

MANNEQUIN AND AVATAR AS A POSTHUMAN FASHION PRACTICE

AUTHORS

Mrs Jayne Mechan
Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, United Kingdom
j.mechan@mmu.ac.uk

Mr Adrian Thornton
Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, United Kingdom
a.thornton@mmu.ac.uk

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MANUSCRIPTION

ABSTRACT

The human body has been represented through technological tools within fashion design since early iterations of mannequins, along with the subsequent ubiquitous tailor's dummy. Such 'body doubles' (Geczy, 2015) evoke notions of posthumanism; materiality and the (immaterial) technological body. Challenges of authentically communicating a body are well documented and critiqued for being presented as "nondisabled, deracialized, and de-ethnicised" (Mair, 2018:45). Moreover, there have been several criticisms targeting the (mis)use of unrepresentative bodies as objectified fashion led ideals (Entwistle, 2015). In contrast and beyond fashion, the ongoing *Humanae* project by photographer Angélica Dass, who creates digital portraits; captures the richness of both the variety and similarity of the global population, currently with over 4000 participants across 20 countries (Dass, 2012-ND). Furthermore, by commissioning the manipulation of full body photographs; both Honig and Superdrug explore themes of diversity and inclusivity through international facing projects set to present the range of perspectives of cultural perceptions of body ideals.

Meanwhile within fashion practices, traditional technologies of mannequin making sit alongside contemporary post-human endeavours of avatar creation. The evolving role of a designer extends to encompass the creator, crafter and customiser of digital versions of their own and other's bodies by means of technologies such as CLO3D™.

Through an interactive workshop the authors seek to bring together a global demographic, with whom to explore themes of the posthuman body in fashion design. The proposal offers facilitation of one or more workshops during the IFFTI event, onsite at the venue. Each participant will be encouraged to customise their own avatar and/or half scale mannequin based on their interpretation of personal values, features and individuality as fashion practitioners. Practical experimentations of 3D digital avatar customisation using CLO3D™ alongside hand craft-based modification of ½ scale mannequins will form these 'phygital' activities to provoke discourse and reflections underpinned by Culkins "we shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us" (Culkin, J. 1967).

The two authors will facilitate the workshop(s) with the offer to include local student volunteers.

The outcome will be a series of vignettes, captured through photographs, 3D imagery and ½ scale mannequins displayed on an online digital board and is designed to act as a springboard for expansion beyond the event.

The workshop provides an opportunity to discuss and connect, hear each other's experiences and perspectives and to consider ethnographic aspects of the posthuman representations of the body beyond the quantitative scientific approach to gathering, categorisation and presentation of the body through anthropometric or morphological data.

Facilitators:

Lead-Jayne Mechan, Adrian Thornton

INTRODUCTION, CONCRETE CONTEXT.

The human body has been represented through technological tools within fashion design since early iterations of mannequins, along with the subsequent ubiquitous tailor's dummy. Such 'body doubles' (Geczy, 2015) evoke notions of posthumanism; materiality and the (immaterial) technological body, whilst such fashion instruments involve some level of problematic abstraction of the human form (Robinson and Aveyard, 2017).

Challenges of authentically communicating a body are well documented and critiqued for being presented as "non-disabled, deracialized, and de-ethnicised" (Mair, 2018:45). Moreover, there have been several criticisms investigating the (mis)use of unrepresentative bodies, cited as aspirational, stylised (Brownbridge et al, 2016) and borne from objectified fashion led ideals (Entwistle, 2015).

Representations in fashion are also applied as methods to anticipate or dictate the body of the end consumer (Geczy and Karaminas, 2015).

Fashion design processes are replete with technological tools and methods offering varying levels of authenticity to depict the posthuman form, as material and immaterial, in 2D and 3D. Studies exploring populations utilising scientific means of anthropometrics, human dimensioning, linear measurements, form, posture, size, defining shape classification, categories, and standards to present variables, seek accuracy and rigour. Each are challenged with some level of abstraction, each striving to represent the body primarily through scientific based data. The use of avatars as a digital twins of its physical version, such as those provided by Alvanon™ support design practitioners to oscillate between 3D digital and physical realms (phygital), potentially broadening the range of body types.

The increasing availability and functionality of 3D digital tools to capture and represent the body, offer opportunities for individual designers to encompass avatar customisation as an act of tool making and to take part in creating a wider range of normative shapes, sizes, and features. This, as a role of fashioning the body digitally within design practices, is evolving (Mechan, 2020) and under researched.

Alongside this 3D digital phenomenon, the physical dress form/tailors dummy continue to be prevalent and valued in studio environments. Such studio practices involve the selection from a fashion industry 'standard' in full scale and half scale and remain widely used in the apparel industry (Yu, M., Kim, DE. (2023)). Moreover, the creation of mannequins through crafting techniques (McEwan, L., et al (2023) and half scale mannequin making by fashion design students (Thornton, A., Mechan, J., De Lacy, B. (2023) demonstrate a timely touchpoint for contemporary application of traditional crafting techniques.

This workshop seeks to offer a collective making space, by bringing together a global audience from over 20 countries, to share values, practices, experiences and explore themes of inclusivity and diversity through the act of 'phygital' crafting of contemporary, relevant mannequins and avatars. Making together is a key element underpinned by collective making methodology (Twigger Holroyd, A., & Shercliff, E. (2023)).

