

VCS – Visual Culture Studies

Call for Essays

#02

“The Visual Culture of SARS-CoV-2”

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Over the last year, the pandemic SARS-CoV-2 (COVID 19) has affected the ways of living of almost every community on earth. It has endangered everyone's life impacting our own prospects and plans and transforming, in different cultures, the significant forms of the organisation of social relationships (Lorusso, Marrone, Jacoviello, 2020); i. e. the use of space, proxemics, the way of presenting ourselves marked by the necessity (or the refusal) of protective masks (Leone 2020), as well as the new centrality of digital interfaces in the workplace.

Furthermore, the pandemic is having a deep impact on the current visual culture as it has determined the production of a great number of images aimed at representing the above mentioned social change. Such images are testimonial evidence, means to represent or avert fear, tools to understand and describe the progressive spread of the virus and support material for political and social debate.

Like every great crisis, therefore, this pandemic is bringing about a remarkable image heritage that will lead to change or modulate the ways we look at the world

and will make us reconsider its significance and relevance. Unlike the “historic” 9/11 images (Mitchell 2011, Dinoi 2008), the images of the pandemic are far more numerous and varied; they in fact account for a common practice of processing and production of images that has become itself one of the main features of the pandemic. This sort of “iconodemic” is monopolizing not only the mass media through report and scientific images, but also the social media, as well as Art and even the urban landscape by means of street art and billboards. A lot of projects have been developed, among which we quote as an example the Covid-19 Visual project

(<https://covid19visualproject.org/it/chapter/una-societa-ferita/5>), the project promoted by W.J.T. Mitchell on Critical Inquiry (<https://critinq.wordpress.com>), or the projects developed to show the pandemic theme in street art (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/coronavirus-street-art-1814961>).

On the other hand, as it always happens in the iconosphere, all these images result from the dialogue with other images, which are already sedimented, as a quotation, a re-elaboration, a comparison with other images, thus creating new webs of meaning and relations between the Covid-19 pandemic and other present and past social phenomena. This process starts from other pandemics, which are historically documented, or maybe only feared or imagined, and which left traces in art, in vintage illustrations (see the great revival of the images of the so called Spanish influenza), in movies (Lancioni 2020). This opens spaces of thought and discussion on the different forms of an epidemic iconography. Starting from these concise considerations, the present call invites to submit contributions on visual culture of the pandemic which can be developed from different perspectives. By way of example, we have listed some themes we consider particularly important that can be a suggestion for your proposals:

- Images of places and social practices during the pandemic  
Empty/voided space of the cities; physical and social distancing; relation pandemic/places; rethinking home space as a media space; forms and ways of forced relocation of our experiences

- Medicalization, biopolitics and vision technologies  
Tracing procedures; development of contact tracing apps; contact detector in terms of health monitoring of the population during and after the emergency
- Infographics and forms of visualization of the pandemic  
Contagion mapping; risk and vulnerability geography; visualization of the invisible virus; anticipation of the therapies and the vaccine
- Virus and technological imagery: the relation with interfaces, the developed apps  
Phenomenology of streaming platforms, distance teaching and e-learning; setting for comparison experiences; hegemony of the close-up; speaker/gallery mode; faceoff practice
- Artistic expressions and new creative forms  
Street art; collective films; pandemic cinema; festivals online, the crisis of performing arts; adaptability, flexibility and scalability of the media for the art scene
- Representation of bodies and passions  
After years of performing, muscular, victorious, aesthetic-surgical bodies, we are now obliged to watch fragile bodies (elderly bodies, sick bodies, shielded bodies, submissive bodies, incubated bodies); bodies like isles of fear; the protective face mask vs "face to face" (Lévinas); the suspicion for the stranger vs the acceptance of every policy of welcoming; social avoidance vs relational twist; interpersonal distancing vs attachment theory
- Human/non human and nature revenge  
Representation of the ecosystem in relation to the pandemic; man as an obsolete paradigm; the pandemic as a tool for the re-definition of the otherness (micro-organisms; the animal kingdom); the post-Anthropocene

#### Bibliographical References:

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## Operational Guidelines

Scholars interested in participating are invited to submit a proposal by 14th December 2020. The proposal should be maximum 300 words long (including a brief bibliography) together with a 100-word presentation of the author/authors. All the materials and the communication regarding publication are to be sent to the editors and the editorial office:

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A reply will be sent by 21st December 2020 to every candidate who will have to send his paper by 22nd February 2021. The length of the papers should be minimum

8,000 – maximum 10,000 words, including notes and bibliography. The rules of editing are available and downloadable on

<https://vcsmimesis.org/norme-redazionali>.

Papers should be accompanied by a 200-word abstract, from 3 to 5 key words and a bio-bibliography of the author or the authors (max 100 words per author). Papers can be written in Italian or English; in case they are in Italian, the abstract should be both in English and Italian and the 200 words extra are to be counted separately. Papers can be accompanied by images for which authors should ensure to have reproduction rights; black and white images are reproduced on a paper booklet inside the article; colour images are published in a specific section of the periodical website and are available through a link.

Papers are read by two referees using a double-blind format. The referees' reviews are sent to the drafters by 19th April 2021: if referees consider the paper fit to publication with amendments, the drafters will have time until 10th May 2021 to submit their papers with the required corrections. For further details, please see the editorial policy which is available and downloadable on

<https://vcsmimesis.org/norme-etiche> .

In addition to written essays, this call encourages and promotes the submission of video-essays, whose abstracts and credits are to be published on the paper issue and the audiovisual version is to be issued on the periodical website. The deadlines and instructions for the submission of the proposals, the contributions and their evaluation are the same as for written papers. Video-essays should be maximum 20 minutes long and should be sent in mp4 HD 1280x720 format. In case transfer web services are used (Google, Onedrive, Wetrasnsfer, etc.) it is recommended to send the proposals to all of the email addresses mentioned above.