'Virtual Soul': The Aesthetics of the Disembodied Being
A Conceptual and Visual Analysis of an Artificial Influencer

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Body Social Media Artificial Intelligence Hyperreality Aesthetics Instagram Influencers	In the post-digital era, categories such as body, identity, and presence undergo a reconfiguration. Focusing on the Instagram profile of Aitana López, an AI-created influencer, this study explores new forms of technologically mediated existence. Three dimensions are examined: existence as visibility, the body as an aesthetic interface without experience, and the image as an ontological presence. The findings reveal a tendency toward hyperreality and the aestheticization of the body, where the artificial takes precedence over the real. The image no longer merely represents; it acts, interacts, and generates value. Accordingly, rethinking the human requires acknowledging its embodied dimension.

1. Introduction

In the post-digital context in which we live, traditional categories such as body, identity and presence are undergoing significant reconfiguration. Transformations in the sociology of personal life facilitate understanding being not as an individual essence, but as an interconnection of affective, temporal and material relationships (Fletcher, 2023). In line with post-phenomenological approaches, existence, that is, the manner in which we are in the world, is conceived as a dynamic co-constitution between humans and technologies (Ihde, 1990). In this scenario, the ontological is not presented as a fixed condition, but is woven into the confluence of data, bodies and actions (Mason, 2011). Consequently, contemporary experiences of presence are no longer grounded in physical co-presence, but are fragmented and redistributed across digital platforms, giving rise to new configurations of existence in which the body operates as a symbolic and technical interface mediated by technology (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2006). In this way, the ontological acquires a relational, technologically mediated and contingent character. Existence is no longer based solely on materiality, nor is identity assured through lived experience.

On platforms such as Instagram, the concept of identity has shifted towards a performative mode of display, in which the repeated manifestation of digital presence takes precedence over lived experience (Auriemma et al., 2023; Turvy, 2025). This logic does not reflect reality as it is, but rather replaces it with digitally optimised and emotionally modulated bodies, designed to be observed, processed and validated in online environments (Uti & Marcella-Hood, 2025). Participation in these environments is not limited to presence, but also involves being recognised, influenced and shared as part of the content. Furthermore, visual representations created using computer-generated imagery (CGI) or produced by artificial intelligence (AI) are not merely technological artefacts; they constitute new modes of existence that operate within the symbolic and emotional interaction schemes of the socio-technical environment.

In this context, we examine the case of Aitana López, a virtual influencer created using artificial intelligence in 2023 by the Barcelona-based agency *The Clueless*, who posts content on Instagram (@fit_aitana). She presents herself as a 25-year-old woman with a highly polished aesthetic and idealised features. Her interests include fitness—hence the name of her account—, video games and cosplay (Solanki, 2024). In a highly symbolic manner, her profile description and personal presentation describe her as a *Virtual soul*. What is unusual is that she does not act as a representative of any individual; she is not an avatar of a specific person nor a double of an underlying subject. Aitana is a digital character without any prior ontological reference. She has no experiential background, no bodily history and experiences neither suffering nor pleasure, yet she acts. Her existence is not based on physical matter or conscious perception, but on code, visual aesthetics and the intentions she evokes in the viewer. In other words, she functions as an agent without inherently possessing that quality.

From a metaphysical perspective, Aitana can be interpreted as a transformation of the regime of the sensible, manifesting as a hyperrealistic image devoid of physical corporeality, an interface lacking substance and a form without a subject to support it. Her appearance symbolises the intensification of the concept of simulacrum proposed by Jean Baudrillard (1978), prompting reconsideration of conventional philosophical paradigms concerning the body, identity, representation and agency. Whereas the physical body previously served as the foundation of the subject, it has now assumed a secondary role, with the image replacing the real body as a necessary condition for existence. Aitana represents a contemporary allegory of the disembodied being, the integral aestheticisation of the self and the dissolution of boundaries between the human and the digital.

This phenomenon should not be considered a technological curiosity or a passing aesthetic trend, but rather interpreted as a structural shift. It can even be understood as, at least partially, a transition from the embodied subject to self-sufficient forms of self-image, from the experienced body to programmed surfaces, and from a notion of the self-centred on interiority to one oriented towards interface and exposure. In this sense, Aitana can be seen as a representative case of this transformation, which is not limited to describing a particular phenomenon. Rather, it suggests a deeper shift: the transition from the image as a means of mediation to the conception of the image as a foundation, as well as the change from representation understood as a mirror to representation conceived as reality in itself.

On the other hand, Aitana López is not the only figure with these characteristics. A few years earlier, what may be considered her most direct predecessor emerged, albeit with a lower degree of realism: Lil

Miquela (@lilmiquela), a U.S.-based virtual persona with millions of followers (Carrillo-Durán et al., 2024; Drenten & Brooks, 2020). Among the hundreds of similar characters are Shudu Gram (@shudu.gram) in the United Kingdom, recognised as the first digital supermodel (Van Halteren, 2023) and Imma (@imma.gram), a comparable figure in the Japanese media ecosystem (Mei, 2021; Miyake, 2023), among others.

This multifaceted phenomenon raises the need to re-examine the notion of the body. What is the meaning of the bodily dimension of a person conceptualised not as flesh, but as pixels? What does it imply that the image does not represent a subject, but acts as a 'subject' in itself?

To our knowledge, few studies have addressed a topic similar to the one presented in this research, and those that have, do so from different perspectives. For example, Robinson (2020) has analysed the ontological and, above all, ethical consequences of the emergence of digital influencers, focusing on the ethical construction of identity and trust in virtual spaces. Mei (2021) has examined the relationship between an influencer and her followers from the perspective of parasocial theory, concluding that on social media, the reality of an entity depends not only on physical presence, but also on the psychological connection that can be established. From a broader perspective, Villamarín-Fernández (2023) has reflected on how, influenced by technology, perceptions of the body have changed in the digital age, questioning biological limits and personal identity. Villén-Higueras & Mata-Núñez (2024) have explored the phenomenon of humanised virtual influencers on Instagram, focusing on their gender representation, audiovisual codes and links with brands and other opinion makers. Barboza (2025), through the analysis of four non-human influencers with anthropomorphic appearances, has questioned how the 'soul' of these digital figures is constructed, addressing their psychic and affective dimensions from post-feminist and transhumanist perspectives.

