

Virtually Perfect



The simulation of perfection through
computer-generated imagery model Shudu

Master Thesis by Myrthe Tiemessen
New Media & Digital Culture



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Abstract

Cameron-James Wilson created a computer-generated imagery (CGI) model called Shudu which represents perfection. By using CGI model Shudu as the perfect example for beauty, Wilson wants to ensure people are embracing beauty and perfection as there are many issues surrounding it. These issues mainly concern the negative influence technologies and media have on the self-esteem of women. These contribute to the widespread promotion of the perfect image. However, there are different approaches to technologies and the role they play in society from different perspectives. Shudu plays a role in the fields of tensions that emerge between these approaches. This thesis investigates her virtual identity by looking at her Instagram account @shudu.gram through the lens of the Cultivation Theory, and different perspectives on Simulations and Cyborg, which attempt to answer the following research question: *How does CGI model Shudu and the degree of her authenticity, constructed through her Instagram page, contribute to the discourse around perfection and its influence on women's self-image in the digital age?* This question is answered by conducting a slightly modified version of Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse (CDA) Analysis. First, the structure set up by the CDA allows the analysis of visual and textual elements in 10 Instagram posts of Shudu. This is done based on a matrix that analyses the tensions between *authenticity* and *fakeness*, and *perfect* and *imperfect*. In addition, the discourses surrounding the text production are analysed to see what Wilson's intentions are with the creation of Shudu and check whether this is also portrayed as such at her Instagram page. Finally, this research examines the societal structures and power structures in which Shudu and the kind of perfection she represents reside. This relates to dimensions of power and access, and the tensions between fake and authenticity and perfect and imperfect. This gives insight into the form of perfection Shudu represents and the role its authenticity plays in the meaning of perfection. This research shows that Shudu's virtual identity represents a humane form of perfection which makes her look authentic. Instead of being, as Wilson pointed out, an inspiring art project for people to enjoy, Shudu is considered authentic and understood as a digital creation consistent with the views of the fashion industry. It can be argued that Shudu's degree of authenticity contributes negatively to the discourse around perfection, as she doesn't deviate from the conventional beauty standards. The perfect image she portrays is received in such a way by society that she ultimately serves as comparison material, adding to the societal pressure among women to pursue the beauty standards.

Keywords: CGI model, simulation, cyborg body, authenticity, Instagram, perfection, beauty standards, Critical Discourse Analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Looking like perfection 🔥”, “Perfection”, “She looks so natural, I love her 😊”. These are comments on an Instagram post by *Shudu*, a computer-generated imagery (CGI) model. Shudu is a simulation of a woman, created in 2016 by British fashion photographer and visual artist Cameron-James Wilson who also manages her Instagram page and virtual identity.¹ Wilson argues that the lines between humans and technologies are blurring, and states that “we’re at a place now where real people are so filtered, so photoshopped, that there is no actual differentiation between 3D-art and a photo.”² For this reason, he started to design 3D-models like Shudu. He argues that in the digital era where everything is modified, it’s better to create fashion models that already fully meet all beauty standards. By using Instagram to promote Shudu’s image, Wilson developed a virtual identity for Shudu that has led to collaborations with major fashion brands such as Vogue and Louboutin. With Shudu, these brands can promote products and create the (perfect) image they wanted. This also makes Shudu an virtual influencer.³ According to Wilson, Shudu serves as an example of the postmodern, blurring of boundaries between reality and simulation, raising questions about perceptions of (human) beauty.⁴

Wilson’s idea behind the creation of Shudu stems from developments in media technologies like augmented reality (AR) and photo editing tools that are changing the way reality is perceived. Within this reality, it’s difficult to see whether something is real or fake as the technologies enable complex, realistic, and automatic edits to digital images.⁵ Nowadays, these technologies are even easily accessible to those less technically advanced, for example Instagram’s easy-to-use filters. These filters help project features of beauty standards onto users’ personal image. It’s all about displaying the perfect image. By using technologies in combination with media platforms this way, e.g. Instagram and its filters, images containing features related to the beauty standards are widely promoted.⁶ This promotion creates societal pressure in women to also obtain the standards in real life.⁷ According to research done by academics Megan Vendemia and David DeAndrea, women experience negative moods and body dissatisfaction when they fail to meet beauty standards presented online by those that can serve as comparison targets.⁸ Wilson tries to lessen the societal pressure of women to meet the beauty standards and display a perfect image, by portraying a form of unattainable perfection⁹ through a CGI like Shudu who is nothing more than an image made by technologies, officially detached from reality. Her virtual existence ensures she can easily meet beauty standards and portray a perfect image. This can take the pressure off people to pursue a perfect image as this is already being pursued and displayed by a virtual human like Shudu, who can’t be considered as realistic comparison material.

¹ “About”, The Diigitals, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://www.thediigitals.com/about/>.

² Ibid.

³ Rachel Berryman, Crystal Abidin, and Tama Leaver. “A topography of virtual influencers” *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*. (2021)

⁴ Munther Habib, “Culture and Consumerism in Jean Baudrillard: A Postmodern Perspective” *Asian Social Science* 14, no. 9 (2018): 43-46.

⁵ Habib, “Culture and Consumerism in Jean Baudrillard”, 45.

⁶ Hye-Ryeon Lee, et al., “Social Media Use, Body Image, and Psychological Well-Being: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Korea and the United States.” *Journal of health communication* 19, no. 12 (2014): 1-16.

⁷ Kirsten Harrison, and Veronica Hefner. “Virtually Perfect: Image Retouching and Adolescent Body Image.” *Media Psychology* 17, no. 2 (2014): 134-153.

⁸ Megan A. Vendemia, and David DeAndrea, “The effect of viewing thin, sexualized selfies on Instagram: Investigating the role of image source and awareness of photo editing practices” *Body Image* 27, no. 1 (2018): 118-27.

⁹ According to the Cambridge Dictionary, perfection relates to something that is complete and without defects or blemishes

The pressure to pursue beauty standards is then placed on a virtual human who is detached from reality. This can even create opportunities for ordinary people to show their true selves containing features that are considered imperfections. However, Shudu's perfect appearance can also lead to the opposite and promote beauty standards since, when considered authentic, she can serve as realistic comparison material. The debate of whether Shudu removes or contributes to the societal pressure to pursue beauty standards is further explored in this thesis.

While the original objective of Shudu is to take the pressure off women who are pursuing the perfect image, her degree of authenticity raises questions about the feasibility of that claim. According to the New Oxford American Dictionary, authenticity relates to an emotionally significant, purposive, and responsible mode of human life.¹⁰ Various theories give their own meaning to authenticity, but the quality of being a real human is leading in this research. To give a theoretical understanding of Shudu's authenticity, it's important to understand her as a technology first. Social Studies of Science and Technology Professor Sherry Turkle, feminist sociologist Donna Haraway and French theorist Jean Baudrillard all regard technologies and their role in society from different perspectives. Their perceptions form the debate that ties into the analysis of Shudu. In her book *Alone Together*, Turkle considers the term authenticity as the ability to put oneself in the place of another and relate to the other because of a shared story in human experience (e.g., we are born and have families).¹¹ In regard to this, Turkle argues that technologies play an important role in shaping our world. They allow people to create stories and experiences that resemble those of real humans,¹² and project them onto robotic creatures or simulations, making them more relatable to the human experience.¹³ In other words, the more real a robotic creature or simulation appears, the easier it can be considered authentic. Looking at Shudu from this perspective, the extent to which she depicts recognizable and human elements of perfection, contributes to the quality of being considered authentic, which can play a role in interpreting her image of perfection. This needs further investigation, in which Turkle's notion of authenticity will be a focus point.

Debora Viviani's review of Baudrillard's theory supplements Turkle's approach. She talks about simulations as complex networks of digital signs and symbols. Her perspective is important in this research as Shudu can be seen as a simulation of a woman. In *Jean Baudrillard: cynism or truth?* Viviani discusses the role of technologies in society and argues that the use of technologies erodes the dominant model of reality, and that virtual reality replaces the real one. As such, the reality continues to live under the effect of simulations that imitate how real-world systems operate over time and even replace them.¹⁴ Technologies have developed in such a way that they can imitate real world systems with digital creations (like CGI's). As a result, these models are closer to the real world, causing people to compare themselves to them. From this perspective, Shudu's virtual image can serve as a

¹⁰ *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), s.v. "Authentic".

¹¹ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, Perseus. 2011.

¹² Turkle, "Alone Together", 287.

¹³ Turkle, "Alone Together", 182.

¹⁴ Debora Viviani, "Jean Baudrillard: cynism or truth" *Italian Sociological Review* 2, no. 1 (2012): 57-650.

comparison to people when she aligns with humans. This comparison negatively affects one's self-image because people then compare themselves to the unattainable form of perfection Shudu displays. However, Donna Haraway approaches the role technologies play in society from another perspective. She argues that there is a need for role-models in society that go beyond humans, extending it and simultaneously stepping away from conventional beauty standards. According to her, this can be attained using cyborg components free from the imposed binary constraints we experience in our society.¹⁵ While Turkle argues that adding cyborg elements to digital creatures makes them less suitable to serve as role-models (because it removes them from the real world), Haraway argues that adding these elements creates opportunities to serve as useful role-models. Both approaches are used as lenses in this thesis to shed light on the role Shudu's degree of authenticity plays in conveying her message on Instagram related to the discourse surrounding perfection.

According to Wilson, Shudu depicts a perfect image. However, this image can be interpreted differently by people. The quality of Shudu's authenticity plays a role in this interpretation because research has shown people perceive messages of CGI's (by most academics referred to as virtual influencers¹⁶) differently.¹⁷ Today, only little research deals specifically with phenomena like these. For example, Ben Robinson showed that there is no meaningful difference between virtual and real-life influencers. He points out that this leads to ethical issues including moral responsibility, motivation, and transparency.¹⁸ Evangelos Moustakas et al. examined whether people felt more comfortable with influencers who appear to be real, or ones that embrace being unreal. They did this by investigating the disadvantages and advantages of using virtual influencers instead of real-life influencers, and argued that lack of authenticity could be one of the pitfalls of using virtual influencers as marketing tools as it makes them less reliable.¹⁹ More towards the side of authenticity, Antonio Batista da Silva Oliveira and Paula Chimenti indicated that the degree of influence virtual influencers have, is related to their degree of authenticity, along with other elements, which builds on the power of a narrative.²⁰ Thus, recent research has been done on virtual influencers, however these mainly focus on the (virtual) influencer consumer relationship and its efficiency as a marketing tool, and are left with associated (ethical) questions (e.g., is it relevant for virtual influencers to share information of being a robot? Aren't virtual influencers more successful when created for artistic purposes?).

This thesis adds to these studies the perspective of the discourse surrounding CGI's specifically and perfection online, and their role on women's self-image, examining (ethical) questions from a new media studies approach. In doing so, this thesis not only provides new insight into CGI's (and virtual influencers), but also into the theoretical understanding of the concept of authenticity,

¹⁵ Donna Haraway, "A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century." In D. Haraway (ed.) *Simians, Cyborgs and Woman*, New York: Routledge (1991) 149-181.

