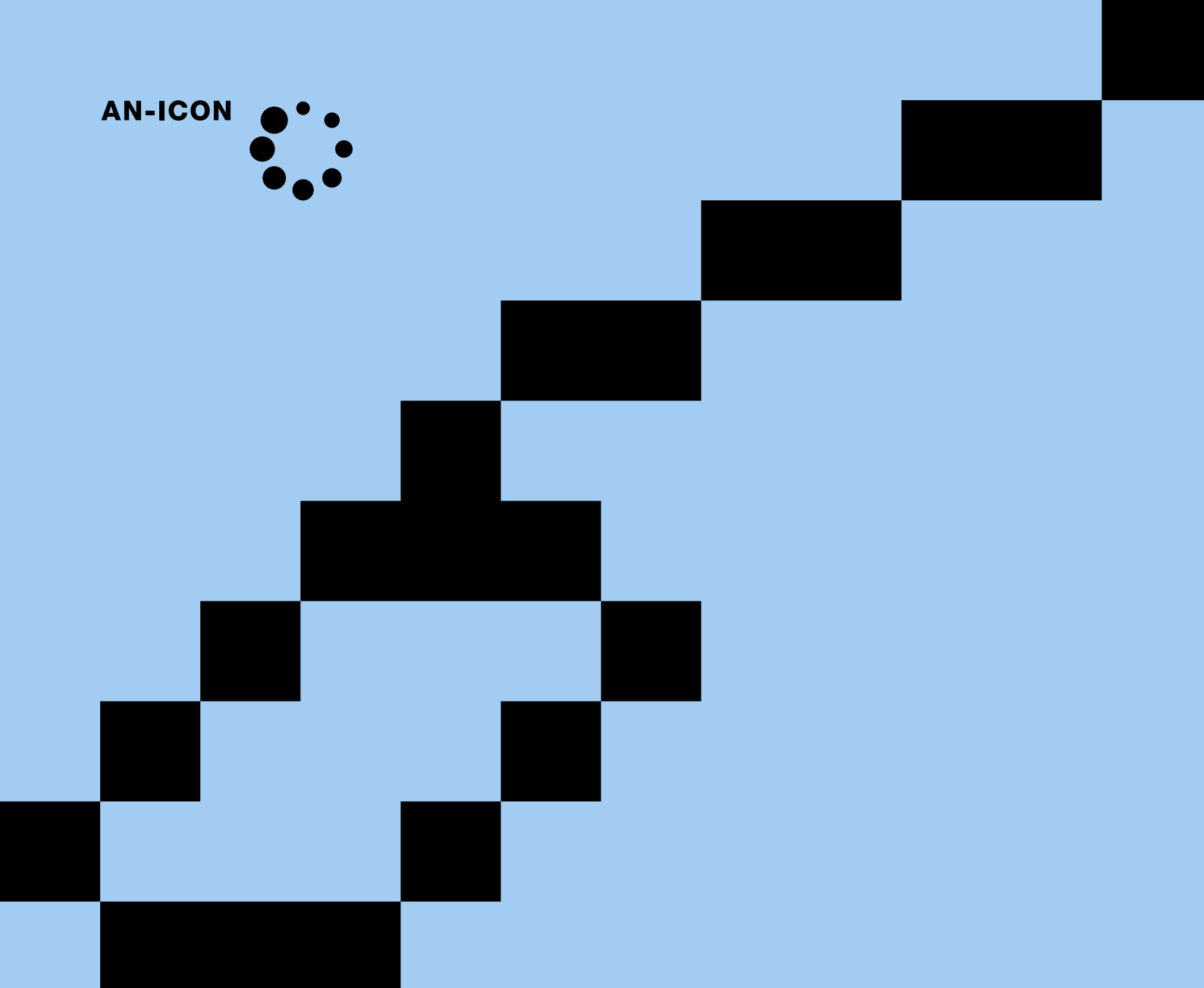
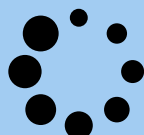


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→ Virtual Sex: Pornography,
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Pornoscopy and Video Games: From Modding Practices to Pornoscopic Experiences



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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to examine pornographic modding in video games as well as pornographic games themselves through the lens of a new concept, pornoscopy. Pornoscopy is a concept forged to deepen our understanding of the complexity surrounding pornographic materials since the invention of photography. It is defined by its link to the aesthetic principles and technical apparatus that constitute the various media it encounters. In this paper, the iconic relationship between pornoscopy and video games will be analyzed, as well as its impact on player satisfaction, through the study of several games.

