

VCS – Visual Culture Studies

Call for Essays
#07

"Wearable – Media to be worn"

edited by Barbara Grespi e Federico Vercellone

The role of the body in new media has been discussed for some time, along with the tendency to make devices that are increasingly compact so that they can be incorporated and always available (Carbone, 2023). This topic is not new, and McLuhan's idea of the medium as a prosthesis already alluded to a continuity, at least imaginary, between bodies and technology. In contemporary times, the question is now posed in reverse: given the extreme automation achieved by algorithmic capital media (Eugeni, 2021), it is the human body that is now considered an appendix, or a complement to the device, rather than vice versa, as Vilém Flusser suggested decades ago through the concept of "epithesis" (Flusser, 1991).

VCS #7 intends to explore the territory of wearable media, reconnecting them to the practices of bodily wearability of the image from a media-archaeological and philosophical-cultural perspective (Huhtamo, Parikka, 2011). The process of transforming the human body into a support, or more precisely, materially into a device for image display and transmission, has deep roots, motivated by the very nature of the body itself, which Merleau-Pontian phenomenology has clarified as inherently medial (Dalmasso, 2018). But in addition to ideas, the practices of the body as a medium have also nurtured the development of technologies to be incorporated. Various cultural and artistic forms have long experimented on the surface of the body as a place where images can appear,

starting from the centuries-old practice of tattooing. Tattooing acts out the idea that “one can make of their own body, of what is most ours, a Ding, something both of one’s own and foreign” (Vercellone, 2023), precisely a screen based on a paradoxical retro (or intra) projection. The extreme intimacy of skin and image, their fusion into a compound that overcomes the distinction between symbolic and material, fixity and movement, internal and external, opens up various mediological reflections, ranging from the possibility of understanding the Western and 19th-century version of tattooing as a variant of pre-cinema, a body-based optical toy (Grespi, 2021), to the mediatic aetiology of skin diseases (Violi, 2013), and to ancient and modern, artistic or therapeutic treatments aimed at its externalization, instrumentalization and sharing (such as transplants, Damiani, 2022).

In this key, the issue intends to broaden the investigation to various phenomena of corporeal mediatization, for example those delegated to our “second skin” (Strauven, 2021), such as the illusionistic use of clothing fabrics, which the tradition of cinema studies has already traced back to the emergence of the moving image (Gunning, 2003). Experiments with the forms of projection (now refocused by Bruno, 2022, and Casetti, 2023) and their use on bodies as screens are equally central – from the first cine-installation conceived by Man Ray, who in the 1920s projected a film by Méliès onto the moving screen formed by the costumes of the guests at a masked ball, to the experiments of Lettrist filmmakers who cast images onto the bodies of the spectators in the theatre (Lischi, 2001) and the practices of re-signification of the body of the artist (*The Gospel According to St. Matthew* of/on Pier Paolo Pasolini by Fabio Mauri – Intellettuale, 1975). Valerie Export’s tactile screening (*Tapp und Tastkino*, 1968), a feminist performance of expanded cinema in which the author transforms her own breasts into a touchscreen, is also part of this series, which ideally continues in those visual performances in real time (*Vjing*) that anchor themselves to the bodies of actors or dancers, and ultimately in the practice of the virtual dress (Liberati, 2017). These aesthetic and cultural forms have prepared the ground on which contemporary wearable media have settled in the form of accessories (glasses, watches, bracelets, Bluetooth rings, sensor headgear, headphones) or of rewriting the naked body (as in the case of electronic tattoos, which embellish and simultaneously connect our skin to the environment).

Contributions are solicited on the following, non-exhaustive topics:

- Case studies on contemporary wearable media (their cultural implications, their phenomenology, and preferably, but not exclusively, their archaeology)

- The production of images in the body, due to “natural” reactions or surgical interventions
- Artistic experiences of every era based on the valorisation of the transmissive, reflective, absorbent and shielding qualities of the skin
- Fabric and its mediatisation, between fashion and technology
- Live performances, Vjing, and augmented reality based on the capitalisation of bodies
- Philosophies of bodily-based images (forms of symbolisation of the body, the question of lost nudity in the face of digitisation)

Bibliographic references:

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Damiani S., “Visibilità esacerbata”: il miracolo della gamba nera dei santi Cosma e Damiano, “STUDIUM”, vol. 118, n. 4, 2022, pp. 524-545.

Eugeni R., *Capitale algoritmico. Cinque dispositivi postmediali (più uno)*, Scholé, Brescia 2021.

Flusser V., *Gestures* (1991), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis/London 2014.

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Violi A., *Il corpo nell'immaginario letterario*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2013.

Operational guidelines:

Researchers interested in participating are invited to submit a proposal no later than 25/06/2023. The proposal must be approximately 300 words long (including an essential bibliography) and should contain a introductory biographical note from the author (s) of up to 100 words. All materials and communications relating to the publication must be sent to the email addresses of the curators and to that of the editorial staff:

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Those who have sent proposals will receive a response by 30/06/2023 and will have to send their contribution by 30/09/2023. Contributions must contain between 8000 and 10000 words, including notes and bibliography. The reference editorial standards can be consulted and downloaded at <https://vcsmimesis.org/norme-redazionali>. Articles must be sent along with the following: an abstract of 200 words, three to five keywords and a bio-

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The articles will be subjected to a double referee according to the double-blind system. The opinions of the referees will be sent back to the authors by 30/10/2023: in the event that the referees deem the contribution to be publishable with amendments, authors will have until 27/11/2023 send their contribution with the appropriate corrections. For anything not made clear in this CFE, please refer to the journal's policy, which can be consulted at and downloaded from <https://vcsmimesis.org/norme-etiche>. In addition to written essays, the call encourages and is committed to supporting the sending of video essays, of which abstracts and credits will be published in the paper magazine, and in the audiovisual version on the magazine's website. Timeframes, deadlines, and methods of sending audiovisual proposals, contributions, and their evaluation will be the same as those for written essays. Video essays must be of a maximum duration of 20 minutes, and sent in mp4 format with HD 1280 x 720 format. If you use web transfer services (Google, Onedrive, Wetransfer, etc.) it is recommended that you always send contributions to all the email addresses listed above.