¹⁶ Virtual influencers are computer generated human avatars with a wide following on social media.

¹⁷ Antonio Batista da Silva Oliveira and Paula Chimenti. "Humanized robots": A Proposition of Categories to Understand Virtual Influencers" *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*, no. 25. (2021)

¹⁸ Ben Robinson. "Towards an Ontology and Ethics of Virtual Influencers". *Australian Journal of Information Systems*, no. 24 (2020)

¹⁹ Evangelos Moustakas, Nishtha Lamba and Dina Mahmoud. "Blurring lines between fiction and reality: Perspectives of experts on marketing effectiveness of virtual influencers" *2020 International Conference on Cyber Security and Protection of Digital Services (Cyber Security)*. (2020): 1-6

²⁰ Batista and Chimenti. "Humanized robots", 1

related to CGI's, from Turkle, Haraway and Baudrillard's perspectives. This is done by investigating the following research question: *How does CGI model Shudu and the degree of her authenticity, constructed through her Instagram page, contribute to the discourse around perfection and its influence on women's self-image in the digital age?* This question is further divided into the following sub-questions:

- How do visual and textual elements of Shudu's Instagram account represent perfection?
- How is Shudu's virtual image understood discursively?
- How can Shudu be understood from the debate of what the degree of authenticity and the representation of perfection do to define beauty, and by extension perfection?

These sub-questions relate to concepts that are discussed in my theoretical framework. After explaining these, I present the methodology consisting of a Critical Discourse Analysis. The different layers of this method structure the sub-questions and clarify the wider public discourse around society's views on the perfect image in the digital age. The method helps to understand Shudu and the image of perfection she presents on Instagram, and how this contributes to the discourse around perfection.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Beauty Standards

Thanks to media technologies, people are increasingly exposed to images of ideal, perfect women which are based on beauty standards. According to social psychologist Michael Cunningham, these beauty standards relate to characteristics such as large eyes, small nose, small chin, prominent cheekbones, narrow cheeks, high eyebrows, large pupils, and large smile.²¹ These characteristics are seen as perfection and are still used as guidelines to strive for the perfect image as in the fashion industry these standards are seen as the norm. They always perfect the finished product of a photoshoot with touch-ups (by technologies such as photo editing tools), accentuating specific elements related to these characteristics.²²

This perfect image is widely promoted by media outlets and people, as they can easily pursue this image with the use of media technologies. This creates a new kind of discussion on bodies on the internet. In *The Becoming of Bodies*, Sociology, Media, and Cultural Studies researcher Rebecca Coleman states that the increasing homogenization of Western cultural images of female bodies (related to Cunningham's characteristics such as young, white, thin, attractive), and how women think about and react to such images, is a central theme in several studies. These studies deal with the pressure women feel from images in the media which increases the number of women developing eating disorders and body hate.²³ Research of Media psychologist Kirsten Harrison documents similar trends and supports the conclusion that "thin is in" as media display and idealize the thin body ideal. Themes of control, perfection and transformation are conveyed through media with images. According to Harrison, people observe models portrayed in these images and evaluate themselves against them, resulting in dissatisfaction.²⁴ They compare themselves to others to make evaluations about their own abilities and opinions, especially when objective measures don't exist.²⁵ They feel the need to control one's body, seek approval from others, and meet the beauty standards.²⁶ This is seen as problematic by critics like Harrison and Coleman as it leads to negative mood, low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction.²⁷ However, it can even have more consequences these days as someone can easily retouch images by media technologies to emphasize beauty standards. This maximizes the idealness even more which results in an increased negative effect.

²¹ Michael R. Cunningham, "Measuring the Physical in Physical Attractiveness: Quasi-Experiments on the Sociobiology of Female Facial Beauty." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50, no. 5 (1986): 925-935.

²² Erin Strahan, et al., "Comparing to perfection: How cultural norms for appearance affect social comparisons and self-image." *Body image* 3, no. 3 (2006): 211-27.

²³ Rebecca, Coleman, "The Becoming of Bodies" *Feminist Media Studies* 8, no. 2 (2008): 163-179.

²⁴ Harrison. "Media and the body", 394.

²⁵ Zoe Brown and Marika Tiggeman, "Attractive celebrity and peer images on Instagram: Effect on women's mood and body image." *Body image* 19, no. 2 (2016): 37-43.

²⁶ Leanne Chang, et al., "A study of Singapore adolescent girls' selfie practices, peer appearance comparisons, and body esteem on Instagram." *Body Image* 29, no. 2 (2019): 90-99.

²⁷ Harrison. "Media and the body", 394.

2.2 Media Exposure

The problems discussed above are results of promoting beauty standards in the media and have also been analysed by feminist theorist Susan Bordo. She is concerned with the way perfect bodies are normalised through the enormous number of images and their rapid and pervasive circulation. She states that images are teaching us how to see “filtered, smoothed, polished, softened, and rearranged” images.²⁸ According to Bordo, digital creations train our perception in what is a defect and what is normal. She frames her argument in terms of seeing and spectatorship, drawing attention to the “over-presence” of images.²⁹ In *Media and the Body*, Harrison elaborates on this and states that the overrepresentation of thinness in the media sends the message that a thin body is good, right, and normative.³⁰ Harrison used the Cultivation Theory of Professor George Gebner to explain how phenomena portrayed in the media might be perceived as ubiquitous, normal, personally desirable, and achievable. His theory assumes that the image people have of reality is largely formed by media. As a Professor of Communication, Gebner focuses on the influence of a much broader scope of messages exerted on people as they are exposed to media messages in their everyday lives. For this purpose, he designed the Cultivation Theory. He believes that systematic exposure to media messages over time leads to the formation of a worldview that matches that of the world of media.³¹ Because perfection is so prevalent displayed in media (that is, within a framework in which models and celebrities pursue the characteristics associated with perfection), the Cultivation Theory supports the prediction that more avid viewers are more likely to find characteristics associated with perfection, normative and attractive.³² The theory is concerned with the system of messages and repetitive patterns of images to which people are exposed over a period of time. It argues that media portrayal of the world is unrealistic, but that frequent exposure to media portrayals will result in a worldview more in line with the unrealistic media portrayal than with reality. It can be argued that the rendering of the perfect image must therefore be broken. People should redefine beauty so that it includes far more than perfect features and artfully enhanced make-up.³³

However, redefining beauty doesn't only involve media exposure, but also power structures. This deals with the question who defines beauty. In *The Beauty of Inclusivity*, Professor Chiara Pompa argues that the fashion industry has this enormous shaping power. The images they create are idealized visual representations of a world of unsatisfied desires. They set reference standards how to define one's body image. With the advent of media, these standards spread and were received by women as rules for judging their physical appearance or as guiding principles for shaping their bodies.³⁴ In contrast to Pompa, Sladana Zivković and Nadežda Stojković believe society has the power itself.³⁵ In

²⁸ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley, Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 2003).

²⁹ Bordo, *Unbearable weight*, 18.

³⁰ Harrison, “Media and the body”, 394.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Sladana Zivkovic and Nadezda Stojkovic, “The Concept of Beauty in Postmodernism and Digital Media as in Howard Gardner's Truth, Beauty and Goodness Reframed” in *The Beauty of Convention: essays in literature and culture*, edited by Marija Krivokapic-Knezevic and Aleksandra Nikcevic-Batricevic, 201-211. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014.

³⁴ Chiara Pompa, “The Beauty of Inclusivity: “Visual Activism” from Social Media to Fashion Magazines.” *Journal of Asia-Pacific Pop Culture* 6, no. 2 (2021): 313-333.

³⁵ Zivkovic, and Stojkovic, “The Concept of Beauty”, 204.

The Beauty of Convention, they argue that the interpretation of beauty is a creation of society. Because people deem achieving beauty standards as normal, adjusting images easily by using media technologies and only comparing themselves to superior people who measure up to the perfect image online, they put pressure on themselves to look in a certain way. This is often based on what people see in, for example, the media. People constantly strive to achieve beauty standards because the emphasis nowadays is on physical attractiveness. Beauty is a currency system. It's an expression of power relations in which women must compete.³⁶

With the creation of Shudu, Wilson aims to break the unrealistic beauty standards defined by the fashion industry and pursued by society. This is possible because, unlike real fashion models, Shudu relies on technologies that create opportunities for doing things in another way. In *Jean Baudrillard: cynism or truth?* Viviani argues that the use of these technologies erodes the dominant model of reality, and that virtual reality replaces the real-world. They create a thin line between reality and the signs of humanity which show themselves in real-life, with those in simulation. As a result, Viviani argues that "the universe has been purified by a "perfect formula" where reality continues to live under the effect of simulation, in a kind of reality that has been purified from any kind of imperfection and limits, to become realer than real".³⁷ Looking at Shudu from this perspective, the technologies she is created with enable her to become reality, allowing people to compare themselves to her. Whether this has positive consequences relates to the role she plays in society. This is further explained in the next paragraph.

2.3 Authenticity

The postmodern society in which media technologies give new direction to reality is made of various experiences and images of video, television, and other information technologies.³⁸ The relationship between reality and technology has undergone a radical change in our media-saturated society.³⁹ As it turned out, they make us look at the world and ourselves differently. However, there are different approaches to the role technologies play in society. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard writes about technologies that mimic reality, also called simulations, and their role in society. Although his theory stems from 1981, it's still relevant today because people create images with media technologies (e.g., AR filters) that don't relate to real life. These technologies have the power to (re)produce signs and objects, creating a reality that has nothing in common with what is represented in the real world.⁴⁰ This relates to Shudu, as she is made by technologies that allow her to represent a form of perfection that is almost unattainable in the real world. In *Instagramable: Simulation, Simulacra and Hyperreality on Instagram Post* Maria Febiana Christanti et al., explains, from Baudrillard's

³⁶ Zivković and Stojković, "The concept of beauty", 203.

³⁷ Viviani, "Jean Baudrillard:", 59

³⁸ Habib, "Culture and Consumerism:", 44.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999.

perspective, that simulation means an imitation or artificial reality which still refers to the real reality.⁴¹ Simulations are complex networks of signs and symbols that imitate how real-world systems operate over time and even replace them. It isn't a place, area, or existence, but a model of reality that makes someone think about how reality is produced.⁴² They can also be considered as authentic. However, this research refers to authentic in the sense that it relates to humans and human experiences. Simulations can imitate real humans, but if they contain fake elements (e.g., cyborg elements) they are already considered less authentic. As a women's simulation, representing perfection, Shudu can also make people think differently about how perfection is produced online and how this should be understood. However, Baudrillard states that the artificial reality, created by technologies, no longer refers to the real reality because it has been closed from its reference.⁴³ He sees simulations as illusions created by humans, built from mixtures of values, facts and images, that are a lie of images constructed by humans which are far from the original reality. In Baudrillard's eyes, simulations ignore reality or categories such as true or false and real or fictitious. They can be anything, no matter how real or fake. The further away from the real world, the less influence they have on people and their understanding of the real world.⁴⁴

Turkle looks at the role technologies play in society from a different perspective. In *Alone Together*, she argues that technologies mark an important progression in shaping our world as they do things *with* and *to* people.⁴⁵ According to Turkle, technology suggests substitution that "puts the real on the run" and can be seductive when what it offers meets our human vulnerabilities.⁴⁶ Looking at Shudu from this perspective, it can be argued she's a substitute as she takes over the work of real fashion models by modelling for fashion brands. These collaborations are with well-known brands which creates trust. They merge Shudu with real-world systems and humans, which can add to her degree of authenticity. According to Turkle, the notion of authenticity is a sense of being connected to the human narrative.⁴⁷ This definition relates to how authenticity is understood in this research. Turkle argues that authenticity plays an important role in the relationships people have with technologies as people reinvent themselves and their relationships with each other through their new intimacy with machines and media technologies.⁴⁸ Simulations like Shudu can imitate how real-world relationships work and replace them. Technologies create stories and experiences that resemble those of real humans. According to Turkle, this contributes to the disappearing of our sense of authenticity.⁴⁹ Images are increasingly modified with media technologies without us realizing because they make images look so "real". From Turkle's perspective, this can lead someone to take the modified elements in an image for real, creating a fake reality in which they might once be more.⁵⁰ She states that people

⁴¹ Maria Febiana Christanti, et al., ""Instagramable:" Simulation, Simulacra and Hyperreality on Instagram post." *International Journal of Social Service and Research* 1, no. 4 (2021): 394-401.

