

HER NAME WAS SIMULATION

HER BODY WAS NEVER REAL

YULIN ZHANG

Università IUAV di Venezia, Italy

zhangyulinnnn@gmail.com

Orcid 0009-0001-5628-8184

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Abstract

In the age of hyperreality, fairy-tale aesthetics are no longer illusions, they constitute the aesthetic logic of the real. My MA graduation collection, Her name was Simulation; her body was never real, explores the image-body: a form detached from physical referents and endlessly reproduced through fashion and media. Drawing on Jean Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum, particularly the "third order" of signs, the project investigates bodily dislocation, visual deception, and technological idealization. Through textile manipulation, 3D printing, and prosthetic-inspired construction, I created garments that simulate artificial structures while maintaining tactile softness. Key designs incorporate spherical forms and inflated volumes, inspired by Eva Fàbregas' Pumping, to evoke a hybrid of the organic and the synthetic. The concept of the grotesque body, open, incomplete, transformable, guides the visual language of fragmentation and porous boundaries, where the body becomes a mutable image-space. Pastel colors associated with girlhood are recontextualized to critique aesthetic norms shaped by digital culture. Ultimately, the project constructs a narrative grounded in simulation: a body in perpetual transformation, an identity sculpted by signs, and an ideal that never belongs to reality. It asks: Does the body still belong to us, or has it been fully absorbed by the regime of images, filters, and tags?

Keywords: *Simulacrum; Image-body; Hyperreality; Fashion and Technology; Grotesque body*

In the age of hyperreality, fairy-tale aesthetics are no longer illusions; they have become the very aesthetic logic of the real. My MA graduation collection project, Her name was Simulation; her body was never real, begins from this theoretical and visual premise. It develops a series of critical explorations concerning bodily dislocation, the deceit of images, the aesthetics of the simulacrum, and the way idealized images are constructed through fashion, technology, and media.

The conceptual foundation of this series derives from Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacres et Simulation* (1981). Here, the simulacrum is not merely a copy, but a sign that has liberated itself from any referent, circulating autonomously within the order of signs. I have translated the idea of

the "third order of simulacra" (Baudrillard, 1981) into a visual language that no longer refers to any real body: an image-body eternally reproduced, yet never possessing physicality. I imagined a character named Simulation. Her body has never actually existed. She is not a human being, but a perfect image within the symbolic order, a projection of ideal beauty shaped by the filters of social media, a fragmented body, modeled, extended, dissected, and modified.

Her apparition poses a fundamental question: How can we perceive the body in an era governed entirely by images? And how can we move from seeing to reconstructing? To answer these questions, I adopted "simulation" as a design



Fig. 01

methodology. Starting from traditional techniques, I created a wool-felt skirt with an overtly artificial appearance (Fig. 01). Its surface is adorned with protruding elements resembling simulated belts, creating a plastic illusion while preserving a tactile softness. This contrast between “soft” and “hard,” between “real” and “replicated,” lies at the core of my research. The felt technique allowed me to build three-dimensional volumes from two-dimensional drawings. This method of constructing volume from surface led me to reconsider the language of prosthetics, transforming the body itself into an image space to be recoded. This handcrafted simulation of a “technological” aesthetic serves as my response to the image-body paradigm. In the era of new media, our bodies increasingly obey the logic of the visible rather than the perceptible. The angle of your selfie, the filter you select, the way you manage your facial expressions, all converge toward a perfectly rendered self that, in truth, has never existed. This reminds me of the eternally youthful portrait in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde, 2003), and of the ever mutating beauty standards of pop culture: You never truly change, but you must constantly

transform.

Mikhail Bakhtin proposed the concept of the grotesque body (Bakhtin, 1984): an incomplete, open, and symbiotic body. This concept deeply resonates with my work. I began investigating the body’s extendability and instability. Within this framework, I developed three pieces centered on spherical forms: a yellow top with embedded spherical elements, a long white skirt composed of ball-like volumes, and a tubular pink belt integrated into a knitted dress (Fig. 02). These pieces were inspired by Eva Fàbregas’ installation *Pumping* (2019), which features inflatable, floating, sensual structures somewhere between organs and machines. Fàbregas’ visualisation of symbiosis between body and technology encouraged me to integrate spherical volumes into my designs, using tactile materials that merge bodily contours and artifice, blurring the line between inside and outside.