Keywords

[Pornography](#)

[Video games](#)

[Pornoscopy](#)

[Interface](#)

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Introduction

During our thesis research, the neologism “pornoscopy” was coined to describe pornography in the period following the invention of photography. It was argued this concept evolved alongside each new technical apparatus and visual medium following the invention of photography. To test this hypothesis, photography, stereoscopy, comic books, cinema, television, new technologies and video games were analyzed.

The suffix “skopéō” signifies “to observe” or “to view”, and it is particularly pertinent to this specific genre of pornography, distinguished by its aesthetic nature. This suffix is borrowed from a very specific apparatus that is still much less well known than photography: stereophotography, or stereoscopy. This apparatus allows the viewer to see a three-dimensional image from two almost identical images. The stereoscopic effect comes from the slight difference between the two images presented to the viewer thereby offering an unprecedented experience in human vision: the combination of two two-dimensional images to create a three-dimensional image. In other words, these three-dimensional effects are “produced by the stereoscopic union of two plane photographs which are invisible in the single picture,” to quote the creator of the stereoscope, Sir David Brewster (1856, 180). From two almost identical images, the viewer, through the stereoscopic apparatus, brings out a third image that was completely absent from the two previous ones that reveal it. Literally, stereoscopy reveals something new, something that was not visible before, and something that is only visible through the aesthetic experience of the viewer. The suffix “skopéō” has been employed to emphasize the novelty of pornography in the era following the invention of photography. That is why vision plays a central role. Pornoscopy, therefore, is not limited to the image (Bertrand and Baron-Carvais 2001, 153) but also encompasses the processes of viewing (Bertrand and Baron-Carvais 2001, 8) and dissemination (Bertrand and Baron-Carvais 2001, 23). Consequently, pornoscopy

will include productions described as pornographic, while adding the perceptive aspect of pornography, the aesthetic experience of pornographic material. In other words, pornoscopy is a concept that facilitates the analysis of the perception of pornography and its visual elements since the invention of photography. The concept of pornoscopy endeavors to encompass pornographic productions in addition to aesthetic experiences that have been fundamentally transformed by the invention of photography. In this regard, this concept stands in contrast to other contemporary concepts related to porn studies, such as “pornification”. Pornification, as discussed by Susanna Paasonen et al. in *Pornification and the Education of Desire* (2007) and *Pornification and the Mainstreaming of Sex* (2016) “addresses the flux between the pornographic and the mainstream while stressing the contingency of porn as a genre and category” (Paasonen 2007, 18). It would seem that the concept of pornification is based more on the complex and multiple ramifications of a “porn aesthetics” (Paasonen 2007, 8) than on the aesthetic experience of pornographic material. It is possible to see some similarities with Ahmed (2004, 146) and her developments on “queer” as a “sticky sign” (Ahmed 2004, 166), following the vision of Butler of queer as performative (Butler 1997). Rather than being considered static and invariable, queerness is understood as a form that is subject to change in accordance with environmental and historical influences, akin to pornographic materials. That is why pornoscopy leverages significant technological advancements in the domain of visual apparatus, which have evolved from audio-visual to multimodal, to establish, disseminate, and commercialize novel mediatized expressions of sexuality. A notable recent development in this technological landscape is video games.

The first challenge when discussing the philosophical analysis of video games is definitional. The lack of consensus on the definition of video games makes it difficult to determine the precise date of their birth. This is particularly surprising given that video games have become the world’s most profitable cultural industry, with

global sales exceeding \$170 billion by 2023, or “more than the film and music industries combined” (Du Montant 2024, 26). Considering the above, several definitions can be proposed. Video games can be defined as a form of entertainment that requires the use of a variety of computer peripherals, including screens, controllers, speakers, mice and keyboards. This distinguishes them from other forms of gaming, such as board games, which do not require such equipment. Video games are a playful, computer-based apparatus focused on entertaining the user. However, this is not the sole objective; the interactive dimension is also essential. The player uses joysticks, keyboard and touch screen, thereby establishing a direct connection with the apparatus. This interaction sets the course of the video game, encompassing the selection of objects, characteristics, dialogue options, and navigation. All these interactions occur within a virtual environment. Rather than moving a pawn on a chessboard or a square in Cluedo, the player moves an avatar within a virtual world. Furthermore, these interactions are governed by predefined rules. When an avatar is moved within the virtual world, the user can input commands via a joystick or keyboard, which will result in a corresponding action in the virtual world. For instance, pushing a joystick forward causes the avatar to move forward, but only within the limits set by the game. These limits are defined by the map of the game and therefore cannot be modified unless the game files themselves are altered. In summary, a video game can be defined as a ludic apparatus requiring computer peripherals, centered on the entertainment of a user interacting with the apparatus in a virtual world with pre-established rules.