⁴² Christanti et al., "Instagramable", 397.

⁴³ Christanti et al., "Instagramable", 396.

⁴⁴ Christanti et al., "Instagramable", 398.

⁴⁵ Turkle, "Alone Together", 1.

⁴⁶ Turkle, "Alone Together", 1.

⁴⁷ Turkle, "Alone Together", 4.

⁴⁸ Turkle, "Alone Together", 3.

⁴⁹ Turkle, "Alone Together", 285.

⁵⁰ Turkle, "Alone Together", 12.

people must understand how media technologies shape the world and their understanding of this world, find a way to live with seductive technology and make it work to their purpose.⁵¹

Donna Haraway looks at the above phenomenon from a post-humanist perspective, a lens to consider the way the human body might be extended with cyborg components, expressing a striving for a more genderless future, “free of any imposed binary restrictions that people have in our current society”.⁵² The term cyborg stands for ‘cybernetic organism’, and describes a being that is part human and part machine. It possesses enhanced abilities due to technologies and can be seen as a symbol of how technology transforms and even surpasses humans.⁵³ It blurs the line between what is human and non-human. According to Haraway there is a need for role-models in society that go beyond the human, extending it and deviating from beauty standards. By using cyborgs as a metaphor for the independent and liberated woman, Haraway calls on people to use technology to resist the models that shape us as humans in society.⁵⁴ This way a cyborg can help change the way women are perceived. It can be used to exceed previously stable dualism, for example human/non-human.⁵⁵

Haraway looks at characters that are posthuman and argues that cyborgs are an image of both imagination and material reality. This argument fits the creation of Shudu as she can be seen as a digital creation (CGI model) that entangles humans with machines. She is based on a real woman but does contain (technological) components that make her seem perfect and remove imperfections.⁵⁶ Looking at Shudu from this perspective brings about change in the meaning of perfection because Shudu is made by technologies that can create cyborg components far from the real reality. This could show perfection is unattainable to achieve in the real world. From this perspective, Shudu’s visualisation of perfection replaces reality with a fake reality that positively affects women’s self-image. Perfection constructed by cyborg components in fake reality creates more space to let people be imperfect in the real reality. However, the fact Shudu is based on real women can also lead to the opposite of this perspective. The image she portrays can be considered real as this is based on real fashion models and today’s beauty standards. Looking at this from Turkle’s perspective, Shudu’s image might then serve as comparative material which negatively affects women’s self-image.

The tensions surrounding the role of Shudu’s authenticity in the meaning of perfection are leading in this thesis. Taking the position of Turkle, one could argue that Shudu is made of technologies that allow her to blur the line between the real and virtual world and replace humans in the real world. With Baudrillard’s perspective in mind, this standpoint could be contradicted. He argues that simulations have nothing to do with the real world. Since Shudu can also be seen as a simulation of a woman, from this perspective one could argue Shudu has little influence on how we should understand the world and in extension the perfect image people try to pursue. Finally,

⁵¹ Turkle. “Alone Together”, 295.

⁵² Haraway. “A cyborg manifesto”

⁵³ Sara Louise Muhr, “Caught in the Gendered Machine: On the Masculine and Feminine in Cyborg Leadership” *Gender, Work & Organization* 18, no. 3 (2011); 337-357

⁵⁴ Haraway. “A cyborg manifesto”, 150.

⁵⁵ Muhr. “Caught in the Gendered Machine”, 353.

⁵⁶ Cameron-James Wilson. “Interview With Cameron-James Wilson, Creator of Shudu, ‘The World’s First Digital Supermodel’”. Interview by Ada Alti, *WeRSM*, December 10, 2018, <https://wersm.com/interview-with-cameron-james-wilson-creator-of-shudu-the-worlds-first-digital-supermodel/>.

following Haraway's perspective, it can be argued Shudu can be understood as a simulation that can make a change. She argues that there is a need for role-models that go beyond humanity. This way Shudu contributes to shifting the perfect image. How and from which point of view we should understand Shudu is therefore important to investigate and is explained in the next section.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

According to Wilson and followers of Shudu's Instagram account, Shudu is portrayed as a perfect fashion model. This, in combination with the degree of her authenticity, plays a role in the discourse surrounding perfection. Discourses shape identities and relations and constitute the knowledge that dictate how people act and respond to things.⁵⁷ To understand how language relates to its surroundings, it's important to explore the connection between discourses and the social structures of society.⁵⁸ That's why the method of choice is a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with focus on Teun A. van Dijk's approach. This method focusses on the discursive practices which construct representations of the world, social subjects, and social relations, including power relations and the role these discursive practices play in furthering the interests of particular social groups.⁵⁹ In this thesis, CDA has made visible how Shudu's degree of authenticity contributes to maintaining or challenging the discourse surrounding perfection. Van Dijk focuses on text analysis and the practice of producing text. His approach places weight on the concepts of power and access, as he believes both are fundamental in the formation of a discourse. Power is a tool, owned by a social group or organization that is used to control the actions and thoughts of others, with the aim of limiting the freedom of other groups.⁶⁰ This approach is interesting for this thesis, as, according to Pompa, the fashion industry has power over what society considers as perfect as their actions and thoughts are used as norms in daily life.⁶¹ The concept of access deals with the concept of power. The group with power has greater access than the group that isn't in power. Therefore, those in power have greater access to media more opportunities to influence public awareness.⁶² The fact that Wilson has a background in the fashion industry, the group that dominates beauty, can help him affect the perfect image of others.

3.2 Operationalizing the Critical Discourse Analysis

Van Dijk describes discourse as having three levels of analysis: *text*, *social cognition*, and *social context*.⁶³ The first level examines the existence of coherence between comments to form a discourse and see the global meaning of all comments. The second level helps to understand the social cognition of message producers, based on mental awareness, beliefs, or specific knowledge of events. The last level examines how society produces and constructs discourse by paying attention to intertextuality.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise K. Phillips, *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. London: Sage Publications, 2002.

⁵⁸ Jørgensen and Philips. *Discourse analysis*, 68.

⁵⁹ Jørgensen and Philips. *Discourse analysis*, 63.

⁶⁰ Sukma Ari Ragil Putri, and A.A.I Prihandari Satvikadewi, "A Critical Discourse Analysis Study of Cyberbullying in LGBTQ's Instagram Account." *SHS Web of Conferences* 33, no. 1 (2017).

⁶¹ Pompa. "The Beauty of Inclusivity".

⁶² Teun A. van Dijk, "Principles of Discourse Analysis" *Discourse & Society*, 4, no 2 (1993): 249-83.

⁶³ Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Communication: New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication*(Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2011)..

⁶⁴ van Dijk, "Principles of Discourse Analysis".

Van Dijk's model is described in the case study of Sukma Ari Ragil Putri and A.A.I Prihandari Satvikadewi, which served as a guideline for this thesis. Putri and Satvikadewi focus on discursive conditions, components, and consequences of power abuse by dominant groups, and the role of discourse in the reproduction and challenge of dominance. Domination itself is interpreted as a social power of the elite or group, which produces social imbalance in various fields such as ethnicity, race, and gender.⁶⁵ Their case study is described in the next section along with the elaboration of this thesis.

3.2.1 Text

The first level of van Dijk's CDA focuses on *text*, which analyses how the structure of text has been used to emphasize particular themes.⁶⁶ These themes deal with the meaning of larger parts of text, are subjective and mostly already formulated in the text itself.⁶⁷ Putri and Satvikadewi also worked with themes while analysing the text. They selected images of an Instagram account that showed the performance of the discourse under investigation. They observed, selected, and categorized the comments under these images and divided them in themes related to discourses made up of (social) events.⁶⁸ This method is also used in this thesis. However, since this thesis deals with both textual and visual elements, this method is complemented by a sub-method described in the case study of Meirika Iin Setyawati and Mulyana.⁶⁹ They collected data by documenting screenshots of Instagram posts containing the discourses. These consist of visual and textual elements and are analysed using a CDA based on van Dijk's content analysis model. This aimed to explain the content of the discourse, while the CDA explained the hidden intentions in the discourse. These discourses were divided into themes that were analysed.⁷⁰ Because of the scope of this thesis, only 10 Instagram posts from Shudu are analysed as text. Since Wilson often uses multiple posts to show a collaboration, many different posts contain the same content. For example, the collaboration with Ellesse is spread over 6 posts that all resemble each other. As a result, there is little variation in types of posts. Because diversity is considered in the selection of posts, 10 posts can provide sufficient insight into Shudu's image. The selected posts aren't part of the same collaboration, show different parts of Shudu's body and range from close-up to full-body images. The variation in posts ensure Shudu's image is analysed from different perspectives. The posts are included in the appendix and include visual images and captions, all of which are described using words. As stated before, the text is analysed according to different themes drawn up from tensions identified in the Theoretical Framework. The themes *perfect* and *imperfect* deal with the tension of Shudu being considered perfect on the one hand, while containing imperfections on the other hand (see Table 2). These themes are explored throughout the text by

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ van Dijk, *Discourse and Communication*, 74.

⁶⁸ Putri, and Satvikadewi, "A Critical Discourse Analysis Study".

⁶⁹ Setyawati Meirika and Mulyana, "A Critical Discourse Analysis on the Instagram account of @filosofi_jawa Based on Van Dijk Model." Conference on Language, Literature, and Arts Education 462, vol 1 (2019): 279-283.

⁷⁰ Meirika and Mulyana, "A Critical Discourse Analysis".

keeping in mind Cunningham’s characteristics which demonstrate how perfection is constructed through Shudu’s virtual identity on Instagram. The tensions related to the degree of authenticity fall under the themes *authentic* and *fake* (see Table 2). These focus on Shudu’s humanity and provide insight in the extent to which human or cyborg elements return in the posts. All themes are processed in a matrix that shows how Shudu can be understood within these tensions (see Figure 1). This sheds a light on Shudu’s virtual identity, the degree of authenticity and the role all this plays in the discourse around the meaning of perfection.

