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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

Relationships Between Skin and Fabric, with attention to experimental materials recreating skin-like qualities

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I, Yingying Ren, hereby declare that I have written this thesis, and I have conducted the research presented and summarised within. The work is original and has not been previously accepted for a degree. This research was conducted as part of my **MDes (by Research)** degree at the University of Dundee, between October 2020 and 31 August 2021.

Signed _____  _____

Date _____ 15 September 2021 _____

Leona Yingying Ren- Master's Research

Title: 'Relationships Between Skin and Fabric, with attention to experimental materials recreating skin-like qualities'

There seems a natural connection between human bodies, animal bodies, and books, not least because they are all containers, vessels of knowledge and experience. So I explored this year many materials that have skin-like qualities. And I began to think about how fabrics are like a second skin, worn to cover the human skin underneath. And I investigated how these exploratory materials might become something like prosthetics, or barriers and protection from anything touching the actual skin.

This has led me to explore making processes as well, and most recently, 3D-printing and laser-cutting materials which may become draped on a body.

My research will lead to an immediate continuation in PhD studies:

Research Questions / Hypothesis:

1. As a design researcher, how may experimental materials be made to resemble fragments of skin, preserving skin-like textures and the qualities of the subtle lines that create fingerprints, wrinkles, skin pores, and lines around joints?
2. How may these skin-like materials be used in order to produce 'wearable' fashion (or 'anti-fashion'), material that resembles 'leaves' in (artist's) books, or installations that evoke a haunting effect with the powerful associations associated with skin?
3. How may these skin-like materials be used in producing 'vessels', containers, and other artefacts that have the function of containing (or the resemblance of containing) conceptual or real substances?
4. The textiles or fashion industry often crosses over into fine art/theatrical/poetic or even spatial applications. In this broadest sense of how evocative materials are used, how may the human and non-human associations with these materials be best deployed?

Aims and objectives of the research:

1. I want to explore human skin, the qualities of the skin as a body part. In order to restore the natural form of skin, as a pure, unadorned surface, to show that the changes of the skin (body) are the laws of natural existence, to try to call for a change in society's uniform aesthetic pursuit of skin (body), and to show the state of skin that is not manipulated by ideal beauty (under the influence of makeup and plastic surgery).
2. I want to extend the qualities and texture of the material to a deeper level of expression. The skin is the largest and most accessible human organ that can interact

with a wide variety of places where clothing is worn. Fabric is the second skin of human beings, which means a replacement skin, is layered on top of the original skin, and helps to convey information about a person's identity. Hence, material has more possibilities and expressions as a medium between self and society, inner thoughts and outer projection. I want to explore how to use experimental materials (sustainable materials) to shape the expansion of the meaning of skin and change the relationship between human beings and fabrics.

3. I want to explore how to combine both traditional craftsmanship and modern technology to create more possibilities by experimenting with combining different materials (especially non-clothing materials). Through learning to form integrated ideas about materials, space, and technology, I would like to make installation art based on design works.

4. I want to explore the skin as a location for wearable artifacts and a presentable body site. I want to explore the design of the body based on the consciousness level of visual art, and public art. I would like to explore the design for and function of the body based on the body itself, and analyze and discuss the aesthetics and fashion of the body in the context of the social and cultural environment and the consumer era. While this may seem like a large task, I wish to do this *through* specific practice-led body-adornments that I will produce, which may be made by first draping on bodies, but which are removed and used in spatial installations. What I explore in this related research question is: how may the evocation of absent bodies may be more effective than the presence of bodies in working with experimental skin-like textiles?

Research Context:

The body is increasingly becoming a focus of research of general interest from all walks of life, crossing over many disciplines and relying upon interdisciplinary knowledge to connect complex issues. With the deepening of people's understanding of more-than-physiology, knowledge of the human embodiment has gradually developed into an important carrier of human culture, which reveals the basic connotation of human society and culture.

The body allows for an element of aesthetic artistic creation in its appreciation, and many types of art are expressed in 'body language', such as dance and sculpture for example. However, the disciplines of literature and fine arts use body language as a basis for re-creation and representation. There is a growing number of philosophical works and articles on the body view in academia, and embodied phenomenology. The main part of sociological research is in the reality of human life, so the subject of its study is the human body in action and behavior patterns. The body not only reflects the laws of social construction, but it also has a distinctive individual cultural identity.

Beginning in the twentieth century, many pioneering art practices were developed in the West, and body art gradually entered a stage of exploration and development among the debates. During this period, a large number of works related to body art

emerged, and people no longer confined themselves to the "physical" view of the body, but more often considered the representation of the body and its spiritual connotation in terms of social, aesthetic and philosophical meanings. The relationship between "I and others" is one of the basic starting points of Bakhtin's thinking about the body. For Bakhtin, the "I" cannot exist independently, and there is an objective connection between the "I" and others. The relationship between "I and others" is also the focus of a large number of philosophers' studies.