To better understand the intricacies of video game pornoscopy, three case studies will be presented: *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda, 2011) to illustrate the modding of a mainstream video game; *Baldur's Gate 3* (Larian Studios, 2023) for the integration of explicit scenes within a role-playing framework; and *Subverse* (FOW Interactive, 2021) as an example of a natively pornographic game. These titles were selected both for their cultural im-

pact and popularity, and because they were directly experienced by the author through extensive gameplay. This approach will facilitate the consideration of the transition from a play society (Cotta, 1980) to a video game society, characterized by the pervasive influence of video games. The subsequent sections will develop the key concepts of identification with the avatar and the aesthetics of flux. The conclusion will assess the analytical value of pornoscopy for the study of both video games and pornography.

Video Game Pornoscopy: Aesthetic Principles and Technical Apparatus Constituting Video Games

One of the special features of video games is their ability to be modified, which distinguishes them significantly from other media such as film or comics. Once a video game has been created, published and distributed, particularly on a computer, the user usually owns a digital, dematerialized version of the game. This trend has been confirmed and has become the majority trend with the development of platforms offering the possibility of buying dematerialized video games, such as Steam (launched in 2003, with a market share of around 75% for PC video games) or Epic Game Store (launched in 2018). Although pornographic video games are relatively uncommon on Steam, pornographic mods for video games that are not originally pornographic are almost ubiquitous. This is particularly the case with video games from publisher Bethesda, including *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (Ubisoft/Bethesda, 2002), *Fallout 3* (Bethesda, 2008) and, above all, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda, 2011). *Skyrim*, an RPG (Role Play Game) set in a fantasy world, is still to this day one of the most modded video games of all time. It will be demonstrated that the game was quickly offered mods that radically transformed the gaming experience.

It is obvious that most players download mods to enhance the visual aspect of the game or to improve the overall gaming experience – HD graphics, improved UI (user

interface), etc. They do so to maintain the visual experience up to date for a fourteen-year-old game. There are numerous highly functional mods that serve a variety of purposes, and even though *Skyrim* contains no pornographic or even explicit scenes, a vast majority of the most popular mods are simply pornographic. It is also noteworthy that these pornographic mods cannot be used without the more conventional graphical enhancement mods: they are generally a prerequisite for the more explicit mods to work properly. These range from the implementation of total nudity – with reworked bodies, particularly those of female characters, across all races, not just humans – to complete new buildings such as brothels, or even purely pornographic explicit animations, with changes in camera axis to take better advantage of the scene. Similarly, a majority of gender identities are represented: straight, gay, bi, lesbian, trans, everything is possible and conceivable. A mere enumeration of the possibilities afforded by *Skyrim* pornographic mods reveals the mods' capacity to allow the player to diverge from the original gameplay mechanics. In this instance, there is a transformation of the gaming experience: the mods are altering and shaping the video game into something new. It is no longer a question of defeating dragons or developing your archery skills but of *making* pornoscopy. The aesthetic experience of a player enjoying *Skyrim* in its original state differs from the one of another player modding the game to enhance its graphics. However, the player who mods the game to embody a colossal werewolf whose quest is to have sex with as many individuals as possible, creates an experience that is not only different, but wholly new.