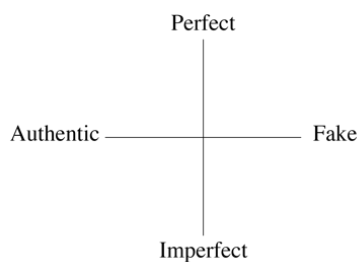


Figure 1: Matrix themes textual analysis.

Person Schemas This scheme illustrates how one defines and view others.
Self Schemas This scheme relates to how someone sees, understand, and describe themselves.
Role Schemas This scheme relates to how someone sees and portrays role and position occupied by someone in the community.
Event Schemas This scheme is perhaps the most common scheme, because almost everyday we always experience events.

Table 1: Social Cognition Analysis

3.2.2 Social Cognition

The level of *social cognition* examines the text production involving the social cognition of the text producer. Social cognition consists of many forms such as ideology, values, attitudes, and norms which can be found by conducting in-depth interviews.⁷¹ Putri and Satvikadewi used van Dijk’s model of mental structure to understand the social cognition (Table 1). This model comprises of four points, namely: the person scheme, self-scheme, role scheme, and scheme of events.⁷² This shows how someone looks at others and gives an interpretation of an (social)event. Muhammad Alyatalathaf also used van Dijk’s model in his case study.⁷³ He kept the model in mind while analysing interviews. He combined arguments and findings per ‘point’, resulting in concise conclusions from which new issues arose. These issues guided the analysis of social cognition.⁷⁴ Van Dijk’s model, described in Alyatalathaf’s case study, is used to structure the analysis of the text by dividing the analysis into sections related to the *person* and *self* schemas. These help to understand the role of Wilson and are used as a guide during the analysis of the interviews with Wilson (e.g., an interview in WERSM) and the website of TheDiigitals. This clarifies the discursive practices that offer a description of both the social processes and structures that give rise to the production of a text, and the social structures and processes in which people create meaning through their interaction with texts.⁷⁵ Explaining Wilson’s thoughts behind the purpose of Shudu helps to determine whether this is also portrayed as such on her Instagram page and gives insight into the extent to which Shudu construct the kind of perfection he

⁷¹ Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse, Power and Access*. (London, Routledge, 1996)

⁷² Putriand Satvikadewi, “A Critical Discourse Analysis Study”.

⁷³ Muhammad Dicka Ma’arif Alyatalathaf, “Cybermisogyny: Hate Against Women and Gendertrolling Manifestation on Instagram.” *Journal ILMU KOMUNIKASI* 18, no. 2 (2021): 183-200.

⁷⁴ Alyatalathaf, “Cybermisogyny:”, 193.

⁷⁵ Ruth Wodak, and Michael Meyer, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*. London: SAGE Publications Inc, 2016.

talks about. In addition, online articles from media outlets about Shudu (e.g., articles by KRO-NCRV and WWD) help to understand how Shudu and the virtual image of perfection she portrays is received in the media and what they say about it. This will be analysed by means of a textual analysis.

3.2.3 Context

The third level is about *social context* and helps to understand discourse construction. This is less of an analysis and more of a gathering of the findings which gives insight into the social context, constructed in society. Putri and Satvikadewi did this by looking at van Dijk's main concepts *power* and *access*. Two concepts that are also important for this thesis because they relate to the power media platforms and fashion industries have on the construction of the meaning of perfection.⁷⁶ The social context helps to understand the context in which Shudu is created. It looks at the broader societal structures in which Shudu and with it also the visualization of the term perfection is located online. The social structures this thesis focuses on are those between fake and authenticity, and perfection and imperfection. These play a role in the societal pressure to be perfect. As stated before, modified images represent a form of perfection that creates this pressure. This negatively influences one's self-esteem. The tensions surrounding this, help clarify how to understand Shudu. On the one hand, through Shudu people can celebrate the fact they cannot achieve perfections, but digital art can. On the other hand, Shudu can display a perfect image people can try to compete with, still causing problems around negative self-images. This, together with Wilson's power to influence the perfect image people have, has been explored at this level.

⁷⁶ Putri and Satvikadewi, "A Critical Discourse Analysis Study", 5.

4. ANALYSIS

This chapter aims to answer the research question *How does CGI model Shudu and the degree of her authenticity, constructed through her Instagram page, contribute to the discourse around perfection and its influence on women's self-image in the digital age?* and is divided into three parts related to layers of the CDA.

4.1 Text

This section answers the sub-question *How do visual and textual elements of Shudu's Instagram account represent perfection?* by keeping in mind the matrix containing the themes *authentic* and *fake*, and *perfect* and *imperfect*. This matrix is described in Table 2 and is attached, together with the analysed posts, in the appendix. All findings are described below.

First, the degree of authenticity is examined by looking for *authentic* and *fake* elements in the analysed posts. As for the visual aspect, elements related to artificial objects indicate Shudu's virtual identity (see Images 1, 2, 5, 6 and 8). These objects are mainly present in full-body images, often look straight and sharp and contain the same colour and saturation as Shudu's skin. This ensures there is little to no difference in colour and shape between Shudu's body and the artificial object. The objects blend with Shudu's appearance, something that isn't physically possible in real life. Moreover, these objects deform Shudu's shapes and curves. For example, the rose petals in Image 1 aren't naturally placed on Shudu's body: there aren't traces of curves or shadows. This makes it look like Wilson didn't design the intimate body parts underneath. The misplacement of shadows and curves is also visible in Image 7, which shows a Pioneer Futures mask that isn't representative of how a real mask would fit around someone's head. Thus, it seems that the artificial objects reveal Shudu's fake existence as they show things that aren't physically possible in real life. This ensures Shudu can be considered less authentic. According to Batista and Chimenti, lack of authenticity causes the image or message to be perceived less as truth.⁷⁷ Following their argument, this may create a positive effect in this case because people are then less likely to take Shudu's perfect appearance as reality.

However, there are also images in which Shudu's face looks like those of real humans (see Images 3, 4, 7, 9 and 10). This is due to the incidence of light serving as make-up, highlighting certain elements related to Cunningham's characteristics and ensuring the proportions of Shudu's limbs and facial features match those of real humans (see Image 9). In addition, it emphasizes details that indicate blackheads and pores (see Image 7), and human aspects such as bones, veins and muscles (see Image 10). In other words, the incidence of light adds a human touch to Shudu. According to Turkle, digital creations are more likely to be seen as authentic if they meet human vulnerabilities.⁷⁸ The above examples demonstrate this because in these images, human vulnerabilities (imperfections like

⁷⁷ Batista and Chimenti. "Humanized robots", 21

⁷⁸ Turkle, "Alone Together", 1.

blackheads and human body parts like bones) are emphasized, making Shudu appear like a real human. Thus, one can argue using colours in a specific way can add to the authenticity of Shudu, because it makes human details more visible. Following the arguments of Batista and Chimenti again, this in turn ensures Shudu can be considered more reliable.⁷⁹ The form of perfection she conveys is then more likely to be considered reliable, serving as comparison, which can negatively contribute to the discourse around perfection.

Looking at the textual analysis, there are interesting findings regarding the authenticity of Shudu. First, the use of hashtags opposes Shudu's authenticity as these are about #digitalmodel and #daz3dstudio. By writing about "DAZ3D", the media technology with which Shudu is created, Wilson is transparent about Shudu's virtual existence (see Image 7). This transparency isn't only seen in hashtags but is also expressed in full texts (see Image 4). Moustakas et al., questioned whether it is important to share information about being a robot.⁸⁰ Here, it is important as Wilson's transparency, caused by textual elements, reveals Shudu's fake existence. However, Wilson doesn't write about his underlying thought with Shudu. As a result, the text doesn't convey a strong message. Instead, textual elements indicate Shudu mainly promotes products and collaborates with major fashion brand (see Images 2, 4, 6 and 9). This makes it seem that Shudu has a commercial purpose. According to Moustakas et al., virtual influencers with explicit commercial aims shouldn't be considered authentic enough to wield real-world.⁸¹ Following their argument, one could argue the text actually reduces Shudu's degree of authenticity. A reduced degree of authenticity can contribute positively to the message being conveyed, as it can lead people to view Shudu's perfect image as less authentic and reliable as well. However, this can also be approached differently. The text indicates Shudu works together well-known brands that have a good reputation and mainly work together with real fashion models. This can create trust which, according to Batista and Chimenti, connects with authenticity.⁸² Although they looked at this from a marketing approach, this can also be applied here as the collaborations create trust with followers which can contribute to Shudu being considered a real human. This in turn can increase Shudu's degree of authenticity. Following Batista and Chimenti, it can be stated that the text pointing to the collaborations could increase Shudu's authenticity rather than decrease. This in turn can contribute to the representation of a form of perfection that, because of Shudu's authenticity, people are more likely to adopt as reality. This can negatively affect how Shudu's image is received.

To what extent Shudu represents perfection and what it entails, has been made clear through the themes *perfect* and *imperfect* (see Table 2). Firstly, the visual analysis reveals that Cunningham's characteristics are reflected in every Instagram post analysed. These all show her full lips, prominent cheekbones, narrow chin, high eyebrows and large almond-shaped eyes. There are almost no details in

⁷⁹ Batista and Chimenti. "'Humanized robots'", 13

⁸⁰ Moustakas, et al., "Blurring lines between fiction and reality", 2

⁸¹ Moustakas, et al., "Blurring lines between fiction and reality", 4

⁸² Batista and Chimenti. "'Humanized robots'", 12

the images that add to imperfection. Instead, the details provide a more human form of perfection (see Images 3 and 7). For example, the lines under Shudu’s eyes, which are supposed to represent bags, don’t look like tired dark circles, and Shudu’s palm lines don’t cause wrinkles. These details are visible but aren’t predominantly clear on her smooth skin. Instead of making Shudu appear more imperfect, they make her appear more human. In addition, the colour palette makes Shudu appear perfect as it emphasizes certain elements related to perfection. For example, in Image 8, light coloured lines on Shudu’s belly make it look as if she has a six-pack, and in Image 2, her curves and thin body are highlighted by her pose. A six-pack relates to a thin and muscular body, which fits Cunningham’s characteristics. Hence, it can be said that Shudu represent a form of perfection that fits Cunningham’s theory. As became clear, this kind of perfection is also used as a guideline by the fashion industry which serves as beauty standards, leading to negative self-images (see section 2.1).⁸³ The findings from the textual analysis also indicate this as Wilson only writes about perfection in the captions. Thus, it seems that Wilson not only conveys perfection through Shudu’s image, but also by textual means. Considering the aforementioned observations, one could argue Shudu displays, and in turn promotes, a form of perfection that can negatively influences women’s self-esteem.