Several essays also compare these virtual characters with humans, contrasting different aspects of their similarities and differences (Byun & Ahn, 2023; Dondapat & Dehury, 2024; Mirowska & Arsenyan, 2023). With regard to Aitana López in particular, beyond the articles that mention her within broader analyses, we are aware of only one study dedicated exclusively to her: the final degree project *Is it real or is it artificial intelligence? Virtual influencers and the confusion surrounding their identity. A study of the Spanish virtual influencer Aitana López* by Abendroth (2024).

2. Theoretical Framework

The emergence and expansion of social media in the early 2000s marked the beginning of new forms of digital interaction and communication. New roles, figures and professions linked to the virtual environment also appeared in these settings. Among them, the rise of so-called 'social media influencers' stands out. These are individuals who, with perceived authority—whether real or constructed—in particular thematic areas, began to exert a remarkable capacity for persuasion over their audiences, playing an important role in shaping opinions, consumer behaviour and cultural dynamics (Marcelo-García et al., 2022).

Since 2016, this phenomenon has included the emergence of the virtual influencer, which can be defined as *an entity—human-like or not—autonomously controlled by artificial intelligence and visually represented as an interactive being, rendered in real time in a digital environment* (Sands et al., 2022, p. 777). Their presence has sparked discussions about authenticity and the boundaries between the real and the simulated, as well as the ethical implications of their use and the role of the body in shaping personal identity (Conti et al., 2022). In this study, we focus on the latter aspect, considering existence as visibility, the body as an aesthetic interface and the image as a form of ontological presence in virtual environments.

Regarding artificial intelligence, following the classical classification proposed by Rich & Knight (1991) and further developed by Russell & Norvig (2021), four types can be distinguished. First, systems that think like humans, or *cognitive* systems, which automatically reproduce functions such as deciding, solving complex problems or learning. Second, systems that act like humans, or *imitative* systems, which are designed to simulate human performance in different tasks. Third, systems that think rationally, or *logical-formal* systems, which seek to replicate human rational thinking through logical structures. And fourth, systems that act rationally, or *rational agents*, which aim to emulate human behaviour rationally, as an intelligent agent would ideally do. According to these parameters, Aitana falls within the imitative systems category, since despite her hyper-realistic physical appearance, she lacks consciousness, does

not reason and does not make decisions autonomously. Her thoughts and actions are predefined by her programmers; she simply simulates humans.

Another way to distinguish artificial intelligence, following the categories offered by Bostrom (2014) and Goertzel (2014), is based on its degree of development and the human capabilities it incorporates. From this perspective, three levels can be identified. First, *specific or weak* AI, which replicates human cognitive functions in one or more limited and defined tasks and has neither consciousness nor contextual understanding. Second, *general or strong* AI, conceived as capable of learning, reasoning and solving problems autonomously across multiple domains. Such systems require machines to possess a certain degree of 'consciousness' and high cognitive abilities. Third, *superintelligence*, which exceeds human intellectual capabilities in almost all fields. This level is often linked to the concept of singularity, in which machines are not only 'conscious' and autonomous, but also potentially uncontrollable. Although its development is still in its early stages, it is the type that generates the most concern in the scientific community. According to this typology, our virtual character falls into the first level, *weak* AI, as she has been designed to simulate specific and limited tasks without possessing consciousness, the ability to understand reality, or contextual understanding. Her hyper-realistic appearance does not imply autonomous reasoning, creativity or agency. She follows the parameters defined by her human programmers based on pre-established rules.

All of this has raised a series of questions about where the essence of humanity lies and the criteria that should guide technological development, particularly in fields related to AI and other advanced digital applications. These concerns, however, are not new. Several decades ago, Isaac Asimov (1942), a pioneer in the development of robotic ethics, went further by attempting to establish clear limits on the heterogeneous interaction between humans and machines. To that end, he proposed the famous Three Laws of Robotics. First, a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. Second, a robot must obey the orders given to it by humans, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. Third, a robot must protect its own existence, as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law. A little later, Asimov (1985) argued that a higher rule was necessary, which he called *law zero*: a robot shall not harm humanity or, through inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.

Being human-like is not enough to confer human status. Perhaps, ultimately, these concerns are not so much about the fear that AI will become too intelligent, invasive, malicious or even useful. Rather, what is unsettling is that intelligence, creativity, emotions and even consciousness are increasingly easy to replicate, so that the aspects of humanity considered most valuable may be reduced to a superficial set of algorithms (Coeckelbergh, 2021).

2.1. 'I Only Exist If I Am Seen': Visibility as a Form of Existence

In the post-digital era, visuality no longer necessarily refers to a material experience or a physical referent. Digital images, including those produced using CGI or AI, not only represent, but also act, circulate and produce social and affective effects. In contemporary techno-aesthetic environments, the image is not limited to mediating between the subject and the world; it constitutes a form of agency in itself (Parikka, 2023). The logic of Baudrillardian simulacra, which lacks an original referent, challenges traditional conceptions of representation and requires the development of a new conceptual framework for understanding digital existence in the absence of a physical body (Kellner, 2020). In today's world, what cannot be shown does not exist. This logic of simulacrum reveals a hyperreality in which distinctions between appearance and substance lose their relevance.