A distinguishing feature of mods is their cost-free nature, a quality that differentiates them from the original video game they modify. All *Skyrim* modifications, ranging from graphical enhancements to pornographic content, are available for free. These creations are the product of a community of players who have purchased the game and who, via dedicated websites, make these modifications available online. As a result, all players who also own the game can benefit from them free of charge by downloading

them. In contrast, game developers do not possess these modifications, and thus, cannot claim ownership over them. In the event that a mod is deemed to contradict the fundamental principles of the game, the only recourse available to the developers is to request the removal of said mod. Given the mods' inherent characteristics and operational modalities, it can be posited that they embody a form of intermediality, which can be defined as "the contemporary form of intertextuality that transgresses media borders" (Sotamaa 2003, 8). This intermediality process extends beyond mere transformation and remodeling; real short films are created in the video game, recorded and often posted on pornographic sites, known as machinima. To illustrate, on one of the most visited pornographic websites, Pornhub, there is a short film lasting over 23 minutes, entitled *Andrea's Female POV Adventure*, viewed 350,000 times. In this machinima, the viewer follows in subjective view (POV being an acronym for Point of View), one of Andrea's adventures – Andrea being the name given by the creator to the main character of his machinima. The channel that posted this machinima has approximately ten others featuring the same character. Andrea is a wild farm girl, and she uses her body of unrealistic proportions to get out of any challenging situation. The script is as basic as you would expect to find in a traditional, heteronormative pornographic film: Andrea must go shopping in town for her parents, is kidnapped by a company of werewolves to be used as a sex slave after having sex with every NPC (non-playable character) she meets in town, both male and female. She manages to escape and returns to her parents' farm. The short film concludes with the following statement directed at her mother, who is concerned about her week-long disappearance: "it was the most ordinary trip to town for me." Surprisingly, the subjective view is maintained, even when sex scenes are in progress, which can result in some rather comical situations. For instance, the camera lingers on a single shot for several dozen seconds, during which there is no action, and the viewer sees very little. In this scene, the floor occupies three-quarters of the shot. Only

the sound effects suggest that this is a sex scene. The author of this machinima has therefore preferred to prioritize continuity and coherence in his choice of script, as well as the subjective view, to the detriment of the visibility of explicit scenes. During the werewolf sex scenes, the viewer does not see much of the scene in question, as in the example given above: all he can see is Andrea's breasts and the floor. The whole point of this machinima is to depict a young woman with an unrealistic anatomy being sexually dominated by werewolves. However, the viewer's experience is largely limited due to the creator's choice to maintain narrative coherence rather than catering to the content the viewer expects to see. The interest of this machinima lies not in its ability to depict pornographic scenes from a heroic-fantasy universe, but in its freedom to refuse what is expected of it, to choose not to show what would appear to be obvious. This approach has the merits of making this production quite original and demonstrating the freedom with which pornoscopy can be treated.



Fig. 1. Screenshot from *Andrea's Female POV Adventure*, timecode 13.29.

On this notion of freedom, it is noteworthy that Paasonen (2019, 147) presented pornographic machinimas as follows: "These videos extend the game world into

the realm of pornographic excess, reimagine it, and add a further layer to experiences accumulated through gameplay.” Paasonen brings forth the concept of “resonance”: “the notion of resonance opens up avenues for addressing gaps and frictions emerging between pornographic preferences and sexual identities. In doing so, resonance helps in conceptualizing the appeal of pornography beyond the notion of identification” (Paasonen 2019, 143). Initially, the content of *Andrea’s Female POV Adventure* may appear to align with Paasonen’s resonance, considering the script of this machinima. However, given the unexpected liberty exercised by the creator, it is more a question of dissonance than of resonance. The “appeal of pornography beyond the notion of identification” (Paasonen 2019, 143) could be here interpreted as a denial of pornography, because the pornographic aspect is only suggested by the sound effect; the visual experience is, at best, limited, refraining the viewer from having more than a fractional aesthetic experience of the pornographic material. Once again, it appears that pornoscopy allows the inclusion of surprising pornographic material such as this one, incorporating what might otherwise be excluded or overlooked.

Video games have historically been regarded as a subject of study that lacks seriousness and intrigue. This perception persists to a certain extent in contemporary times. However, the subject of games and the act of playing has been a topic of extensive exploration since the 1930s (Huizinga 1938; Goffman 1961; Haddon 1999; Lowood 2006). Given the widely acknowledged considerable impact of video games on contemporary societies, a rethinking of the “play society” concept, as defined by Alain Cotta in 1980, is imperative. The contemporary era has transitioned from a play society to one characterized by the pervasive influence of video games. This transformation is supported by Schmoll’s assertion that video games are “a paradigm of the play society” (Schmoll 2013, 6). It is crucial to acknowledge as well that the society’s engagement with video games might have some similarities to its engagement with pornography. For instance, Paasonen established