In summary, Shudu can be placed in the matrix as shown in Figure 2, 3 and 4. The textual and visual elements both represent Shudu as perfect. This is due to the incidence of light and colour palette. Details that mean to represent imperfection, aren’t dominant and create a human form of perfection. The form of perfection she presents descends from Cunningham’s theory. Only artificial objects and hashtags indicate Shudu’s fake existence. However, the objects don’t affect Shudu’s authenticity as they have less to do with her appearance and are only visible in full-body images. The hashtags provide transparency about Shudu’s existence which should reduce the relevance of her degree of authenticity and in turn affect how users perceive her image of perfection.⁸⁴ However, Wilson is only transparent in the text which people can overlook. When they overlook this, they don’t know of Shudu's fake existence. Thus, transparency through textual elements has too little influence determining authenticity. Here, the visuals are leading. It can be concluded that in this case visuals, especially close-up images, therefore radiate the greatest human form of perfection, as these images reinforce Shudu’s authenticity and don’t contain artificial objects that counteract this.

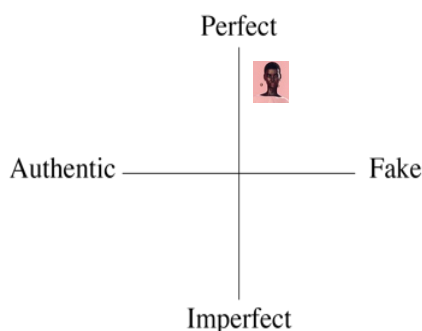


Figure 2: Shudu’s position in the matrix according to the textual analysis

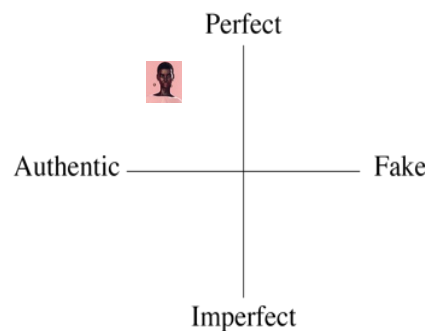


Figure 3: Shudu’s position in the matrix according to the visual analysis

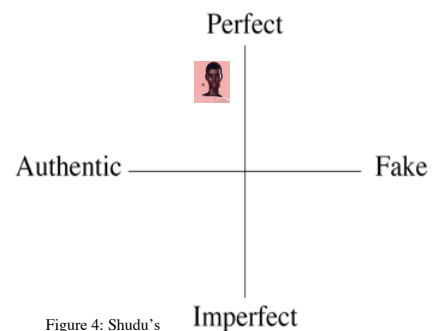


Figure 4: Shudu’s position in the matrix according to both the visual and textual analysis

⁸³ Leanne Chang, et al., “A study of Singapore adolescent girls’ selfie practices, peer appearance comparisons, and body esteem on Instagram,” *Body Image* 29, no. 2 (2019): 90-99.

⁸⁴ Batista and Chimenti. “Humanized robots”, 12

4.2 Social cognition

To explore the discourse surrounding the production of Shudu and representation of perfection, interviews with Wilson have been analysed with van Dijk's social cognition model as a guide (Table 1). These are supplemented with articles from media outlets to clarify how Shudu is perceived by the media and how they talk about her in the light of perfection. This section answers the following sub-question: *How can Shudu be understood from the debate of what the degree of authenticity and the representation of perfection do to define beauty, and by extension perfection?*

4.2.1 Wilson's role

First, the Person Scheme is used to investigate how Wilson describes and looks at others. This clarifies his understanding of the world and gives insight into his thoughts behind the creation of Shudu. In an interview with WERSM, Wilson stated that, before he started to design 3D-fashion models like Shudu, he had been a fashion photographer for ten years. After years of editing photos of models, eliminating imperfections, he knew exactly which elements were seen as perfect and which weren't.⁸⁵ He used this knowledge when creating Shudu. His inspiration for Shudu's appearance also came from supermodel Duckie Thot and a Barbie doll (see Image 11 and 12).⁸⁶ Both are well-known in the fashion industry and fit most of Cunningham's characteristics (e.g., they contain full lips, narrow cheeks, and a glowing skin without pimples). These characteristics are also used in the fashion industry as a guide. It therefore seems that Wilson still adheres to the norms and values of the fashion industry with the creation of Shudu as he used their knowledge and norms as a source of inspiration for the creation of Shudu. That is why Shudu can be considered a product of the fashion industry. Moreover, in an interview in *HarpersBazaar*, Wilson argued that Shudu is the representation "*of what most beautiful women in the world should look like*" indicating Shudu serves as an example.⁸⁷ This makes it seem that Wilson encourages women to pursue standards of the fashion industry, as he indicates women should look like Shudu, who pursues these standards. Thus, one could argue that the fashion industry plays a big role in creating Shudu and understanding her.

In an interview with WWD, Alexa Tietjen cited the following statement of Wilson: "*In some ways, digital creations can be more accurate to real life because you must put in so much realism*".⁸⁸ This statement shows how Wilson looks at digital creations. This can be complemented with another argument in WERSM, saying that "*Shudu has more natural imperfections than average influencers*".⁸⁹ Linking both arguments, it seems Wilson wants people to consider Shudu as "*more accurate to real life*" by adding "*natural imperfections*". According to the Cultivation Theory, when someone sees this

⁸⁵ Wilson, "Interview With Cameron-James Wilson".

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Jenna Rosenstein, "People Can't Tell If This Fenty Model Is Real Or Fake" *HarpersBazaar*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/beauty/makeup/a16810663/shudu-gram-fenty-model-fake/>

⁸⁸ Alexa Tietjen, "Shudu: Fashion's First Avatar Supermodel?" *WWD*, June 13, 2018. <https://wwd.com/eye/people/shudu-digital-fashion-model-avtar-1202683320/>.

⁸⁹ Wilson, "Interview With Cameron-James Wilson".

image more often and take it as reality, it might lead people to reconsider their definition of perfection based on this image.⁹⁰ One could argue that Wilson tries to shift the concept of perfection, because he added imperfections to Shudu's image and indicates her image is more accurate.

Secondly, the Self Scheme is examined to clarify how Wilson describes Shudu and looks at himself. Since he created Shudu and currently manages her virtual identity, his views will show how to understand Shudu. Wilson is the CEO of 'The Diigitals'; world's first all-digital modelling agency. According to the website of The Diigitals, this agency takes advantage of the increasing accessibility of new technologies and tries to erase boundaries between the real and digital world. They mainly do this with Shudu, who, in their eyes, leads people to a place where fashion visuals have no limitations.⁹¹ The words "*erase boundaries*" and "*no limitations*" indicate they ignore reality with the creation of Shudu. This fits Baudrillard's perspective as he states that simulations ignore reality and can be anything, no matter how real or fake.⁹² Ignoring reality is also reflected in an article of WERSM where Wilson argued that: "*Shudu is an expression of my views, and what inspires me, however I think what she represents to others is a shift, a shift in how beauty is viewed.*"⁹³ He says that Shudu arose from everything that inspired him.⁹⁴ This doesn't need to relate to the real world. That is why we should look at Shudu more from Baudrillard's perspective, so that people separate Shudu from the real world. This can ensure that the form of perfection she represents isn't taken as reality, but as part of the virtual world, thereby taking the pressure of women to pursue it in real life.

In WERSM it becomes clear how Wilson looks at Shudu as he says: "*I like to think that I contribute to that change by creating beautiful and inclusive 3D art that is inspired by fashion and supermodels*".⁹⁵ In this interview, Wilson talks about Shudu as "*3D art*" created through his *creativity*. This makes it seem that Wilson considers Shudu to be an art project instead of a commercial product. In addition, Wilson said he used Shudu as the perfect example for beauty with which he tries to take the pressure off real women to achieve perfection. According to him, it's better to create CGI models who already meet all beauty standards instead of real humans trying to achieve them.⁹⁶ Since Shudu is a CGI model created by media technologies and is seen by Wilson as an art project that reduces the pressure on women to pursue the perfect image, it can be said he seems to use technology and art to resist the models that shape women. It appears he doesn't make Shudu a role model by adding cyborg elements, as Haraway argues, but rather by keeping Shudu close to the real world. However, it seems he doesn't look at Shudu from Turkle's perspective who talks about substitutes, but more from Baudrillard's perspective as he ignores categories such as real and fantasy by making Shudu's appearance unattainably perfect. As stated above, this ensures perfection reside in virtual world. This allows people to look at perfection and embrace it, instead of projecting perfection onto themselves.

⁹⁰ Harrison. "Media and the body", 394.

⁹¹ "About", The Diigitals, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://www.thediigitals.com/about/>.

⁹² Christanti et al., "Instagramable", 398.

⁹³ Wilson, "Interview With Cameron-James Wilson"

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Wilson, "Interview With Cameron-James Wilson"

This appears to be the message Wilson wants to convey. According to Batista and Chimenti, the power of the message and its coherence influence the relevance of one's authenticity. Following this argument, one could argue that when Wilson continues to convey this message, the relevance of Shudu's authenticity would be reduced.⁹⁷ This can cause people to receive the message as reality more quickly, regardless of whether Shudu appears authentic or not. However, it remains to be seen in practice whether this message is also conveyed as such.

In an interview with *HarpersBazaar*, Wilson explains he noticed that people initially didn't realize Shudu was a CGI model because she turned out to be almost indistinguishable from real humans. He indicated he was hesitant to confirm or deny her existence "*She is not a real model unfortunately*".⁹⁸ According to the Cambridge Dictionary "*unfortunately*" is used to say something is sad.⁹⁹ That Wilson used this word indicates he might have preferred Shudu to be a real human after all. Yet, he chose to be honest about Shudu's appearance. In an interview with *Fashnerd*, Wilson said he was trying to add to the kind of movement that is out there and the standard of beauty that is being shifted to something much more inclusive.¹⁰⁰ This can make Wilson a forerunner in how technologies should be used according to research of Moustakas et al. They examined that the use of technologies must be problem-oriented rather than imposing the technology where it isn't essential.¹⁰¹ Despite their perspective being marketing-oriented, it is still relevant here as Wilson claims to use technologies (Shudu) to solve a problem (pressure of pursuing beauty standards). Whether this claim holds true in practice remains to be seen. Assuming it does, this strategy can contribute to a more powerful message. Wilson wants to "*raise awareness that technology existed that could make 3D humans look so realistic*".¹⁰² He argues that he tries to open the eyes of people in the era where face tuning and digitally altered photos are the norm across media platforms.¹⁰³ Using the words "*raising awareness*" and "*opening people's eyes*", Wilson showcases he is aware of the problems surrounding the impact of technologies on women's self-image. It seems he has put his own consciousness into an art project with which he wants to inspire others. Thus, one can argue Wilson's intent with Shudu fits the problem-oriented perspective Moustakas et al. examined. This can contribute to the power of the message which should reduce the relevance of Shudu's authenticity.

Wilson indicated he brings fantasy to life: "*We live in such a filtered world now, where real is becoming fake. I wanted to create something that is fantasy toward becoming more real and bringing it completely the other way*".¹⁰⁴ He keeps talking about creating "*something*", instead of creating a simulation and imitating humans. This makes it seem he doesn't see Shudu as a replacement for humans, but rather as something new. He clarifies this by saying that "*it's meant to be beautiful art*

⁹⁷ Batista and Chimenti, "'Humanized robots'", 12

⁹⁸ Rosenstein, "People Can't Tell If This Fenty Model Is Real Or Fake".