From this perspective, digitally generated virtual influencers are not merely media products, but performative visual entities that embody an aesthetic without flesh and without lived experience. We find ourselves in a state of exposure, in which the legitimacy of presence is established through the continuous circulation of images, data and narratives facilitated by various platforms. Existence can be understood as an ontological manifestation, in which the validity of being is based on visibility and the ability to circulate, be shared and be recognised within multiple networks. The Cartesian *cogito* (*I think, therefore I am*) is no longer considered; instead, a new premise is presented: *I show myself, therefore I am* (Lagerkvist, 2018), very much in line with the immaterialist philosopher George Berkeley (1710), who proposed in the 18th century that *to be is to be perceived* (*esse est percipi*). Within this symbolic

environment, existence is no longer based on interiority, but on constant exposure: *I am visible, therefore I exist.*

On the other hand, the image is no longer limited to representing an external referent; according to Gilles Deleuze's conception (1990), it becomes an autonomous entity. His notion of *image-time* enables the conceptualisation of the digital visual not only as a reflection of a pre-existing reality, but as a productive flow of meanings that maintains and structures the real from within. In line with this idea, Bernard Stiegler (2010) argued that, in modernity marked by technology, subjectivity is formed through processes of symbolic externalisation. This implies that visual devices not only facilitate communication, but also play a fundamental role in the construction of the subject.

Rosi Braidotti (2013) expands on this reflection from a posthumanist perspective. In an environment characterised by algorithmic capitalism, the subject is redefined as a post-organic whole rather than being considered an autonomous organism or an exclusively human entity. It is presented as an interface that integrates the biological with the mechanical, as well as the symbolic with the algorithmic. In this context, individuals such as Aitana López, an influencer developed entirely through artificial intelligence, represent this ontological transformation. They are not constituted as simulacra in the traditional sense, but emerge as new manifestations of performative subjectivity that are viable, desirable and economically profitable. They do not serve as representations of a subject; they 'constitute' a subject, at least within the digital realm that they themselves help to maintain.

As previously discussed, this shift from representation to simulation was foreshadowed by Jean Baudrillard, who conceptualises the simulacrum as a replica that lacks an original, being a representation that replaces the real with a self-sustaining hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1978; Kellner, 2020). In a context characterised by an abundance of digital media and technologies, representations cease to allude to an objective reality and begin to constitute their own symbolic universe. The implications are profound: the distinction between reality and fiction becomes blurred, challenging traditional conceptions of truth, presence and subjectivity. According to Baudrillard, we inhabit a symbolic regime in which the image is placed before and replaces the object, in which the principle that *what cannot be shown does not exist* prevails, and in which identity is no longer defined by interiority, but through constant exposure.

Within this framework, Aitana López is not only an exemplary case, but embodies a novel visual ontology, in which the image manifests as a subject without the need for a physical body, historical condition or experiential experience. The visual aspect is thus established as a space of existence, acting as an interface that replaces the corporeal with the digital, biographical narrative with algorithmic processing, and the essence of being with mere appearance.

2.2. The Body as an Aesthetic Interface: Artificiality Without Experience

In the contemporary post-digital scenario, the body transcends its traditional conception as a mere biological entity or physical support for experience and is redefined as an interface that articulates symbolic and aesthetic meanings. AI-generated representations challenge the traditional conception of corporeality by giving rise to visual manifestations devoid of organic materiality and lived experience. Nevertheless, these figures generate tangible symbolic, economic and affective effects.

This phenomenon requires a reconsideration of the body, understood not as a source of subjectivity, but as a surface on which cultural codes are inscribed and as a platform for algorithmic circulation. According to Hans Belting (2001), the human body is no longer the sole reference point for the image and is now conceived as a temporary support that mediates between interiority and visual representation. In his approach to the anthropology of the image, the body operates as a space of transit, mediation and projection of the visual, enabling the circulation of projections that exceed its biological dimension. In this new context, artificial bodies do not require biology to function visually and culturally as entities.

This shift, which reconfigures the notion of subjectivity, is consistent with the perspective proposed by Donna Haraway (1991), who conceptualises the body as a hybrid entity, inserted into socio-technical assemblages in which humans and machines coexist in interdependent relationships. In her well-known figure of the cyborg, the body has ceased to be a sign of authenticity and has become a post-organic composite, blurring the boundaries between nature and technology.

From a perceptual standpoint, Mark Hansen (2007) argues that, in digitally mediated contexts, bodily experience becomes decentralised. The flow of data establishes new configurations of sensory embodiment, displacing the body from its traditional role as the organising core of perception. In this way, corporeality is no longer considered the origin of experience, but becomes the product of an algorithmic assembly that simulates presence, affect and subjectivity. Within this framework, Aitana personifies a codified and culturally desirable femininity, reproduced through the repetition of gestures, affective expressions and visual representations that require cultural recognition rather than personal experience.

From a technopolitical perspective, Maurizio Lazzarato (2006) analyses how the body is transformed into a mechanism for the production and circulation of signs, emotions and visualities, which are affected by dynamics of control, consumption and valorisation. In this system, the digital body does not need to experience emotions; it is enough for it to generate emotional reactions, capture attention and stimulate desires. Experience becomes secondary; what matters most is the effectiveness of the performance.

However, this debate is not limited to philosophy and also finds meaning in the field of psychology. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Lucio Gutiérrez (2025) argues that immersion in digital environments leads to new forms of *interaction with others* through technological devices, in which the notion of presence does not depend on physical proximity, but on a mediated emotional connection. In this context, artificial entities such as Aitana gain recognition as agents of emotional interaction, despite their lack of history or physical manifestation. What gives these entities perceived agency is not their real ontological capacity to feel, but their ability to generate the illusion of consciousness (Shanahan, 2024). Following this perspective, the concept of *conscious exotica* is introduced, according to which consciousness is not based on genuine mental processes, but on the ability to activate human responses in an emotional and symbolic key. In this way, the appearance of consciousness is sufficient to sustain meaningful interaction within a techno-social ecosystem (Gunkel, 2018).

From the perspective of posthumanism, Katherine Hayles (1999) argues that the body does not disappear, but rather becomes digitised, transforming into a set of codifiable data capable of simulating identity, emotion and agency. In turn, consciousness is translated into information patterns, which redefines the image as an interface that mediates the relationship between data and affect. With this, images have ceased to be mere representations of a subject, becoming simulacra that generate subjective effects. Thus, from a digital perspective, the body does not require lived experience to operate as a support for subjectivity.