that the third approach to “pornification” called Porno Chic “refers to the sheer popularity of pornography (bearing in mind the staggering number of Pornhub visits alone) but, equally and even more centrally, to the broad circulation of imageries ‘which borrow from, refer to, or pastiche the styles and iconography of the pornographic’ (McNair, 2013, 36)” (Paasonen, 2016, 20). In other words, as well as video games are not a niche phenomenon anymore and can be found within many layers of our society, pornography has evolved to influence mainstream cultures. This analogy raises pertinent questions about the intersection of video games and pornography, and the insights it offers into the aesthetic dimensions of these forms, particularly in relation to pleasure and reality. The onus falls upon us to meticulously examine this interplay and its implications, paving the way for a nuanced and informed understanding of both the pornographic video game and its aesthetic dimensions.

The Reality of the Video Game Society: Ambivalent Pleasure And A Relationship With The Virtual World. From A Play Society to a Video Game Society?

As previously stated, it has been accepted since the 1980s that we live in a play society, as theorized by Alain Cotta, a society in which games play a vital and, above all, growing role.¹ For Alain Cotta, “Hardly less than the idea of nothingness, the idea of boredom takes precedence” (Cotta 1980, 1). That is why games have assumed a substantial role in contemporary societies, extending far beyond their traditional domains of education and marketing (Philippette 2024, 29). Contemporary societies are increasingly characterized by an environment that is not merely playful but is distinctly characterized by video games. Without limiting ourselves to the economic impact of the video game world, it is easy to see its omnipresence in our society. A prime

¹ In 1980, Cotta’s thesis presented a challenge to the prevailing theories on play, which posited a gradual decline in the importance and impact of play. This perspective was elucidated by Philippette 2024, 29.

example of this phenomenon is the character of Lara Croft from the video game *Tomb Raider* (1996, Eidos Interactive). According to Micheli-Rechtman, Lara Croft was “the first video game heroine to appear in fashion magazines,” and she was reincarnated “in the cinema, in advertising and in our visual environment in general” (Micheli-Rechtman 2008, 141).

While video games have been influenced by cinema, particularly since the era of 3D and the systematic use of cinematic images in video games, either as prologues or throughout the entire game, the reverse is also true: there have been numerous adaptations of video games for the cinema, and the language specific to video games is regularly used in the cinema. There is a retrospective influence of video games on cinema, after the latter was a considerable source of inspiration for the former. Far beyond cinema, the influence of video games is societal: in 2023, in France, 94% of 10–14-year-olds and 47% of those aged 65 and over are playing video games,² showing the extent to which video games have become an integral part of our societies. What is the reason for this influence? How, in the space of a few decades, have video games gone from being a fringe activity that it was shameful to flaunt, to becoming mainstream?

Most certainly because of the experience offered by video games, the unique interactivity that allows the player to “embody” (the question of embodiment will be discussed in the section revolving around the avatar) a character in a virtual world, a world that is not our own, a new world. Undeniably, the pleasure felt during the video game experience is a major factor in this success, and this pleasure is even more intense because interactivity requires active participation on the part of the player, as mentioned earlier. This highlights the necessity to examine the question of pleasure, its form and its development in the world of video games.

² Source: *Proportion des joueurs de jeux vidéo en France en 2023, par tranche d'âge*, survey carried out on a representative panel of 4005 people, available online: <https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/481002/proportion-gamers-francais-age-jeux-video/>.

Pleasure in a Video Game World: Between Subjectivity and a Regulatory Framework, Videogame Pornoscopy as an Iconic Relationship Between Video Games and Player Satisfaction

As Mathieu Triclot rightly explains, scientific studies of video games have no trouble identifying and analyzing issues relating to the apparatus: “it’s easy to describe the properties of the medium, whether in terms of hardware specifications, the graphic forms displayed on the screen or the rules systems [...]” (Triclot 2011, 30). However, “it is difficult to produce an objective description of ‘what it feels like to play’, of a ‘form of experience’” (Triclot 2011, 30): as Raphaël Koster sums up, “the pleasure taken in practicing an activity remains a particularly difficult phenomenon to grasp scientifically” (Koster 2013, 100).