⁹⁹ Cambridge Dictionary, "Unfortunately". Accessed March 29, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/unfortunately/>.

¹⁰⁰ Kapfunde, "Fashion, Technology And Augmented Reality Gives Birth To Digital Supermodel Shudu"

¹⁰¹ Moustakas, et al., "Blurring lines between fiction and reality", 5

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Jenna Rosenstein, "People Can't Tell If This Fenty Model Is Real Or Fake" *HarpersBazaar*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/beauty/makeup/a16810663/shudu-gram-fenty-model-fake/>

which empowers people. It's not trying to take away an opportunity from anyone or replace anyone. She is trying to complement those people".¹⁰⁵ Here he also talks about an art project instead of a fashion model. In addition, the fact he talks about "*complement*" and "*empower*", shows he isn't using technology for non-essential purposes. Regardless of whether Shudu looks authentic or not, it can be argued Wilson tries to use Shudu in a problem-oriented way. This intention contrasts Turkle's argument that technology can suggest substitution.¹⁰⁶ Hence, we should look at Shudu less from Turkle's perspective. Instead, we must once again approach her more from Baudrillard's perspective, as Wilson states he entangles the "*real*" with the "*fantasy*", blurring the lines between the virtual and real world.¹⁰⁷ This relates to Baudrillard's perspective as Shudu can be seen as a model of reality that makes people think about how reality is produced.¹⁰⁸ Using technologies this way, Wilson tries to "*shift*" what people see as perfection. It should no longer negatively affect one's self-image.

Wilson even says: "*Her intent isn't to fool or trick anyone, but rather to be a beacon of inspiring beauty and creativity*".¹⁰⁹ By talking about "*inspiring beauty*" and "*creativity*", it seems Wilson uses knowledge from the fashion industry in combination with his own creativity to change the purpose of beauty images from comparative material to inspiring material. This matches the fact he doesn't want to "*fool or trick anyone*", which indicate he doesn't want to replace people with Shudu. To fool or trick someone relates to replacing humans with digital creations since these can also fool people when they look real. Taking together the recurring statements about Wilson's "*creativity*", seeing Shudu as "*3D-art*" and wanting to "*inspire*" and "*empower*" people, it appears Wilson tries to express perfection through an art project that people can enjoy instead of bringing perfection to real humans. However, it still matters whether she is received as such and how Wilson expresses this on Shudu's Instagram page.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Turkle, "Alone Together", 1

¹⁰⁷ Jenna Rosenstein, "People Can't Tell If This Fenty Model Is Real Or Fake" *HarpersBazaar*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/beauty/makeup/a16810663/shudu-gram-fenty-model-fake/>

¹⁰⁸ Muchaneta Kapfunde, "Fashion, Technology And Augmented Reality Gives Birth To Digital Supermodel Shudu" *Fashnerd*, Accessed March 17, 2022. <https://fashnerd.com/2018/03/shudu-fashion-tech-augmented-reality/>.

¹⁰⁹ Rosenstein, "People Can't Tell If This Fenty Model Is Real Or Fake".

4.2.2 Shudu's role

The role Shudu plays in society is examined by analysing the text in online articles from media outlets. Author Jenna Rosenstein wrote an article on Shudu in HarpersBazaar with which she paid extra attention to Shudu's appearance as she wrote: "*Her beauty is so striking and unfathomably perfect that you almost don't want to believe it's real. The thing is, it's not – she's 100 percent CGI*".¹¹⁰ By writing about *her*" and not about *it*", it seems that Rosenstein perceives Shudu as a human instead of a digital creation. By combining the words "*her beauty*" and "*unfathomably perfect*", it even seems she considers Shudu to be too perfect. Unfathomably relates to being inexplicable, something Shudu's appearance is since the form of perfection she displays is almost non-existent in real life.¹¹¹ This fits Baudrillard's notion of simulations as they can ignore reality and distort humans' perspectives.¹¹² Looking at Shudu from this approach, it can be said that users should first understand Shudu's false existence so that they receive her message the right way.

An article by KRO-NCRV indicates Shudu is received as a human as they describe her as "*another successful model on Instagram*".¹¹³ The words "*another model*", indicate they compared her to human fashion models. This comparison points to the blurring of the lines between the real and the virtual world. The author wonders what this says about our image of women, as people on social media can no longer distinguish real women from virtual women. According to the author, Shudu gives an unrealistic image of what women should look like.¹¹⁴ This argument contrasts Wilson's intention as he sees Shudu as the representation of what the most beautiful women in the world should look like. However, the word "*unrealistic*" doesn't necessarily indicate that the author disagrees with Wilson. Rather, it resembles the meaning of unreal. This again indicates that Shudu must be approached from Baudrillard's perspective, as he argues simulations are allowed to create unreal(istic) images.¹¹⁵ In WERSM, Tietjen states that "*Shudu is more than anything, an extension of Wilson*".¹¹⁶ An extension doesn't necessarily have to be considered negative. However, when linking it to another statement of Tietjen saying "*Shudu is problematic for fashion because if hired for work, she'd potentially be taking jobs away from real-life models*", the word "*extension*" can be placed in a negative light.¹¹⁷ Writing about "*taking jobs away*" denotes taking over something, serving as a substitute. This makes it seem Shudu is considered a substitute, which, according to Turkle, can be seductive leading to negative consequences.¹¹⁸ This might be due to the perfect image she displays, which can serve as an example. Thus, if people consider Shudu a real human because of her human appearance, it could lead to her serving as a substitute, which can negatively affect one's self-image.

¹¹⁰ Rosenstein, "People Can't Tell If This Fenty Model Is Real Or Fake".

¹¹¹ According to the Cambridge Dictionary unfathomably relates to something that is difficult to understand and explain.

¹¹² Christanti et al., "Instagramable", 398.

¹¹³ KRO-NCRV, "Hoe dit Instagram-model een wereldwijde hit werd (terwijl ze niet eens bestaat)" Accessed March 17, 2022. <https://kro-ncrv.nl/ho-dit-instagram-model-een-wereldwijde-hit-werd-terwijl-ze-niet-eens-bestaat/>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Christanti et al., "Instagramable", 398.

¹¹⁶ Tietjen, "Shudu: Fashion's First Avatar Supermodel?".

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Turkle, "Alone Together", 1.

In an article in Metro, Ellen Scott writes that people felt that Shudu was an “*uplifting and positive art piece, who reflected true beauty ideals untainted by Westernised standards*”.¹¹⁹ Using the word “*art piece*” shows Shudu is considered by the author as an art project. Unlike other authors Scott doesn’t refer to a fashion model. She does write about “*uplifting*” and “*positive*”, indicating that Shudu is experienced as positive. This may be due the fact Shudu is considered an art project instead of a fashion model with commercial aims which, according to Moustakas et al., is why she is more likely to be positively received.¹²⁰ However, Scott also indicates that until you know Shudu is a CGI model, you won’t see anything other than a stunning model.¹²¹ This fits a quote described in KRO-NCRV: “*Shudu is of course so perfect that somehow, I’m glad she is not real*”.¹²² The word “*glad*” expresses relief which denotes positivity. It seems that not knowing about Shudu’s fake existence can lead to the opposite of relief, which can relate to negative consequences. It therefore is important for Wilson to be transparent about Shudu’s fake existence. This contrasts with Robinson’s argument about transparency¹²³ and answers the question of Moustakas et al. whether it is important to be transparent about one’s existence.¹²⁴ Thus, according to these findings it isn’t only the degree of authenticity of Shudu’s virtual identity that plays a role in society, also Wilson’s honesty about Shudu’s existence. Transparency about her existence helps to understand the message she conveys. The only question remains how visible this transparency is.

¹¹⁹ Ellen Scott, “Photographer creates digital dark-skinned models called Shudu and Nfon” *Metro*, February 28, 2018. <https://metro.co.uk/2018/02/28/photographer-creates-digital-dark-skinned-models-called-shudu-nfon-7347548/>.

¹²⁰ Moustakas, et al., “Blurring lines between fiction and reality”, 4

¹²¹ Scott, “Photographer creates digital dark-skinned models called Shudu and Nfon”.

¹²² KRO-NCRV, “Hoe dit Instagram-model een wereldwijde hit werd”.

¹²³ Robinson, “Towards an Ontology”, 4

¹²⁴ Moustakas, et al., “Blurring lines between fiction and reality”, 2

4.3 Social Context

This paragraph examines the societal structures and power structures in which Shudu and the kind of perfection she represents reside and answers the sub-question: *How can Shudu be understood from the debate of what the degree of authenticity and the representation of perfection do to define beauty, and by extension perfection?* Van Dijk's dimensions of power and access, influence the role Shudu plays within the discourse surrounding perfection.

The practice of power of this thesis deals with the social expectation of women and mass beauty ideals provided by the fashion industry and media. This happens between the fashion industry and media as the dominant party and people who want to fight for a shift in the beauty standards as humans.¹²⁵ As stated before, Shudu can be understood as a product from the fashion industry as Wilson received knowledge from this industry which he applied to Shudu. Because of this, Shudu should be understood as the dominant party. The dominance carried out by this party is clearly reflected in Shudu, as she reflects aspects related to the norms and values of those who dominate. These also relate to the cultural norms for thinness and beauty which play a large role in women's chronic dissatisfaction with their bodies.¹²⁶ Wilson stated in captions and interviews that Shudu is the ultimate example of perfection. As became clear, this form of perfection consists of views from the fashion industry. Following this argument, this can ensure that the power over the perfect image remains with the fashion industry, as their views are, in this case, still used in the media today.

However, Wilson wants people to understand Shudu as an art project rather than a fashion model.¹²⁷ According to Moustakas et al., this has greater success to influence society.¹²⁸ Wilson doesn't necessarily try to shift the definition of perfection, but how we should deal with perfection. He tries to do this by using a digital creation like Shudu who, according to Baudrillard, can ignore reality or categories such as real or fiction.¹²⁹ This way he tries to show people that perfection isn't related to the real world, as he talks about "*unfathomably perfect*". Thus, we should approach Shudu more from Baudrillard's perspective. Looking from that perspective, one could argue Wilson brings perfection to a digital creation, or art project as he calls it, which can lead people to embrace perfection instead of being pressured to pursue it. Wilson's background in the fashion industry should make this message more powerful as it makes him part of the dominant party, which can give him more access and opportunities to influence public awareness.¹³⁰ Thus, these power structures could contribute to Wilson's effort to take the pressure off people to be perfect through the creation of Shudu.

However, findings reveal that Wilson's intention doesn't quite match with how Shudu is perceived, which diminishes the power of his message. He still exposes people to a perfect, unattainable and human image with the creation of Shudu. Although textual elements make people

¹²⁵ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How images of female beauty are used against women*. New York: William Morrow, 1992.

¹²⁶ Strahan, et al., "Comparing to perfection".

¹²⁷ Wilson, "Interview With Cameron-James Wilson".

¹²⁸ Moustakas, et al., "Blurring lines between fiction and reality", 4.

¹²⁹ Christanti et al., "Instagramable", 398.