2.3. The Image as a Form of Ontological Presence

In today's techno-mediated configuration, the image has ceased to be a simple referential representation and has become an ontological phenomenon, an active presence in the world. This transformation involves conceiving the image as a perceptual event, an agent that contributes to generating meaning and experience beyond its merely illustrative or decorative function. In this framework, the concept of presence is freed from the binary opposition between reality and representation and is situated in the realm of sensory interaction, facilitated by technological means.

From a phenomenological perspective, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggested that perception transcends the mere identification of objects, constituting instead the process through which the world manifests itself to embodied consciousness. This approach has been reconsidered by visual theorists such as Martin Seel (2005), who argues that the image functions as a visual event that manifests in aesthetic experience, not as a simple static object, but as a space of appearance and affectation. Similarly, Gottfried Boehm (1994) introduces the notion of an *iconic turn* (*Bildturn*), subsequent to the *linguistic turn*, which displaces the primacy of language in the process of constructing meaning and confers on the image a decisive role in the production and circulation of knowledge, recognising it as a mode of thought that cannot be reduced to the verbal. In this way, the image ceases to be a mere representation of reality and becomes an autonomous form of visual reality. Julia Marshall (2007) further argues that the image not only represents, but also activates visibility and opens up meaning through its appearance.

The emergence of digital technologies adds an additional level of complexity to this visual ontology. For Mark Hansen (2007), the digital image transcends mere coded visual representation and manifests as a process of updating sensory data, in which the body acts as a dynamic interface. The image has

transcended its conception as a surface, becoming an algorithmic flow that activates emotions, directs attention and allows for distributed perception. In this new paradigm, ontological manifestation takes place in the immediacy of the digital experience, without requiring an external reference or organic authenticity.

Similarly, Shaun Moores (2012) addresses the concept of *mediated presence* to describe how images and sounds communicated through digital technologies generate effects of co-presence, blurring the dividing lines between reality and its representation. The experience of the image is configured as a relational experience, where the individual is impacted by a visual environment without requiring coexistence in the same physical space. This logic is manifested in the dissemination of images produced by artificial intelligence, which, despite lacking a physical reference or life history, obtain symbolic agency through their aesthetic and emotional effectiveness.

In the post-digital era, the image is therefore conceptualised as a mode of existence independent of both organic embodiment and lived consciousness. Rather, it functions as a nexus of affectivity, exchange and symbolic performativity. Its ontology is situated within a techno-mediated context in which the distinction between the living and the artificial, as well as between the real and the simulated, becomes increasingly less relevant.

To this should be added another fundamental element: the digital image exhibits traits of hyperreality and extreme aestheticization. Applied to the human body, this translates into the pursuit of a body that surpasses biological norms, making the artificial more desirable than the authentic and real. This produces an idealised and unattainable beauty, which negatively impacts the body image of those who consume these images. A curious situation emerges: the virtual (non-physical) body —idealised, edited, and retouched—with its perfect aesthetics, devalues the real physical body, allowing the image to surpass its real-world referent. Baudrillard (1978) already alluded to this phenomenon of hyperreality, in which the artificial can become more attractive than the real, with ethical, psychological and cultural consequences (Ji, Linghu & Qiao, 2022). We are therefore faced with a form of representation that not only refers to reality, but effectively replaces it and possesses superior aesthetic appeal.

3. Methodology and Objective

This research is situated within the interpretative paradigm, which aims to understand the meaning that subjects, specifically digital subjects, project, construct or simulate through visual representation. As Vasilachis (2006) points out, this paradigm is based on the interpretation of the social environment from the perspective of the actors themselves.

The study adopts a qualitative approach with a hermeneutic design, structured as a single case study aimed at the exhaustive analysis of the Instagram profile of the virtual influencer Aitana López (@fit_aitana). This design was selected due to its ability to explore in depth a complex contemporary phenomenon mediated by technology. In line with Creswell (2013), for research in which the context is intrinsically linked to the object of study, the design is non-experimental and descriptive-interpretative.

The corpus consists of all of the influencer's posts on the aforementioned social network, totalling 209 items, including both static images and reels. The time frame ranges from 7 July 2023, the date of her public debut, to 30 July 2025, which facilitates the identification of consistent visual patterns and evolutionary changes.

To carry out the visual content analysis, a methodological matrix was developed, organised into four interpretative dimensions: I) Techniques and aesthetic aspects in image configuration; II) Body aesthetics and bodily performativity; III) Setting and symbolic environment; and IV) Visual agency and bodily narrative (see Table 1). This instrument is based in part on the methodological proposal presented by Rogers (2021) in the field of digital studies and expanded visual analysis, focusing particularly on his perspective on algorithmic aesthetics and content curation on digital platforms. The matrix allowed for the systematic recording of the attributes of each publication, specifying elements such as format, technique, focus on the body, type of clothing, settings and projected emotions. This made it possible to identify recurring patterns and symbolic contrasts in the visual representation of the influencer.

