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A LEG TO STAND ON: PROSTHETICS,
METAPHOR, AND MATERIALITY¹

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Matter has been given infinite fertility, inexhaustible vitality, and at the same time, a seductive power of temptation which invites us to create as well.

—Bruno Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles*²

It is this submission which is offered as a sacrifice to the glamorous singularity of an inhuman condition.

—Roland Barthes, "The Jet-Man," in *Mythologies*³

Let me begin with the fact that I have a prosthetic left leg—and thus a certain investment in and curiosity about the ways in which "the prosthetic" has been embraced and recreated by contemporary scholars trying to make sense (and theory) out of our increasingly technologized lives. When I put my leg on in the morning, knowing that I am the one who will give it literal (if exhaustible) vitality even as it gives me literal support, I don't find it nearly as seductive a matter—or generalized an idea—as do some of my academic colleagues. And walking around during the day, going to teach a class or to shop at the supermarket, neither do I feel like Barthes's "reified hero," the "Jet-Man"—a mythological "semi-object" whose prosthetically enhanced flesh has sacrificially submitted itself to "the glamorous singularity of an inhuman condition." Not only do I see myself as fully human (if hardly singular or glamorous), but I also know intimately my prosthetic leg's essential inertia and lack of motivating volition. Indeed, for all the weight

that I place on it, it does not run my life. And thus, as I engage a variety of recent work in the humanities and arts, I am both startled and amused at the extraordinary moves made of and by “the prosthetic” of late—particularly since my prosthetic leg can barely stand on its own and certainly will never go out dancing without me.

Particularly, shall we say, “well equipped” to do so, I want both to critique and redress this metaphorical (and, dare I say, ethical) displacement of the prosthetic through a return to its premises in lived-body experience. However, this return will not be direct—but rather by way of what might be called a “topological phenomenology.”⁴ In *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, Paul Ricoeur writes: “If there is a point in our experience where living expression states living existence, it is where our movement up the entropic slope of language encounters the movement by which we come back this side of the distinctions between actuality, action, production, motion.”⁵ Thus, in what follows, I pay as much attention to language as I do to lived bodies. This is because there are both an *oppositional tension* and a *dynamic connection* between *the* prosthetic as a topological figure and *my* prosthetic as a material but also a phenomenologically lived artifact—the *the* and the *my* here indicating differences both of kind and degree between generalization and specificity, figure and ground, esthetics and pragmatics, alienation and incorporation, subjectivity and objectivity, and between (as Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum put it) “a cultural trope and a material condition that indelibly affect[s] people’s lives.”⁶ Thus, it is not my aim to privilege here autobiographical experience as somehow “more authentic” than “less authentic” discursive experience. Experience of any kind requires both bodies and language for its expression, and both autobiographical and discursive experiences are real in that they both have material causes and consequences. It is also not my aim here to hobble flights of scholarly or artistic imagination and deny them the freedom of mobility that I have come to dearly cherish. In this regard (although I return to my own prosthetic leg—as well as to the prosthetic legs of an extraordinary woman who has made both the metaphorical and the material dance to her own choreography—later in this chapter), such an anecdotal move is not meant to overvalue the “secret” knowledge that is possessed and revealed by the cultural other who has a real prosthetic. Rather, it is meant to ground and expand the topological premises of “the prosthetic” as it

informs the aesthetic and ethical imagination of the humanities and arts. Perhaps a more embodied “sense-ability” of the prosthetic by cultural critics and artists will lead to a greater apprehension of “response-ability” in its discursive use.

1

Sometime, fairly recently, after “the cyborg” became somewhat tired and tiresome from academic overuse, we started to hear and read about “the prosthetic”—less as a specific material replacement of a missing limb or body part than as a sexy, new metaphor that, whether noun or (more frequently) adjective, has become topological currency for describing a vague and shifting constellation of relationships among bodies, technologies, and subjectivities. In an important essay called “The Prosthetic Imagination: Enabling and Disabling the Prosthetic Trope” that investigates the scholarly uses and abuses of the prosthetic, Sarah S. Jain writes: “As a trope that has flourished in a recent and varied literature concerned with interrogating human–technology interfaces, ‘technology as prosthesis’ attempts to describe the joining of materials, naturalizations, excorporations, and semi-otic transfer that also go far beyond the medical definition of ‘replacement of a missing part.’”⁷