¹³⁰ van Dijk, "Principles of Discourse Analysis".

aware of Shudu's fake existence, this is less clear due to visual element that only serve as support to understand the image. When someone doesn't make effort to read captions or interviews and only look at the image, they have less insight into Wilson's line of thought concerning Shudu. They then only see the perfect image Shudu presents and don't read about her virtual existence. Transparency about Shudu's existence is only visible in the text, which is why it doesn't reduce the relevancy of Shudu's authenticity. Authenticity, however, is important in understanding Wilson's message with Shudu. Since her image appears authentic, this can be seen as problematic. It reduces the power of Wilson's message and promotes norms and values of the fashion industry. According to the Cultivation Theory, the recurring rendering of this perfect image leads to the formation of a worldview that is consistent with the perfect image Shudu presents.¹³¹ As a result, it can lead people who don't pay attention to the text to create their own definition of perfection through over-exposure of Shudu's perfect image. According to Turkle, people must learn how to live with this. However, this is difficult as people are still exposed to the perfect image and beauty standards. Shudu can also be considered an example of this as her visual image is leading and pursues norms and values from the fashion industry. These relate to the widespread beauty standards and contribute to the frequent exposure of media portraits that results in a worldview that is more in line with unrealistic media portrayal than with reality.¹³²

It can be concluded that, while Wilson is transparent about the creation of Shudu in the caption and interviews, Shudu's visual image, which conveys a form of perfection created by the fashion industry, seems to play a negative role on the self-image of women. It appears that the perfect image Shudu represents, arises from norms and values from the fashion industry that already puts lots of pressure on women. The social structures of media ensure these images are considered more important than the accompanying text. This can lead to Shudu being understood as a product of the fashion industry, that, through its authenticity, provides material for women to compare themselves to, rather than being an art project. It seems that the fashion industry and media therefore, unconsciously, have too much power and grip on Shudu. Those who read the text are more likely to understand Shudu as an art project. However, this doesn't alter the argument that Shudu still radiates a perfect image that can serve as comparison. She can only contribute positively to the discourse around perfection when she appears less authentic (human), because she then serves less as comparative material and more as digital art through which people can embrace perfection.

¹³¹ Turkle, "Alone Together", 4.

¹³² Harrison, "Media and the body", 394.

5. CONCLUSION

By analyzing Shudu's virtual identity through a Critical Discourse Analysis with Teun A. van Dijk's approach as a tool, it is clarified how Shudu contributes to the discourse around perfection. This is done by looking at the phenomenon from different perspectives on Simulations and Cyborgs, through the lens of the Cultivation Theory, and by attempting to answer the research question: *How does CGI model Shudu and the degree of her authenticity, constructed through her Instagram page, contribute to the discourse around perfection and its influence on women's self-image in the digital age?*

Perfection, as promoted through images on social media platforms, leads to societal pressure among women to pursue the perfect image. Wilson claims to relieve this pressure with CGI model Shudu. However, there are tensions surrounding CGI models and how their degree of authenticity affects people and their understanding of the world. Jean Baudrillard, Donna Haraway and Sherry Turkle all look at the role technologies play in society from different perspectives. Baudrillard and Haraway argue that simulations and technologies, like the ones Shudu has been created with, can create a virtual world that goes beyond humans and the real world, resisting the beauty standards that shape people. Turkle, on the other hand, argues these technologies create a world that is close to the real world, blurring the lines between what's real and what's fake. By analyzing *text, social cognition, and social context*, it's examined to what extent Wilson's claim holds up in this debate.

This analysis shows that Wilson's claim that people can enjoy perfection through Shudu hasn't stood up. Shudu's virtual identity presents a human form of perfection that is still under control of the fashion industry. She consists of norms and values of this industry, which is why the power to say what is considered perfect still lies with the fashion industry as the dominant party, leaving unsolved issues surrounding women's mental health such as low self-esteem. Shudu is considered authentic which abandons the idea of being an art project and adds to the idea of being comparative material for people. Although supporting text refutes her humanity, this doesn't outweigh the dominance of visual elements that present her as a real human. If people don't read the text carefully, they will have less insight into Shudu's fake existence. As a result, they might consider Shudu's image as credible and human, which in turn would negatively contribute to the discourse around perfection and its influence on women's self-image. Thus, if Shudu's appearance is considered authentic and human, the image of perfection she portrays can be used as comparative material, which could create societal pressure among women to also pursue this image. Looking at Shudu from this perspective, it seems that she can negatively affect women's self-image in the digital age.

This conclusion stems from striking findings. Firstly, it became clear that Shudu's degree of authenticity creates a gap between how Shudu should be understood according to Wilson, and how her image is received by media outlets. Wilson's intentions match Baudrillard's perspective. He considers Shudu to be an art project that radiates perfection. By leaving perfection with Shudu, he tries to take the pressure from women to pursue the perfect image so people can embrace perfection again. He

claims to ignore categories such as real and fantasy, makes Shudu's appearance unattainably perfect and uses her as a model that makes people (re)think about perfection. However, the discourses have revealed Shudu isn't understood as such. This is due to the findings revealing that Shudu features human details rather than resembling an art project or cyborg, making her look like a role model that doesn't go beyond the human, as she doesn't step away from beauty standards with her perfect image. It seems that Shudu is perceived as a human who can be placed in the real world, making her a substitute. This mainly fits with how Turkle views and describes digital creations like Shudu, and less with Haraway's perspective as there are no cyborg elements involved. That's why we should understand Shudu more from Turkle's perspective. This may clarify her role in society, which in this case seems to be seductive and substitutive.

Secondly, the findings allow us to talk about Shudu's authenticity with which we can complement research of Batista and Chimenti, Robinson and Moustakas et al. Since Turkle's notion of authenticity is leading in this thesis, the degree of authenticity equals the degree of humanity. As became clear, Shudu is considered authentic due to her human appearance. Although Wilson claims to convey a strong message, this doesn't affect the relevance of Shudu's authenticity. This is because the message is detached from the dominant image. The message should be coherent both visually and textually. In Shudu's case they aren't, which is why someone might not understand Wilson's message appropriately. People need to understand Shudu's fake existence to perceive the underlying message. CDA revealed that, despite Wilson being transparent about Shudu's virtual existence in the text, people mostly talk about Shudu as if she is an authentic human being. In this case, it seems that the transparency about Shudu's virtual existence doesn't outweigh her authentic appearance. However, this can vary from one virtual influencer to another. Whereas Wilson presented Shudu as a way to embrace perfection and reduce societal pressure to pursue beauty standards, this research has shown that his aim can be disputed. Indeed, my findings show that Shudu's kind of authenticity, revealed through visuals, leads to the promotion of a perfect image that can serve as material with which people can compare themselves.

This thesis aims to contribute to the academic debate concerning CGI models (and virtual influencers) and their authenticity. By looking at Shudu from different perspectives on Simulations and Cyborgs, and the concept of authenticity, I hope to have shown that Shudu should better be seen as an individual phenomenon with its own role of authenticity. How Wilson currently deploys Shudu can be considered ineffective because it can lead to the opposite of his intentions. If Wilson adopted Haraway's approach a little more, he could have designed Shudu differently (less authentic) so his message would come across positively: serving as an inspiring beauty and not a substitute. This research has provided sufficient information, although larger research may yield different or additional findings. Not only CGI models play a role in the discourse around perfection, filters and real-life influencers also contribute to this. Due to the scope of this research, I decided to only focus on Shudu as, in my view, she is the ultimate example that stands between humans and technologies. In addition,

the CDA limited the research as it mainly focuses on language as the central source of power construction. However, language isn't the only factor that plays a role in the phenomenon that this thesis focused on. The affordances of media platforms, on which perfection is displayed, and the economic and politic tensions like the ones in the fashion industry, also play a role in the power constructions and discourse around perfection. Despite the limitations, this thesis did provide important insights in understanding CGI's like Shudu and the discourse around perfection.

6. REFERENCES

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7. APPENDIX

7.1 Images

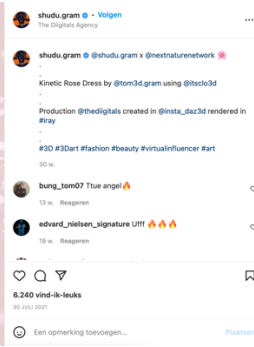


Image 1: Instagram post of Shudu

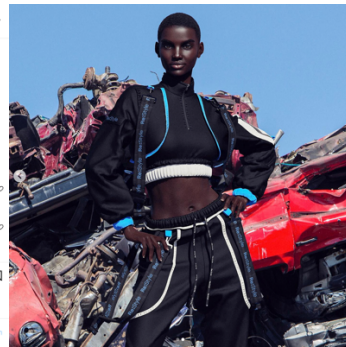


Image 2: Instagram post of Shudu

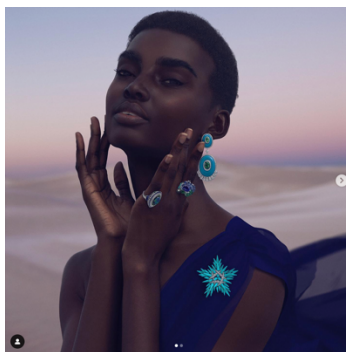


Image 3: Instagram post of Shudu



Image 4: Instagram post of Shudu

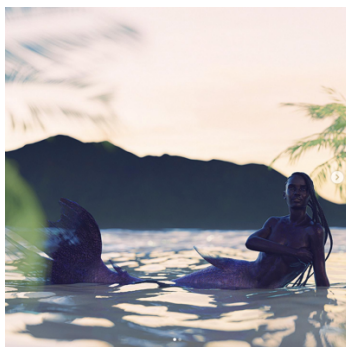


Image 5: Instagram post of Shudu

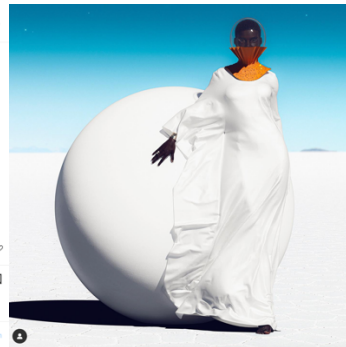


Image 6: Instagram post of Shudu

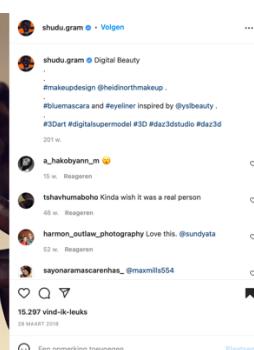
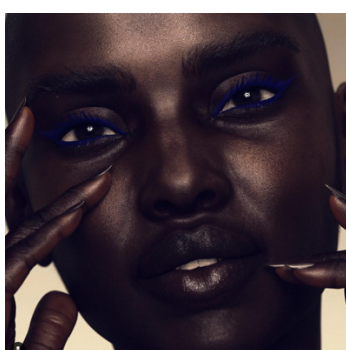