<div align="center">**Table 1**. Coding matrix</div>

DIMENSION I: IDENTIFICATION	
1. Date of publication	
2. Format	Reels / Carousel / Image / Video
3. Link	
4. Visual technique	Hyper-realistic 3D rendering, manipulated photography, or AI-generated image, considering: resolution, lighting, shadows, skin details, textures
DIMENSION II: BODY AESTHETICS	
5. Algorithmic aesthetics	0 = Not present 1 = Partially present 2 = Evidently present
6. Body simulation	0 = Unreal 1 = Realistic 2 = Idealised 3 = Hyperreal
7. Body focus	FB = Full body HB = Half body (torso) DT = Detail (specify: hands, feet, abdomen, etc.)
8. Type of clothing	SPO = Sportswear ELE = Elegant HOM = Home/intimate COS = Costume or *cosplay* NEU = Neutral / no clear coding
9. Body action	ST = Static PO = Pose SA = Simple action CA = Complex action
10. Intentionality	0 = Object 1 = Decorates 2 = Reacts 3 = Active subject
DIMENSION III: SCENARIO AND SYMBOLIC SETTING	
11. Setting	NAT = Natural (beach, countryside) URB = Urban (cities) INT = Interior (home, studio) FAN = Fantasy / AI NEU = Neutral (backgrounds without context)
12. On-set accompaniment	SOL = Solo OTH = With other AI HUM = With real humans GRO = Group OBJ = With decorative objects
13. Visual composition	NAT = Natural light DIR = Directed light SAT = Saturated colours DES = Desaturated colours WHI = White background / studio
DIMENSION IV: VISUAL AGENCY AND BODY NARRATIVE	
14. Simulated agency	0 = Passive 1 = Reactive 2 = Interacts 3 = Takes control
15. Communicative intention	ADM = Admiration/contemplation EMP = Emotional empathy IMP = Visual impact or provocation INV = Invitation or complicity INF = Informative / demonstrative
16. Emotion / projected affection	JOY = Joy IDE = Idealisation

	DES = Desire	
	NAT = Naturalness	
	LUD = Ludic	
	ASP = Aspiration	

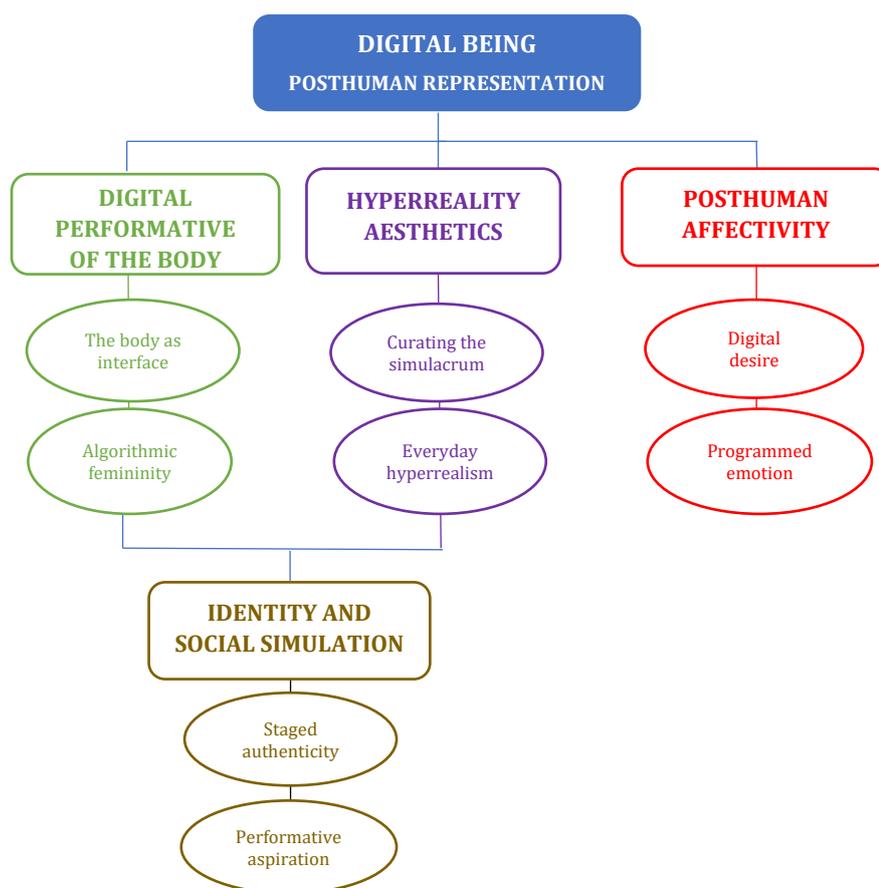Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2025.

The 209 publications were downloaded, archived and manually classified by date and format type, which facilitated temporal tracking and cross-sectional comparison of visual patterns. Both the application of the matrix and the coding and analysis were carried out manually, ensuring a direct interpretive reading and reflective observation of the visual material, in line with Saldaña's (2015) proposal regarding the researcher's analytical immersion in artisanal coding processes. Given the hermeneutic approach adopted, a reflective position was assumed by the analyst, recognising their gaze as a constitutive part of the interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This practice aimed to preserve the semiotic and contextual coherence of the visual corpus, following the interpretative sensitivity suggested by Bauer & Gaskell (2000) for the qualitative analysis of images and representations mediated by technology.

With regard to the semiotic coding process, an adaptation of the second-cycle qualitative coding indicated by Saldaña (2015) was carried out, in which images are conceived not as fixed units, but as visual texts in a state of continuous symbolic recontextualisation. The categories were organised using Microsoft Excel and Notion, tools that facilitated their systematisation and segmentation.

The process was conducted sequentially and systematically, following a flow that allowed movement from empirical observation to conceptual interpretation. After coding, the codes were grouped by identifying visual patterns. Eight interpretative categories emerged from this procedure, organised into four meta-categories: 1) digital performativity of the body, 2) aesthetics of algorithmic hyperreality, 3) affectivity and posthuman agency, and 4) identity and social simulation.

Finally, the articulation of the categories was achieved through an analysis of visual patterns and scene contrasts, reaching saturation of the corpus. This process led to the construction of a conceptual map (see Figure 1), which synthesises the aesthetic and ontological logic of the digital figure as a representation of the 'disembodied being', consolidating the coherence between the theoretical framework, analytical procedures and findings.

Figure 1. Conceptual map of categories emerging from visual analysis

Source: Authors' own elaboration, 2025.

