AN-ICON

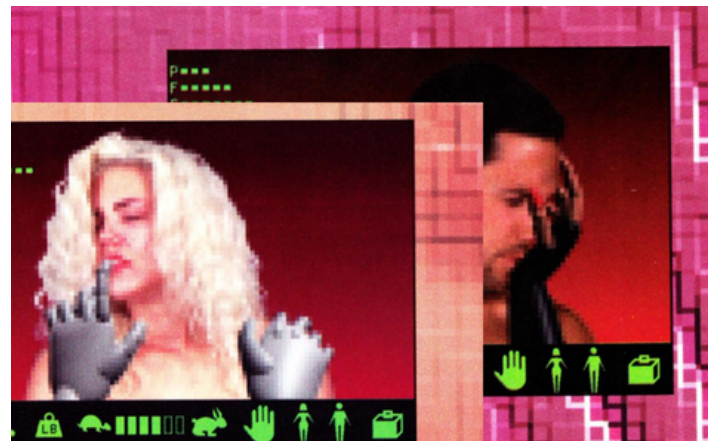## Call for Papers
Virtual Sex: Pornography, Immersion, and Erotic Environments

Edited by Ihsan Asman, Giovanna Maina, and Roberto P. Malaspina.

Extended Deadline for full articles: 30th April 2025

Details from the magazine Future Sex *(2) (1992): 30-31, Graphic Design: Ken Holewczynski*
3-D Modeling and Graphics: Mike Saenz and Norm Dwyer

[Journal presentation - See Call for papers next page]

Online Open Access Journal "AN-ICON. Studies in Environmental Images"

Recent technologies (like virtual and augmented reality) have given new impulse to a type of images that negate themselves as such and that can therefore be named "an-icons". Traditional images are grounded in a material medium; they are separated from their context by framing devices; and they refer to something in the real world. By contrast, an-icons conceal their mediateness, ideally getting rid of any framing devices, and aim at constituting autonomous quasi-real worlds. The result is a radical "environmentalization" of images that ask to be inhabited and experienced more than viewed and observed.
"AN-ICON. Studies in Environmental Images" is an online open access journal that investigates an-icons according to theoretical, historical, and practical perspectives.

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Virtual Sex: Pornography, Immersion, and Erotic Environments

Edited by Ihsan Asman, Giovanna Maina, and Roberto P. Malaspina.

Deadline for full articles: **15th March 2025**

In a letter published in 1969 on *Architectural Design*, Donald Kenzotaki from the Bio-Cybernetic Institute of Tokaida, Japan, details the marvels of his research team's latest invention. This ground-breaking device, known as "Cybersex," is engineered to record the multimodal expressions of a sexual encounter, store them on a hard disk, and reproduce the experience for distribution to anyone seeking a multisensory encounter. Users would be able to visit a cybersex studio, select their preferred recording, and initiate a fully immersive experience. The complex computer system would respond dynamically to the user's body, adapting the visual, tactile, and olfactory stimuli of the recording to ensure an immediate and erotically effective experience.

A contemporary reader of *Architectural Design* at the time might have reacted with amusement and disbelief, recognizing that this account was, in fact, part of *Cosmorama* – a satirical column that playfully speculated on the future potential of emerging technologies. Nevertheless, this fictional description serves as an early articulation of what would become central to a "sexual futurology": the utopian desire to combine technology and sexuality in ways that transcend "physical" limitations. Kenzotaki's "Cybersex" anticipated several *topoi* that would come to define the discourse on mediated sex in the following decades. Concepts such as technical reproducibility, complete multisensoriality, immediacy, and telecommunication have remained at the core of discursive experiments, cinematic portrayals, and rhetorical promises. This set of new technologies claims to enhance sexual experiences with increasing efficacy and erotic satisfaction, combining the rhetoric of "new" media with the indexical instability of the pornographic product.