Image 7: Instagram post of Shudu

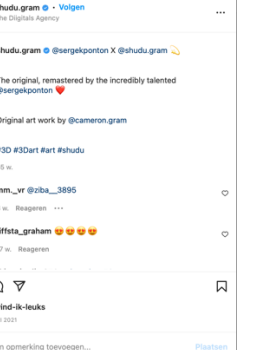
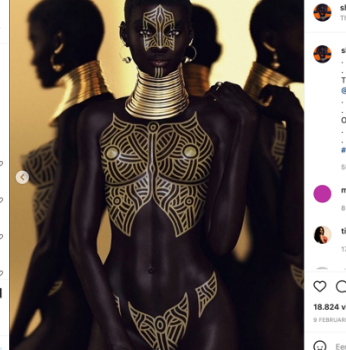


Image 8: Instagram post of Shudu

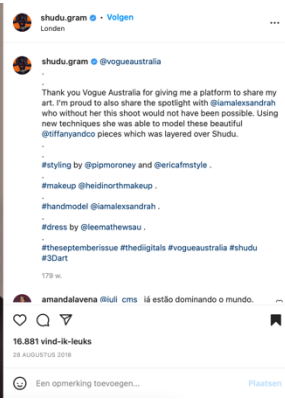


Image 9: Instagram post of Shudu

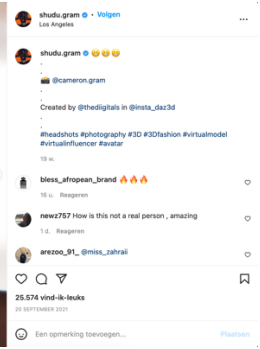
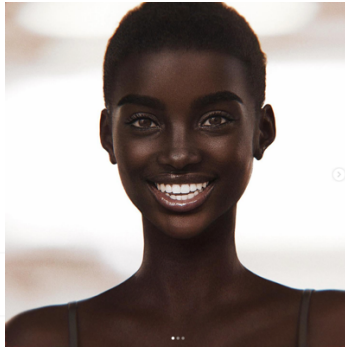


Image 10: Instagram post of Shudu



Image 11: Supermodel Duckie Thot



Image 12: Barbie Doll Princess of South Africa

7.2 Table 2 Text Analysis

Instagram Posts	Theme	
	<i>Authentic vs. Fake</i>	<i>Perfect vs. Imperfect</i>
<i>Image 1</i>	Both visually and textually, this image makes clear Shudu isn't a real human. The caption says Shudu is "created in @insta_daz3d rendered in #iray". This is seen in the image as well. Shudu is shown naked with rose petals covering her private parts. However, these petals don't fall naturally around her body. An image of a real human that is shown naked often includes shadows and shapes around intimate parts. In this image, these details aren't shown. In addition, there are no shadows or curves. Her body is completely even. This makes it look like Wilson didn't design these intimate body parts. Finally, no muscles or veins, signs of humanity, are found in the image.	Keeping in mind the characteristics of Cunningham, this image only portrays perfection. The image shows full lips, large almond-shaped eyes, prominent cheekbones, and an even skin without bumps. In addition, she is standing in an elegant pose with her hands resting on her hip. Because of this pose, her nails, which are round and contain a white edge, are clearly visible.
<i>Image 2</i>	This post is made in collaboration with Hyundai. Because the post says, "paid collaboration", it might seem it is about a real human. However, the colours of the background are in contrast with the colours of Shudu's body which makes her seem fake.	This image shows Shudu's entire body in which her thin body is clearly visible. This is related to the standards of a fashion model (57 kg and 1.77 meter ¹³³). Her clothes, and in particular her crop top, accentuate her toned belly and make her rounded navel clearly visible. In addition, the characteristics mentioned in the first image are also clearly visible here. Her face looks very symmetrical due to her full lips, small nose, and small chin. These elements are further accentuated by the use of light colours.
<i>Image 3</i>	Visually, Shudu looks like a real human as she contains no cyborg elements and poses with jewellery from real fashion brands (Dior, Chopard, Tiffany and Co and Chaumet). Posing with physical products contribute to her authenticity. In addition, human details have been applied to her skin. For example, she has detailed palm lines and healthy-looking nails. The lightning also accentuates her body, showing human aspects such as her collarbone and wrist. However, the caption does reveal she isn't human as it says, "Virtually Perfect", "Production @thediigitals using @insta_daz3d", "#digitalfashion made and dressed in @itsclo3d" and "#3D #3Dart #mixedreality".	Both visually and textually, this post represents a form of perfection. Textually this is seen in the caption as it says, "Virtually perfect". Visually, only elements related to perfection are shown. These elements have already been mentioned in the images above. On top of those elements, in this post her hand can also be considered perfect as Shudu has long and thin fingers and healthy-looking nails. There are no imperfections, bumps, or moles.
<i>Image 4</i>	This post contains more elements that reveal she is no human. First of all, the caption shows "fashion meets technology as Shudu models the @samsunguk Galaxy Z Flip". In addition, the glow of her skin also shows she isn't real. This is smooth and reshaped which doesn't represent a human body. In this image her arm is also off length relative to other body parts. However, the collaboration with Samsung can be seen as human as this is a paid partnership.	In this image, Shudu's skin seems so perfect it is almost inhumane. When zooming in, there are no bumps, hairs, or spots to be found. It is shiny and smooth. Her make-up also fits perfectly on her face. The eyeliner and eyeshadow are nicely pointed and not faded. They accentuate her big almond shaped eyes and high eyebrows.
<i>Image 5</i>	This image clearly shows Shudu isn't human because of the fin which overflows into Shudu's own body. This can be seen as an extension of her body (which is an element of a cyborg). In addition, the skin, as mentioned before, makes Shudu look fake as it is smooth and shiny. This may also have to do with the fact she lies in the water. This 'wet look' is also reflected in her dreadlocks. Finally, the shape of her head also looks less human, this is more related to an avatar. ¹³⁴	Textually, this post doesn't specifically say something about perfect or imperfect as it says, "The most beautiful thing about the ocean is the diversity within it". Visually, however, this post shows a lot of perfection. This is also reflected in the form of her arms which are thin and muscular. There are no bumps, blemishes, stains, grease rolls or other signs of imperfection.
<i>Image 6</i>	This image is made in collaboration with Discover Lexus, which makes Shudu seem human. Furthermore, few	This image doesn't necessarily indicate perfection or imperfection as Shudu is mainly

¹³³ Simona Alexandra Zancu, Rachel F. Rodgers, and Violeta Enea, "Self-determined motivation for eating behavior regulation and sociocultural influences among Romanian fashion models", *Body Image* 31, no. 1 (2019): 15-159.

¹³⁴ Creatures with pointed ears and triangular faces with flat bifurcated noses, all framed with large, almost hypnotically golden eyes.

	<p>human elements are found as this image shows space. That is also why Shudu wears the Pioneer Futures mask. If you zoom in, you can clearly see this mask is fake as it is placed around her head inhumanly. The colours and shimmers also don't match aspects of the real world. In addition, both the colours of Shudu and her background are of the same saturation. This invalidates the authenticity of this image.</p>	<p>covered with clothes. As a result, her body and face aren't clearly visible. The few elements that are visible, however, indicate perfection. Her hairline is completely straight without any coves, her small nose stands out well, her ears are symmetrical, and her make-up is aligned and nicely set around her almond-shaped eyes. Finally, her hand is placed in a such a position that her shiny and smooth skin comes out perfectly, focusing on her narrow fingers. This also has to do with the fact this is placed on a white object.</p>
<i>Image 7</i>	<p>Textually, the post indicates that this is a virtual creation as it reads "Digital Beauty" and "#3Dart #digitalsupermodel #3D #daz3dstudio #Daz3d". Visually, however, Shudu does appear human. Her face contains human aspects stated before. For example, lines have been created under her eyes that indicate bags, there are pores and blackheads can be seen that make her skin less even and there are palm lines. In addition, the lightening ensures the proportions of her limbs, shadows in her faces and curves in her appear human.</p>	<p>Looking at the characteristics of Cunningham, this image can be considered perfect. She has full lips, shaped eyebrows, almond shaped eyes, straight teeth, and a small chin. Her make-up is also well applied. This hasn't faded, adds a glow to her skin and lips, and didn't make her lashes stick together. However, some imperfections can be seen in her skin. Blackheads have been added to her cheeks and pores are more visible. On the other hand, her skin still represents perfection as there is no acne and blemishes. Her skin is still even and shiny. Finally, her nails are long and have no coves or hooks, making them look perfect.</p>
<i>Image 8</i>	<p>At first glance, this image doesn't look human. This is mainly due to visual elements on Shudu's body which are created by visual artist @sergekponon. Someone who, normally, creates these visual elements on real humans. However, this image clearly shows these visual elements have digitally been placed on Shudu's body as they consist of straight lines, perfectly cover the intimate parts and have no blemishes or shadows. This is especially evident when looking at Shudu's face. In addition, these artificial lines on her face make her eyes look fake. They look more like <u>glassy cat eyes</u>.</p>	<p>This body shot of Shudu shows a toned but thin body, something that can be seen as perfect. There are no stretch marks, rolls of fat or other irregularities. The lightning accentuates her hips, full lips, jawlines and the muscles in her abdomen and arms. In addition, there are no imperfections in her skin, this is shiny and even.</p>
<i>Image 9</i>	<p>This post is in collaboration with Vogue Australia, something that is highlighted in the text. It also reads she poses with real jewellery "Using new techniques she was able to model these beautiful @tiffanyandco pieces which was layered over Shudu". This partly show she is a digital creation. However, other words in the caption make it seem as if real humans work with her "#styling by @pipmoroney and @ericafmstyle", "#makeup @heidinorthmakeup". In addition, the caption shows humanity by writing about "#handmodel @iamalexsandrah". Visually, Shudu also matches the appearance of a real human as all elements and curves are in proportion to each other. This is especially due to the lightning and shadows. These create details like coves at the cheeks, bags under the eyes, contours of her bones, lines of veins on her hand and palm lines.</p>	<p>Visually, this image only represents perfection because Shudu contains all characteristics Cunningham considers as perfect. For example, her full lips, prominent cheekbones, small chin, and almond shaped eyes stand out. The latter also has to do with her make-up. This matches the shape of her eyes which show her well-filled and contoured eyebrows and soft lashes. Her skin also looks smooth and shiny. There are no bumps, pustules, or spots. The evenness of her skin, which provides a perfect image, may also have to do with the grains. Finally, the contours around her collarbones and prominent cheekbones make it look like she can be considered as thin.</p>
<i>Image 10</i>	<p>Visually, Shudu looks like a real human in this post. This has to do with the fact all the elements in her face match those of a human. In addition, the applied shadows ensure the shape of her collarbones and muscles are clearly visible. However, there are elements that indicate she is a digital creation. For example, Shudu smiles without even the slightest wrinkle. Everything remains in a symmetrical shape. In addition, the colour of her radiant white teeth doesn't match the rest of the colours in the image. Finally, the caption "#3D #3Dfashion #virtualmodel #virtualinfluencer #avatar" which indicate she is a digital model.</p>	<p>This image represents perfection as she contains all Cunningham's characteristics. Her full lips, straight and white teeth, large smile, large eyes and pupils, small chin and prominent cheekbones really stand out here. Because a gradient has been placed over the image, there are no signs of imperfections. Her skin mainly contains grains.</p>