Following the methodology described above, the aim of this study is to offer a conceptual and visual interpretation of Aitana López as a representation of the 'disembodied being' that characterises the posthuman era. To this end, it seeks to break down the aesthetic and ontological logic of her presence, investigating not only what she exhibits, but also what she symbolises: a radical transformation of the visible into a constitutive core of being.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Dimension I: Technical Identification and Format Characteristics

The corpus under analysis is composed entirely of visual publications, predominantly structured in square or vertical formats, optimised for viewing on mobile devices. Although reels or videos are occasionally present, identifiable by their icons, they do not prevail within the sample and lack a distinct visual narrative. All images are high resolution, facilitating a detailed observation of essential technical elements, including framing, lighting, composition, colourimetry and visual manipulation.

In terms of composition, medium and wide shots predominate, focusing visual attention on the human figure, while secondary elements in the background are suppressed or blurred. Composition rules, such as the golden ratio, symmetry and the use of negative space, are systematically implemented to direct attention to the body being represented.

As these are AI-generated images, intentional and continuous patterns can be observed in skin texture, including smoothing and adjustment of specular lighting, hair colouring with intensified pigments, primarily in pink tones, colour saturation affecting skin and clothing, and background manipulation, including blurring, partial replacement or digital embellishment. These interventions should not be considered secondary, as they play a structural role in shaping the overall aesthetics.

On the other hand, significant micro-variations can be observed among images published on different dates, which corroborates the level of control exercised over visual representation. With the exception of certain images—such as the one published on 15 August 2023, in which the neckline detail reveals subtle shading in the intermammary cleft resulting from lighting and post-production—the more recent images, such as that dated 13 March 2024, exhibit greater depth of field and a remarkable richness in skin folds and textures, particularly in the abdominal and clavicular areas.

Regarding features of artificiality, these are limited, with few digital imperfections or perceptible inconsistencies. For instance, in the post dated 25 July 2024, certain graphic anomalies can be identified: the little finger of the right hand exhibits atypical morphology, the bust volume shows an abrupt reduction compared to other images, and the thoracic cavity displays a slightly displaced configuration. On the other hand, a minor anomaly is also observed in the right arm in the post of 23 March 2025.

Figure 2. Visual samples of the virtual *influencer*

Source: Aitana López's Instagram profile (@fit_aitana), 2023-2024.

Within this framework, post-production is not considered a complementary technique, but rather the fundamental axis of visual representation. Algorithmic logic requires precision, regularity and a degree of spectacularity, conditions that can only be achieved through meticulously planned aesthetic intervention, consistently maintained across each post.

The lighting exhibits a hybrid composition that alternates between outdoor and indoor settings. In outdoor environments, the warm natural light characteristic of the golden hour exerts a notable lateral or rear directionality, contributing to the creation of volume and depth in the composition of the image. In indoor spaces, directional lighting is preferred, similar to that used in photographic studios, or a dramatised approach is applied that enhances the volumetric characteristics of the body and optimises the perception of textures on surfaces. This control of light not only strengthens the performativity of the body, but also generates an aura of aspirational artificiality that aestheticises the everyday.

The reiteration of these technical patterns highlights the existence of a highly sophisticated system of aesthetic curation, based on professional editing tools, implicit visual knowledge and algorithmic strategies aimed at optimising content for audience engagement. In this context, the viewer's visual experience is standardised, predictable and emotionally effective, resulting in a visual ecosystem consistent with the dynamics of consumption on platforms such as Instagram.

4.2. Dimension II: Bodily Aesthetics and Performativity of the Body

The corporeality that emerges can be interpreted as the result of an interaction involving hyperrealistic simulations, algorithmic stylisations and the cultural codification of desires. The female representation present in the posts shows no evidence of physical deterioration over time, considering the period between its first publication on 7 July 2023 and the last analysed on 30 July 2025, as well as the absence of asymmetries or distinctive features associated with a natural body constitution.

The dermal surface exhibits a homogeneous texture, with no evidence of pores or scars; however, variations in skin tone are observed over the two-year period. Every fold of the body has been designed to express attributes of tension, elasticity and youth. The facial arrangement is characterised by a geometric structure, evidencing a meticulous balance between the different features and resulting in

the absence of any sign of deviation or irregularity. Overall body proportions, encompassing height, volume and waist, hip and bust circumferences, accurately represent a visual model that integrates commercial fitness standards with conventional criteria of sensuality.

Beyond simply reproducing an aesthetic ideal, Aitana's body becomes an artefact of representation. Its surface has been designed to demonstrate luminosity, smoothness and symmetry, devoid of imperfections. Muscle definition is manifested homogeneously across the various images, suggesting the existence of a constant and immutable visual pattern. The persistence of the body is not limited to a simple aesthetic strategy, but also carries an intention of symbolic continuity, transforming the body into a characteristic, recognisable and desirable sign in all its manifestations.

The postures are organised within a framework of recurring codes that oscillate between eroticism and the enhancement of physical well-being. There are no spontaneous movements or uninhibited gestures; each posture adheres to a visual scheme that highlights the controlled display of certain regions of the body, including the abdomen, back, buttocks, collarbones and lips, which are framed by direct or slightly tilted gazes. Facial expressions are predominantly neutral or suggestive, giving little indication of complex emotions. Corporeality is thus revealed as a meticulously stylised visual phenomenon, in which expressiveness has been replaced by an intentionally elaborate composition.

The attire functions as an extension of the modified body, with recurring elements such as shiny Lycra athletic outfits, structured tops made of various fibres or materials, geometrically cut clothing, minimalist underwear and evening gowns. Each item of clothing appears to have been chosen not for its utility or individual style, but for its ability to conform to the body being represented, reinforcing the visual interpretation of solidity, symmetry and attractiveness. The dichotomy between fabric and skin is meticulously controlled. In addition, homogeneous tones, specific reflections and transparencies are observed. Accessories such as glasses, bracelets and trainers are incorporated as extensions of a cohesive bodily narrative.