The degree of variability in pleasure is what presents the greatest difficulty here: the subjectivity of individual experience makes scientific analysis perilous. In the same sense, the rules that pre-exist the subjective experience of pleasure are conditions for it: “It is therefore impossible to dissociate these two dimensions of the game: the subjective experience of pleasure and the objective regulatory framework” (Koster 2013, 101). It is also important to take into account how experience and enjoyment vary depending on the medium used, whether arcade, home console, or personal computer: “Arcade games, for example, appear to be an experience of mastery: they force players to discipline their bodies in order to respond to the accelerated injunctions of the computer program” (Koster 2013, 101).

Games on [home] consoles, on the other hand, are more of an immersive experience, because they introduce spaces to explore and therefore the possibility for the player to invest in the program over the long term, to uncover all its secrets. Each game medium therefore generates its own ‘experience regimes’” (Triclot 2011, 28). How do pornographic video games satisfy the player? How do the play and the pornographic aspects fit together? Of course, player satisfaction can be understood as the simple satis-

faction of sexual arousal; if the pornographic video game manages to arouse the player, mission accomplished. However, pornoscopy is not merely the satisfaction of a sexual desire, it goes far beyond that.

To illustrate this further, something needs to be added to the example of the video game *Skyrim* and its mods. In this case, pornography will be applied as a tracing of the mainstream video game, which will in fact be transformed and become pornographic. It is no longer a question of simply playing *Skyrim*; rather, it is about playing an alternative version of *Skyrim*, a kind of enhanced version of the original video game, offering new possibilities and perspectives. It is important to note that this is not a case of simply grafting huge penises and breasts onto all the characters in the game. Pornographic modding, as a layer, is going to deposit something onto the game, which is going to become a component of it, a part of it. If this layer modifies the game, then it also modifies the player's experience, since the "objective regulatory framework" has been changed. This is why a modded *Skyrim* on pornography becomes a pornoscopic game: the pleasure derived from playing a video game is not the same as the pleasure derived from playing a pornographic videogame. The game, the rules and the individual experience are all transformed.

This is a manifestation of the fundamentally iconic nature of pornoscopy, which functions as an intermediary between the traditional videogame world and the pornographic world, creating another. *Skyrim* is not a pornographic game; the pornographic mods in *Skyrim* rely on the original base game. The pornographic link gives rise to an alter ego, another video game, a pornoscopic one, and pornoscopy acts as a layer between the game and the player. Thus, the subjective experience of playing a pornographic modded video game differs from that of playing a traditional video game. It is possible to see a similar variation in enjoyment depending not just on the medium of the game, but on the type of game: for the modded *Skyrim*, satisfaction will come from the diversity of quests, settings and relationships with NPCs (non-playable characters), and

there are no limits to the scenarios, since mods are legion and varied, going so far as to implement other characters, films or other video games in *Skyrim*.

To further elaborate, it would be worthwhile to consider an additional example from a game that was originally designed to be pornographic: *Subverse* (2021, FOW Interactive). This science fiction role-playing game, an independent production, reveals a unique development. The Kickstarter campaign to fund it in 2019, with a goal of £100,000, raised £1,668,626 with 58,730 contributors in one month, making it one of the top 20 most successful video games on the Kickstarter funding platform. In the initial weekend following its release in early access on Steam on 26 March 2021, it became the second best-selling game of the moment, behind *Valheim* (2021, Iron Gate AB), the most meteoric success in the history of the Steam platform. To date, it has sold more than 500,000 units. The SF universe and some of the characters are explicitly inspired by the *Mass Effect* franchise (2007, Electronic Arts), one of the most successful SF and RPG video games of all time. The gameplay can be praised for its diversity: from the nervous *shoot'em up* phases (SHMUP) in space, inspired by the successes of the 1980s-1990s arcade and PC video games, to the turn-based tactics on the ground reminiscent of *X-COM* (1994, MicroProse), not forgetting the important and numerous RPG phases, with long dialogue phases and advanced voice acting of remarkable quality.

The story itself is well-developed, with political intrigue and an extensive background to the universe presented. Pop culture references are legion and extend far beyond the domain of video games. The fourth wall is regularly breached in a manner reminiscent of the Marvel comic *Deadpool*, which will inspire the character design of the protagonist, Captain. The primary issue comes from the ad nauseam addition of these references: the intergalactic system of government is called Imperium and controls its citizens based on an indisputable higher religious law (*Warhammer 40K*, originally a board game from 1987). Galactic distances are stated in parsecs (*Star Wars* by George Lu-

cas, 1977). The map of a galaxy allows the player's spaceship to move freely within the boundaries of the galaxy, with the task of scanning planets (*Spore*, 2008, Maxis). The references are endless and, regrettably, frequently pointless.

