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Mimicry: the possible playful model behind interactive wearables for fashion - paper

What can happen when technology becomes wearable and interactive? We open up a new space for visionary scenarios of social interactions and new means for personal expression.

Wearable computing represents a fertile opportunity for designers willing to create the feeling of empowerment and involvement in a user, through designing interactions that can lead to a new perception of the self, of the moment and of the place. In this frame, a simple behavior, embedded in the wearable, can become a potential narrative element interacting with a personal narrative and with a potential audience.

Wearables can become masks and, exploiting the potential of technology to create an illusion of a new identity, they can generate infinite scenarios for role-playing in everyday life.

Fetishisation of technology for its own sake is just the emerging mask, the one of the cyborg, nourished by engineers and scientist, focusing on the idea of a solving task oriented empowerment.

But we can look at the potential of digital interactivity as means of personal expression rather than purely as a means of functionality. This involves considering interactive behavior not in terms of utility, but imagination and projection of identity: the ultimate "utility" of fashion.

This issue is particularly true with wearable devices with which the fictional aura created by the technology around us depend so intimately on our body, our movements, and that implies such a personal involvement and active participation.

The paper will present a possible model for wearable interactive devices for fashion: "Mimicry", "deliberate impersonation" as it was defined by Roger Caillos, in his now classic anthropological study "Man, Play and Games". Using his definition as a basis, and presenting some of the prototypes I developed as examples, I'll show how technology can transform garments and accessories in explorative interfaces

(following Brenda Laurels' definition) and generate opportunities for new immersive experiences.

In my conclusions I will underline how the characteristics of modern technologies (invisibility, effect on the context, change in state) can enable the arousal of a new participatory immersive medium that can satisfy the age-old desire to live out fantasies, more completely than has ever before been possible, and how this can lead designer in generating new ideas for wearables.

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