Among the devices that seem to most effectively embody these long-standing aspirations is Virtual Reality (VR). Since its most recent technological re-emergence (2014-15) (Evans 2018), VR has brought forth new possibilities for both the mediation of sex and the porn industry. Indeed, virtual technologies have created immersive forms that produce both social experiences – such as multi-user sex games – and pure "simulation," as in the case of pornographic audio-visual products. Most pornographic materials conceived for VR to date are based on a form of virtual augmentation of the POV (point-of-view) subgenre: even though they limit themselves to 180° or 360° videos rather than actual interactive environments, they integrate the strong agency of the first-person shot with the visceral capacities of the body transfer process (Slater et al. 2010). The success of virtual forms of pornography raises urgent issues regarding the aesthetic consequences that such images have on visua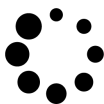lity and bodily self-perception: on the one hand, VR redefines the composition qualities and directing strategies of the pornographic image (Evans 2020); on the other, it constructs new horizons of social and political agency (Paré et al. 2019; Wang 2021). VR porn may therefore constitute complex biocultural dynamics concerning the politics of bodies and the gendered perceptions of the self (Tacikowski et al. 2020; Zhang and Juvrud 2024). Following a somatechnical (Sullivan and Murray 2014) perspective – stressing the co-constitution between bodies, technologies, and images – VR pornography seems to "excite" with particular effectiveness the primary potentialities and problematics of environmental images (Pinotti 2021), especially in relation to intersectional identity proprioception.

In addition to VR, other technologies like AI (Viola and Voto 2023), haptic feedback systems (Ley and Rambukkana 2021), and teledildonics (Reinghold 1990, Liberati 2017) are transforming how sexuality and intimacy are experienced and represented.

In this issue of *AN-ICON. Studies in Environmental Images*, we invite contributions that critically engage with the intersections of immersion, technology, and sexuality through various methodologies. While VR is a primary focus, we welcome papers that explore other immersive technologies, including AR (Augmented Reality), XR (Extended Reality), AI-driven environments, and social VR, to expand the discussion on how digital environments shape and redefine sexual experiences, pornographies and identities.

Contributions might relate to the following topics:

- <u>Genealogies, media archaeologies, and imaginations of sex and immersive pornography.</u> How technically mediated sex and immersive pornographies have been imagined in the past?

- <u>Social, political, and identity consequences of erotic-pornographic virtual simulation.</u> What social and political effects arise from virtual erotic simulations? How do these simulations impact identity formation?

- <u>Identity performance in Social Virtual Reality.</u> How does social VR influence the performance of identity, gender and race? What opportunities or constraints does it create for exploring fluid identities? How do queer communities use immersive technologies to challenge normative sexualities?

- <u>Post-porn perspectives and virtual technologies.</u> How do virtual technologies contribute to post-porn aesthetics? What new forms of sexual representation do they enable that challenge mainstream porn?

- <u>Analysis of VR porn production, directing, and distribution strategies.</u> What are the key challenges and innovations in VR porn production and

distribution? How do these strategies differ from traditional pornographic works?

- Political-legal issues: virtual harassment and consent in digital spaces. How do legal frameworks address virtual harassment and consent in immersive environments? What new regulations are needed to ensure ethical interactions in VR?

- Ethical implications of artificial intelligence in virtual pornography. What ethical concerns arise from the use of AI in virtual pornography? How do AI-generated erotic contents affect issues of consent and privacy?

Contributions **must adhere to the Journal's editorial guidelines** (https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/anicon/about/submissions). Manuscripts that fail to do so will not be considered for peer review and will be desk-rejected.
If motivated by the nature of the research, word count for manuscripts destined to this issue may be extended to a maximum of 10.000 words (footnotes included - final reference list excluded).

Please sign up / login to the Journal's webpage and upload your complete manuscript here: https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/anicon/about/submissions

In case you have any question before submission, please contact:

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