However, this video game does not use the video game medium as a pretext for showing explicit scenes; it develops varied gameplay and offers a rich video game experience. *Subverse* is undoubtedly an important milestone in the history of pornographic video games, as it demonstrates the feasibility of developing a pornographic video game that is, fundamentally, just as much a video game as it is pornographic. The character of DEMI, one of the spaceship's first recruits, is a good example of this. DEMI is an android, a robot with artificial intelligence, model APEX-17 D19M45, one of the few survivors of this model of android personal assistant, following the Great AI Purge, an imperial ban on artificial intelligences within the empire, both in their possession and in their manufacture. As the story unfolds and develops, DEMI enhances its database, unlocking more human vocabulary and intonations, presenting a profound development in voice acting. In the *Subverse* universe, alien and human races coexist and interact with robots, cyborgs and artificial intelligences, raising, sometimes unwittingly or unknowingly, fundamental questions about the place, function and evolution of artificial intelligences or avatars. Among them, are avatars people, beings capable of humanity and feelings? What are their links with reality?

Identification With the Avatar: Queer Icon and Aesthetics of The Flux

To better understand the videogame avatar, it is essential to recall the etymological origin of the virtual. This will enable us to situate the virtual-actual-real interaction and its impact on the avatar. "Etymologically, [virtual] comes from the Latin *virtualis* meaning 'that which is only potential'. For example, before conception, a child exists 'virtually', i.e. 'potentially' for its future parents; it is the ac-

tualization of this virtuality that lies at the heart of the process of becoming a parent” (Micheli-Rechtman 2008, 136). The etymology of the term ‘virtual’ reminds us that the virtual and the real are not opposed; rather, the opposition lies between the virtual and the actual (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980, 125). The definition of the term “virtual” implies that the avatar is, by nature, in a state of potentiality rather than actuality. It is a virtual incarnation, in the making. The term “incarnation” is deliberately employed in direct reference to the etymology of avatar, “a term derived from the Sanskrit *avatara*, meaning incarnation, return,” which “designates the digital representation of the person moving in a three-dimensional environment. It is the player’s ‘alter ego’” (Micheli-Rechtman 2008, 141). Above all, “the avatar constitutes a virtual identity whose form is evolving” (Renault 2023, 38), and over which the player has a concrete and growing influence as personalization evolves and deepens.

In this sense, Thierry Hoquet describes Avatar as “unclassifiable and elusive, always in transition and never fixed. Its essence is to be queer: unassignable to any definitive identity [...]” (Hoquet 2021, 324–325). Avatar is in a state of flux, neither entirely real nor entirely actual. It is a variable entity, capable of infinite modification, and represents an ever-changing aspect of identity that cannot be fixed. “Avatar is a passer between worlds” (Hoquet 2021, 325), an intermediary between the real and virtual worlds. The avatar is, once again, a digital icon, “always in transition, [...] never really where we have seen him” (Hoquet 2021, 325), always already somewhere else, he “has only one homeland: it’s the whole universe, or rather pluriverses, infinite parallel worlds that he visits to the point of intoxication” (Hoquet 2021, 348), capable of investing himself and “creating links in each of them without any of them constituting a privileged attachment for him. He accepts no borders, claims no nationality, belongs to no particular world” (Hoquet 2021, 348).

Considering the inclusion of the avatar in the aesthetics of the flux, how can the mechanisms through

which the player identifies with the avatar can be examined? Several possibilities can be considered for an avatar with which the player will “identify [...] as an extension of oneself or as oneself” (Renault 2023, 38). Personalizing the avatar, whether through physical characteristics, clothing or even the name given to it, will enable the player to express themselves, whether the avatar is “realistic (a faithful projection of the player), augmented avatar (a projection of the player with a few different characteristics), or idealized (a fantasized version of oneself)” (2023, 46). And, of course, none of these categories are set in stone, and can change or evolve at any time, with video games for which personalization will become fundamental and essential.³