AIM, OBJECTIVES, VALUE:

The workshops aim is to explore how a 3D phygital co-creation space may draw together people from global and diverse backgrounds, to initiate discourse and generate creative work both physically and digitally. It seeks to gain fresh insights into phygital crafting of ½ scale mannequins and digital avatars. Through an enriching, open and non-judgmental space to explore notions of body inclusion and representation by engaging in hands-on practice, by sharing perspectives and experiences of the 3D tools we use to design and represent bodies in fashion practices.

The growing significance of technologies extending reality presents challenges to academics, business practitioners, and society (Awan et al., 2021). A series of questions will underpin the workshop. How might we explore themes of diversity and inclusivity in fashion design practices through the notion of the phygital mannequin collectively. How might we forge new connections beyond the boundaries of our understanding and cultures to empathise, encompass and action more inclusive practices. What fresh perspectives might this activity bring beyond our familiar cultural, social and fashion industrial and academic backgrounds. How might we foster a rich and open sharing of perspectives through the act of tool making?

How might practical experimentations of 3D digital avatar customisation using CLO3D™ alongside hand craft-based modification of ½ scale mannequins provoke discourse and reflections underpinned by Culkin's "we shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us" (Culkin, J. 1967).

As academics and researchers our anecdotal observations have found students reflecting and conversing on the variety, diversity and relativity of the mannequins and avatars available to them. Commenting on features relating to the appropriateness included 'this looks nothing like me/my muse/my consumer', 'can I change it, as it's not right', to 'do we have any other ones'. The use of mannequins with a nomenclature of 'plus size' fostered notions of 'that looks like, and reminds me of my grannie'.

It is anticipated that through making and sharing as a collective; similarities and differences, contradictions and harmony, stereotypes, and uniqueness, will provide a stimulating workshop drawn from a global reach of over 20 countries.

The outcome will be a series of vignettes exhibited in the space during the conference and captured through photographs, 3D imagery and ½ scale physical mannequins displayed on an online digital board. The workshop is designed to act as a springboard for further events and collaborations beyond the conference.

The workshop provides an informal safe space to discuss and connect, share each other's experiences and perspectives of the making of instruments representing the body.

PRACTICAL FORMAT REQUIREMENTS:

KINDLY REQUEST FOR EWHA UNIVERSITY TO PROVIDE:

Participants to be able to sign up during the event, no previous experience required. Participants will be introduced to the concept and workshop plan. Participants will select a half scale mannequin that they feel best represents themselves (or that they want to change).

SPACE AND EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENT REQUEST

The area to be a space with tables, chairs and 8 laptops with 3-wheel mouse and access/logins to the latest version of CLO3D for participants and facilitators.

A projector/display screen to demonstrate and present the workshop introduction. Pens and Post-it notes.

The area to accommodate the participants/facilitators/volunteers with enough table space and floor space for all persons involved in the workshop, and to enable participants to comfortably move around and engage as a collective group. Bins/recycling for offcuts.

Once the workshop/s are completed, please provide a space to exhibit any completed ½ scale mannequins and to display the online digital montage board until the end of the conference.

Access to the internet (for CLO3D and for online montage board).

TIMING - 2 HOURS

Mechan and Thornton will co facilitate to ensure smooth running of the workshops to achieve the aims and objectives and support both participants and volunteer helpers.

PARTICIPANTS - 8

There will be a maximum of 8 participant spaces for each workshop. Potential to facilitate more than one workshop depending on conference programme/timings.

STUDENT VOLUNTEERS - 2-4

The facilitators would welcome fashion student volunteers with a practical understanding of pattern making and garment construction skills to assist the facilitators in supporting the participants. Volunteers to possess excellent Clo3D skills to assist in supporting participants who do not have experience of Clo3D.

PREPARATION

Facilitators would like access to the space ideally the day before the workshop to setup and layout mannequins and equipment/materials and to check details/software etc.

Facilitators would provide a short induction and preparation session for the volunteers prior to the workshop.

FORMAT OF THE WORKSHOPS.

Participants will be introduced to the workshop concept, practicalities and facilitator/ volunteer roles, the tools, equipment, and plan for the session. The session will be informal to encourage participation and no prior experience is required. Participants will have the opportunity to use CLO3D, to select and customise an avatar using the software on laptops (provided by EWHA) and/or customise a half scale mannequin using a range of materials and equipment provided by the facilitators.

Basic block garments will be offered both physically and digitally for participants to dress their avatar/mannequin to invoke discussion on topics of fit and inclusivity.

Facilitators/volunteers will take photos/screenshots during the workshop.

Workshop close to include reflections and a questionnaire. The process and outcomes will be captured by photos for exhibiting on an online montage board.

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN TO PROVIDE

To enable the physical elements of the workshop to take place the facilitators anticipate travelling with 12 half scale mannequins.

There will be a set of reusable workshop kits provided for basic sewing/joining; comprising snips, hand sewing needles, thread, tape measures sticky/masking tapes, pins, materials including toy stuffing to customise mannequins.

A small range of half scale toiles of basic shirt and trouser blocks and corresponding digital toiles across a range of UK sizes, male/female will be supplied for participants to dress and reflect on the effect and affect of making.

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