In addition to these, I designed a 3D-printed baseball cap to accompany the pink knitted dress, intending to explore the mutability of materiality itself (Fig. 02). This piece acts as a tangible experiment in simulation and substitution, where



Fig. 02

digital fabrication challenges the boundaries between the organic and the artificial, questioning how materials can be manipulated and replaced while retaining symbolic resonance within the body's extended image.

For instance, in the yellow sleeveless top, the spheres are positioned at the waistline (Fig. 03); in the white skirt, they extend across the front and back, as if active genetic molecules were unfolding from within the body (Fig. 04). The pink spherical belt resembles the rhythmic motion of bubbles, winding around the waist. These elements are intended to evoke a dual association: the technological simulacrum and the tactile qualities of the human body. They also raise further questions: How can the body become unstable, heterogeneous, and incomplete? How can it extend from within, merging with others, with the environment, with time? And through what means can a subject be entirely replaced by its own simulacrum?

This obsession with bodily transformation is also reflected in other experiments in my collection. I used padded inserts to create unnatural shapes at the hips and waist, drawing inspiration from Georgina Godley's sculptural silhouettes and

Rei Kawakubo's theatrical costumes for Scenario (1997). Hans Bellmer's disjointed, fragmented, mirrored, and reassembled dolls have profoundly influenced my understanding of dislocated structures, which is evident in the repetition of exaggerated shoulders and joint elements in my work.

Beyond bodily structure, I am also concerned with the instability of the face. I created a knitted balaclava that covers the mouth (Fig. 02), inspired by the textile masks of Louise Bourgeois, 40 Portraits by Gisèle Vienne, and the photographic series *Poupée de Peau* by Ninot. All these references speak to a shared obsession: How can we maintain a sense of self in a society dominated by images? Have we become dolls under "sweet" filters, concealing the void beneath a kawaii aesthetic? For this reason, I selected seemingly innocent colors: pastel pink, pale yellow, mint green, and white. These are shades traditionally associated with "girlhood imagery," but in my vision, they function as a critique of the dominant aesthetic. I use "visual pleasure" as a vehicle for a deeper sense of discomfort.

Ultimately, I constructed a narrative system based on the aesthetics of the simulacrum: a body in perpetual transformation, an identity sculpted by images, an ideal that never belongs to reality. This project has led me to ask repeatedly: Does the body still belong to us? Or has it become the property of images, filters, and tags? Through fashion, I strive to challenge the relationship between clothing and the body, to expand the limits of the "skin," and to simulate a double that can never be touched.



Fig. 03

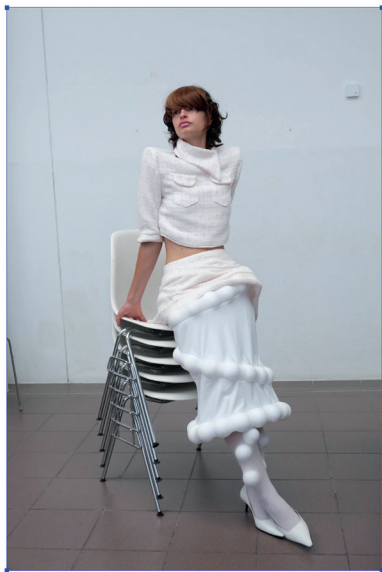


Fig. 04

CAPTIONS

[Fig. 01] Handcrafted three-dimensional felted wool skirt. Designer: Yulin Zhang; From the MA graduation project *Her name was Simulation*; her body was never real; Photograph by Peishan Lee.

[Fig. 02] Pink spherical knitted dress with 3D-printed cap and knitted balaclava mask; Designer: Yulin Zhang; From the MA graduation project *Her name was Simulation*; her body was never real; Photograph by Peishan Lee.

[Fig. 03] Left: Pink spherical knitted dress paired with 3D-printed cap. Right: Yellow top with spherical belt detail, worn with padded inflated shorts and white knitted balaclava-cap. Designer: Yulin Zhang; From the MA graduation project *Her name was Simulation*; her body was never real; Photograph by Peishan Lee.

[Fig. 04] White tweed jacket with structured shoulder pads, paired with a white spherical midi skirt. Designer: Yulin Zhang; From the MA graduation project *Her name was Simulation*; her body was never real; Photograph by Peishan Lee.

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