The appendices do not illustrate the possibilities for personalizing the avatar of a particular game. This is deliberate: to fix in one image an almost infinite number of possibilities would be irrelevant. It is impossible to assign a fixed image to an avatar precisely to illustrate the multiplicity of variations in its identity. However, some conservative gamers regularly take offence at customization possibilities that do not directly resemble them,⁴ as was the case with the video game *Baldur’s Gate 3* (2023, Larian Studios), in which the player can embody a non-binary avatar and can romance all NPCs, whatever their gender or sex. One of the most discussed customization options was the ability to choose the appearance of the avatar’s genitalia. Indeed, there are many ways of unlocking intimate scenes in *Baldur’s Gate 3* (henceforth abbreviated to *BG3*), which form an integral part of the plot and are often explicit. But is *BG3* a pornographic game simply because

3 Some players express the fact that their avatar can, for various reasons, take on multiple facets: “Sometimes I make it look like me, sometimes not, it depends on the roleplay I want to play”, (Renault 2023, 46). For more details, see the entire study by Sophie Renault in *Mon avatar, la mode et moi, ibid.*, in which she shows the fundamental importance of the avatar’s clothing appearance in the game *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (2020, Nintendo).

4 As an example, it is possible to cite the controversy that occurred in September 2018 surrounding the DLC (Downloadable Content) *Desert Kingdoms* for the game *Total War: Rome II* (2013, Creative assembly). This DLC implemented a small percentage to obtain feminine generals. In three days, 1642 negative reviews were submitted on the Steam platform. For further details, see this article from IGN: “Total War: Rome 2 Is Being Review Bombed on Steam over Imagined Controversy” (<https://www.ign.com/articles/2018/09/25/total-war-rome-2-is-being-review-bombed-on-steam-over-imagined-controversy>).

it features explicit cutscenes?

It could be argued that the developers' primary intention was not to make a pornographic video game. While the game is recommended for an adult audience – not just because of the explicit scenes, but also because of the violence and language – it is not, however, labelled as pornographic. From our perspective, the question is not meaningful, for several reasons. The first concerns the nature of the game itself. As an RPG, *BG3* offers a wide variety of situations that evolve according to the player's choices. It is entirely possible to finish the game without sleeping with anyone. It is important to note that some NPCs are more reluctant than others, or on the contrary, more inclined to sleep with the avatar, depending on their personality and backstory. The existence of explicit sex scenes is a possibility placed on the same level as taking a particular path, visiting a particular cave or talking to a particular NPC: the choice is ultimately up to the player, and is simply an expression of the freedom inherent within RPGs.⁵ Unlike *Subverse*, which was praised for the quality of its gameplay – an unexpected element for a game whose aim is eminently pornographic – *BG3* manages the tour de force of showing pornographic scenes that are consistent with the story's narrative logic, and of a quality that is also praised and appreciated.

Conclusion

In this article, the aim was to examine pornographic modding in video games as long as pornographic video games through the lens of pornoscopy. This study revealed that even non-pornographic video games can be transformed into pornoscopic video games. The analysis of *Skyrim* mods demonstrated that video games could transcend their medium and become machinimas, there-

⁵ However, in the first few weeks following the game's release, it was undoubtedly the explicit sex scenes that got people talking the most on the Internet, particularly one with a druid capable of turning into a bear during the sex scene. The developers explained that the ease of access to these scenes was a coding error that made the characters more inclined to accept the advances of the player's avatar.

by revealing a certain degree of freedom inherent to video games' pornoscopy. Consequently, *Skyrim* mods gave rise to a distinctive pornoscopic videogame experience. This led to establish the transition from a play society to a video game society, underscoring the centrality of player satisfaction and the considerable impact of video games on contemporary societies. Utilizing *Baldur's Gate 3* as a case study, it has been demonstrated that the incorporation of pornographic scenes does not necessitate a game's conceptualization exclusively around these elements, as was the case with *Subverse*, which was developed from the outset with the explicit objective of being pornographic. *Subverse* also showed the ability to raise fundamental philosophical questions concerning the status of the avatar and the aesthetics of the flux. As of now, the concept of pornoscopy substantiates that pornographic video games cannot be regarded as a subject lacking sufficient scientific rigor. There is so much more to say on this subject, ranging from the first pornographic video games to the potential evolutions to come considering the ultracontemporary evolution of artificial intelligence. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the indispensable role of the concept of pornoscopy in order to better understand the intricacies of pornographic video games, and of pornographic manifestations overall.

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