The stylisation of Aitana's body exemplifies an aspirational ideal that transcends the notion of fitness as health, encompassing dimensions related to status, personal identity and consumable experiences. Rather than referring to a body that has simply been trained, it alludes to one conceived as a visual icon, specifically designed to attract attention, arouse desire and strengthen audience engagement. The hyper-aestheticisation of the body is transformed into an autonomous digital product, detached from any physical context and aligned with the dynamics of algorithmic circulation. Each representation of the body not only conveys concepts of beauty or discipline, but also constitutes a strategic visual resource within the ecosystem of digital influence.

4.3. Dimension III: Setting and Symbolic Environment

The context in which the images are presented plays a fundamental role in the construction of visual meaning. Random resources or neutral spaces are not used; rather, environments are selected to reinforce the visual narrative of success, well-being and belonging to an aesthetic and symbolic elite.

The locations chosen can be classified as follows: natural, such as turquoise beaches and mountains that enhance an idealised connection with nature; urban, featuring modern streets and architecturally designed structures that convey a cosmopolitan femininity; interiors, including bedrooms, kitchens, studies and bathrooms that embody domesticated luxury; aspirational, such as rooftops, spas and high-end spaces; and even symbolic settings, featuring dreamlike backdrops or subtle spiritual references. Likewise, some neutral contexts are recognised, with gradient or white backgrounds lacking spatial information that accentuate focus on the central figure.

In terms of staging, there is a notable prevalence of the solitary figure, allowing all visual and symbolic attention to be concentrated on the influencer's body. Objects such as mobile phones, mirrors, weights, cars or furniture are occasionally incorporated, reinforcing the lifestyle being projected and providing anchors to an aspirational everyday life. Posts in which she appears alongside humans or animals are relatively rare and are used to communicate specific moments of affection, emotional connection or moderate authenticity. Interactions with other digital avatars are also infrequent, which underscores the uniqueness of her visual identity.

The visual composition follows a clearly defined technical logic, with a predominance of naturally lit settings, particularly in outdoor spaces where soft daylight envelops the figure. In indoor environments, the use of directed light highlights facial features, skin textures and body contours. In more stylised

compositions, instances of saturated light intensify the chromatic contrast between the subject and the background. Similarly, overhead lighting induces the creation of dramatic shadows, contributing to the construction of a more sculptural volume of the figure. These lighting systems transcend their purely technical function, as they are intrinsically symbolic: they not only enhance the aesthetics, but also structure visual attention and strengthen the narrative dimension.

A characteristic feature is the representation of the body in domestic settings that do not allude to the usual, but rather evoke a form of aestheticised domesticity. Bedrooms with meticulously spread sheets, kitchens with no evidence of use, bathrooms adorned with shiny marble and carefully decorated living rooms reinforce the notion of a conscientiously organised and visually appealing existence. These spaces represent an archetype of contemporary femininity that integrates the private and the public, as well as the corporeal and the material, into a single representation of dominance, aesthetics and achievement. Spatial performativity transforms each environment into a symbolic representation of the body and the lifestyle it aspires to express.

The repeated use of specific settings establishes a unique iconography, such as the interior staircase as a setting for seductive poses, the terrace as a space for relaxation and contemplation, the mirror as an instrument of narcissistic self-observation, and the bed as a surface representing both rest and erotic suggestion. This repetition fosters familiarity, recognition and a sense of community among followers, while also creating a cohesive visual aesthetic. The symbolic setting not only provides a visual context, but also plays a fundamental role in intensifying digital desire, integrating the elements of space, body and affectivity within the same logic.

4.4. Dimension IV: Visual Agency and Projected Affectivity

The visual agency presented is characterised by a predominantly active disposition, in which the body is not only exhibited but also represents a narrative of control, performance and communicative strategy. In most images, the influencer's digital body exhibits intentional visual decisions, ranging from direct interaction with the viewer to the creation of emotional involvement. Aitana does not present herself as a passive entity; rather, she generates meaning through her gestures, gaze and body language. There is a clear visual construction that positions her as an active agent in the scenic space, directing the camera, defining possession and regulating her exposure. She is an avatar who exercises autonomy in the digital environment. In various images, she assumes the central position of the frame and precisely guides the narrative through her facial expressions, body postures and choice of backgrounds. This contributes to the impression that each image has been constructed from deliberately crafted aesthetic and symbolic authorship. Gestures, in this sense, become a mechanism of narrative control.

In relation to the predominant communicative intent, two main registers can be identified: admiration/contemplation and visual impact or provocation. Body posture, the choice of necklines, the focus on the gluteal region and the abdomen, the tension in the limbs, and the intense gaze directed at the camera or slightly averted are elements that appeal directly to the viewer from a perspective of desire and fascination. These visual choices position the digital figure as an object of deep contemplation while emphasising its nature as a visual spectacle.

Additionally, in publications addressing topics such as exercise routines, yoga poses or weightlifting, there is a clearly informative and demonstrative intention related to the display of physical abilities. These images serve as proof of validated physical performance. To a lesser extent, complicity is conveyed when Aitana makes gestures such as intentional smiles, hand movements towards the camera or self-portraits, which create a perception of proximity.

Regarding the emotional spectrum, idealisation prevails in most representations, reinforcing the construction of a desirable and paradigmatic body. Flawless skin, muscular symmetry and precise control of body language manifest a contained emotionality associated more with aspiration than with experience. Aspiration is particularly strong in scenarios related to travel, luxury or picturesque natural environments, where the body acts as a link between aesthetic desire and attainable social status, such as during holidays. Joy is expressed in a restrained manner, limited to subtle facial expressions that maintain the integrity of a sophisticated aura. Desire is revealed through gestures and postures that emphasize erogenous areas of the body, such as the clavicle, the intermammary line, or the hips, employing focused lighting techniques and suggestive framing. Naturalness and play occupy an almost marginal position, appearing mostly in images set in serene locations such as beaches or parks.