Jean Baudrillard distinguishes "body" into "consumer body", "corporeal body" and "symbolic body". "Symbolic body" mainly refers to the aesthetic consciousness formed in the development of human society. In addition, a large number of works related to the study of the body have appeared, among which the more representative ones are John O'Neill's *The Five States of the Body: Reshaping the Shape of Relationships* and Chris Schilling's *The Body and Social Theory*. These works led to a better understanding of the connotation of "incarnate" and "non-incarnate" bodies and promoted the further development of related research.

Body art also draws on primitive tribal rituals. Jean Mouk's sculpture "Boy Crouching in Front of a Mirror" shows mottled skin, an unusual size, and curled limbs, all of which give the viewers a strong visual impression and convey their added identity.

Alvarez-Errecalde's installation TALLAS is a fictional "store" featuring 50 jumpsuits with unretouched images of different women's bodies, printed with unretouched photographic images of women's bodies of different ages, races and body types. Viewers are invited to choose and try on the skin of others in order to reflect on how society uses the female body as a commodity.

Fabrics change the shape of the body while wrapping it. When the body moves, our skin meets the fabric. And the touch makes the invisible outline of the body visible, so whether it's a corset or a fat suit, they help to reshape our bodies. In 1972, Issey Miyake proposed the concept of "clothing is an extension of the body, and the body is an expression of the outline of clothing" and called clothing "second skin" to reflect the relationship between the body and clothing, reflecting the relationship between the body and the garment. The human body is free to express itself in the space created by the clothing, and a new uncertain space is created in the change of movement.

Significance:

The body, as a symbol with multiple meanings, has been embedded within the social and historical fields. Body art is expressed in a variety of forms and is also closely related to issues such as gender and race, and it is necessary to explore and consider these subsets of embodiment in a deeper way. It is also important to explore the skin as a medium of communication between the body and the outside world, and as a vehicle for many types of art, such as dance and sculpture. From the perspective of

design, both design and the human body are inter-linked. If we care about people, we should pay attention to their bodies.

This study is based on experimental fabric research; like skin, wearable design and its extension to spatial research offer exciting opportunities to innovate through practice-led experimentation, to understand what is more applicable to the body design, and better fulfill the mission of people.

Proposed research methodology and methods:

It will be practice-led research approach.

1. I would use biomedical research methods, and in the early stages of my research I think I will be using a microscope to study the surface and cross-sectional features of the skin, recorded in a series of photographs, digital data, to inform the formation of patterns and surfaces of textiles.
2. I will use the field research method. In the pre-study period, I will comb through the relevant literature and books on body (skin) related design and make a questionnaire research according to the proposal.
3. I will use the literature research method. In order to better promote the research, I will collect some books, images and papers related to skin and contemporary art design, sustainable fabrics, to sort out the art forms in the research questions and provide theoretical support for the next experimental method.
4. I will adopt the experimental method. Practice-oriented work is going to be the main method for my research. For the art form of sustainable fabric (bio-fabric), I will keep researching and exploring, and record the whole process of experimentation to push forward the further advancement of knowledge about the practice. Besides, I will record my reading notes and daily research to improve my work, and build on the state of contemporary knowledge as a platform for my investigations.
5. I will use an interdisciplinary analytical approach. I will look up relevant disciplines and knowledge such as biology and humanities, use theories of relevant theoretical knowledge to assist in the conduct of the research and summarize.

Initial Plan of Work (which may be revised in consultation with supervisors):

1. I would like to do a questionnaire survey on skin-related issues for people of different age groups and regions to analyze what factors affect skin qualities and texture, and I would like to take photos to record how people's physiological and psychological reactions affect their skin. I want to collect the results and extract the visual elements.
2. I would like to make experimental fabrics from the preliminary findings, emphasizing different visual elements and reflecting the diversity of different skins. I want to start with sustainable fabrics, combine with biomaterials to do some experiment, make wrinkles by pleating, drawstring and so on. I have always been interested in knitting, because of the epidemic I did not study it at the graduate level, I was very interested in studying it when I was doing my Ph.D. Knitting fabrics can be

very breathable, can be used to express skin pores, textures, and at the same time can combine traditional handicrafts with modern technology.

3. I want to use the fabric made in the first stage as the base material for wearable design, to express the relationship between the skin and the space of the body inside and outside.

4. The spatiality of the body involves a complex relationship between presence and absence, public and private, virtual and real. I want to use the body (skin-like fabric) as a medium for artistic activity, existing as a sculpture, or a brief performance, becoming an active, inviting place, presenting an evocative openness.

Outcome:

My final product could be a combination of formats or outputs. As the research question states, I hope to design a series of skin-like textured fabrics with individual variability, and then do some installation and wearable designs, container presentations and other art forms based on it. I will also have a small part of a written thesis to present, as required, which will probably deal with the relationship between skin (fabric) and space.

Contribution to knowledge and impact:

This research project will make a contribution to society by expanding upon the unique connections between material innovations, embodied knowledge and actions traced through interdisciplinary investigations and cultural differences, and in its expression in a fine art mode of spatial installations. What this unusual combination of practice-led outputs and reflective analysis will do is to link what it means to be human, each of us 'within our skins', to creatively and empathetically understand that we are more than our skin-contained bodies, and that spatially our presence extends beyond the pores, the hairs, the stretch of skin to link us with the breathing, porous, more-than-human world.

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