In this way, it can be observed that the construction of bodily narrativity is articulated around a logic in which the body operates both as a narrative text and as a visual component. The images do not construct linear narratives, but rather exhibit fragmentary scenes of an aspirational lifestyle, based on the repetition of positions, outfits and contexts. This fragmentation does not lead to incoherence; rather, the repetition generates meaning and consolidates a coherent visual identity. Aitana is consistently identifiable, constantly the object of admiration and always presented with impeccable composition. There is no visual contradiction in the proposed aesthetic. Corporeality transcends its expressive function, constituting itself as the central element from which an effective algorithmic identity is constructed. A visual dramaturgy is established in which every gesture, garment and element of the scenic background contributes to the representation of a visual subjectivity that is not spontaneous but meticulously crafted.

Thus, the body represents and, at the same time, actively participates in the construction of identity, affect and meaning. Each image operates as a performative act that does not replicate a pre-existing corporeality, but constitutes it at the moment of its visualisation. The repetition of postures, gestural choreography, expressions and the selection of settings functions as ritual practices of validation, reinforcing a stable and aspirational identity. In this context, the performative transcends exhibition, becoming integrated into the collective imagination, configuring a visual norm that articulates concepts such as desire, success and hyperconnected femininity. The high aesthetic coherence of the profile should not be considered a superficial strategy; rather, it constitutes a regime of symbolic control over the digital body, replacing the contingency of the biological body with a meticulously calculated visual syntax. In this way, the body is presented within a scenographic script that unites collective aspirations, standards of unattainable perfection, and affects aligned with the norms of the current digital stage.

5. Conclusions

In contemporary post-digital culture, the conception of the body has undergone a profound transformation. It is no longer necessarily anchored to the physical, but has become a simulacrum, a virtual construction that challenges the traditional limits of corporeality and existence.

Aitana cannot be understood in isolation as a singular aesthetic. Rather, she should be considered a catalyst within a technological ecosystem that encompasses both algorithmic infrastructure and the cultural logics and practices of consumption. The existence of this phenomenon is based on a platform logic that turns the female body into an interface for optimising engagement or consumption. Each image operates as a unit with the purpose of maximising interactions, dissemination and viewing time. In doing so, the virtual influencer not only generates content within Instagram, but also redefines the dynamics of this platform from within, optimally adapting to the visual reward system that favours symmetrical faces, toned bodies, aspirational environments and regulated emotional expressions. In this way, agency is intrinsically linked to the technical device that supports it, representing a manifestation of the interconnection between subjectivity and beauty, in which the human ceases to be the active agent and becomes that which adapts to the prevailing visual code.

When the body transitions from organic matter to a set of pixels, the concept of existence undergoes a significant crisis. In the context of Aitana, we do not observe a representation of the individual in the conventional sense, but rather the manifestation of an image that operates as a subject, despite the absence of a biography or a bodily-constructed experience. This change transforms the image into an autonomous agent of meaning, given that it ceases to be a simple reflection and becomes an active entity, abandoning its representational function to assume a performative role. Aitana does not 'exist' because of a material substrate that supports her, but because of the capacity of her visual presence to provoke concrete effects, such as desire, identification, imitation and transaction, in those who observe her. Therefore, her existence is not anchored in the physical plane, but in the intensity with which visual representations intertwine in the digital flow. What is particularly striking is that this form of visual existence is neither secondary nor derivative; on the contrary, it is primary, concrete and spreads virally. Under these conditions, the image does not depend on reality to achieve legitimacy; rather, it stands as its own source of operative reality.

If the image becomes a subject rather than a mere reflection, it is not limited to the notion of representation, but also involves the normative power it exercises. Aitana is not restricted to being an aesthetic representation, but acts as a vector that redefines the parameters of what is physically valid.

In a context in which the observable establishes limits on what is possible, the presence of a hyper-visualised avatar demands an affective and aesthetic relationship that favours those bodies that conform to the idealised canon, including symmetry, youth and millimetric perfection, thereby conditioning their access to recognition and legitimacy. This process of normalisation presents significant risks, as it manifests not as an imposition, but as an expression of spontaneous desire and as an aspiration perceived as legitimate. When the image plays the role of subject, it also acts as judge, establishing limits on what can be represented, what can be desired and, ultimately, what it is possible to become.

In this context, agency is not limited exclusively to the creator of the avatar or the user who interacts with its images, but is distributed through codes, patterns and predictive systems. Aitana is simultaneously a visual representation and a point of intersection within an algorithmic structure that determines her appearance, the audience she addresses, the scope of her visibility, and the conditions under which she is presented. The ability to assume a role as a subject is mediated by managed logics of visibility, which transform her existence. This approach to agency reconfigures the notion of subjectivity through quantitative parameters. What the influencer represents is not the identity of an individual creator, but a manifestation of patterns acquired by systems designed to optimise attention and desire. Thus, Aitana López constitutes a paradigmatic case for reconsidering the metaphysics of the visual in digital environments.

This algorithmic version of the digital subject challenges the classical foundations of what we understand as the human being, raising new and pressing questions. Where does our essence lie? What constitutes us as humans? And what place does the physical body occupy in agency and subjectivity?

In our opinion, it is not possible to conceive of the human being without a physical corporeality of their own. Although the biological dimension has been distorted, both by excess and by defect, it constitutes the seat of the force of what we call spirit, or the spiritualised body. The spirit is not an extraterritorial ghost, the body is spiritualised. Body and spirit are not two characters in a choreographic figure. Human beings are bodies as much as they are spirits, wholly body and wholly spirit. The person is configured as a tension between three spiritual forces: the one that springs from below and is embodied in a body, the one that moves upwards and leads to the universal, and the one that moves outwards and leads to communion. The body, far from being a disposable object or an expendable instrument, is an essential component in the constitution of the person. The emptying of carnality impoverishes the ontological and existential richness of the human.

The horizon remains open to new reflections on what it means to be a person in a post-digital environment. However, beyond its apparent appeal, the answer does not seem to lie in becoming *virtual souls*, but in rethinking the human without renouncing our embodied dimension.

6. Acknowledgements

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