We have, for example, “prosthetic consciousness” (“a reflexive awareness of supplementation”)⁸ and “prosthetic memory” (the public extroversions of photography and cinema that cast doubt on the privilege of interiority that once constructed individual subjectivity and identity). Then there is the “prosthetic aesthetic,” which “extends our thinking on the relationship between aesthetics, the body, and technology as an a priori prosthetic one.”¹⁰ We have also “prosthetic territories,” described as “where technology and humanity fuse,”¹¹ “prosthetic devices,” such as “autobiographical objects,” that are “an addition, a trace, and a replacement for the intangible aspects of desire, identification, and social relations;”¹² and “prosthetic processes,” such as “contemporary aging,” that point to a “postmodern state [that] is clearly a prosthetic creature cobbled together out of various organic and cybernetic sub-units.”¹³ And then there is a recent issue of *Cultural Anthropology* that produces what might be called the “prosthetic subaltern” in two essays, respectively entitled “Stumped Identities: Body Image, Bodies Politic, and the *Mujer Maya* as Prosthetic” and “Desire and the Prosthetics of

Supervision: A Case of Maquiladora Flexibility.”¹⁴ Indeed, as Diane M. Nelson (author of the first essay) points out in her introduction to the issue’s focus on prosthesis and cultural analysis:

*The prosthetic metaphor is drawn from recent work in cyborg anthropology, feminist studies of science, philosophy, political economy, disability studies, and neurophysiology. . . . [P]rosthesis mediate a whole series of those binaries we know we need to think beyond, but which still tend to ground our politics and our theory (self/other, body/technology, actor/ground, first world/third world, normal/disabled, global/local, male/female, West/East, public/private).*¹⁵

This is a tall order for a metaphor to fill. Furthermore, somehow, somewhere, in all this far-reaching and interdisciplinary cultural work (and with the exception of disability studies), the literal and material ground of the metaphor has been largely forgotten, if not disavowed. That is, the primary context in which “the prosthetic” functions literally rather than figuratively has been left behind—as has the experience and agency of those who, like myself, actually use prostheses without feeling “posthuman” and who, moreover, are often startled to read about all the hidden powers that their prostheses apparently exercise both in the world and in the imaginations of cultural theorists. Indeed, most of the scholars who embrace the prosthetic metaphor far too quickly mobilize their fascination with artificial and “posthuman” extensions of “the body” in the service of a rhetoric (and, in some cases, a poetics) that is always located *elsewhere*—displacing and generalizing the prosthetic before exploring it first on its own quite extraordinarily complex, literal (and logical) ground. As Jain points out in her critique, “So many authors use it as an introductory point—a general premise underpinning their work about the ways in which technoscience and bodies interact,” and thus the “metaphors of prosthetic extension are presented as if they were equivalent in some way, from typewriters to automobiles, hearing aids to silicone implants. . . . Both the prosthesis and the body are generalized in a form that denies how bodies can and do ‘take up’ technologies of all kinds.”¹⁶

There is, then, a certain scandal to this metaphorical displacement and generalization—not because my (or anyone else’s) literal and specific experiences of prosthesis are sacrosanct or because the metaphor obliterates the political atroc-

ities of mass amputations by land mines in Cambodia or by civil war in Sierra Leone.¹⁷ Rather, the scandal of the metaphor is that it has become a fetishized and “unfleshed-out” catchword that functions vaguely as the ungrounded and “floating signifier” for a broad and variegated critical discourse on technoculture that includes little of these prosthetic realities. That is, the metaphor (and imagination) is too often less expansive than it is reductive, and its figuration is less complex and dynamic in aspect and function than the object and relations from whence it was—dare I say—amputated. As Steven L. Kurzman (himself an amputee) summarizes in the aforementioned special issue of *Cultural Anthropology*:

*Rather than develop a metaphor based on ethnographic material about artificial limbs or other prosthetic devices (e.g., breast implants, dental implants, joint implants, and so on), [scholars] develop a theoretical model to explain a problem arising out of a completely different topic and then retroactively define it in the world of amputation and artificial limbs. . . . Prosthesis simultaneously occupies the space of artificial limbs, metaphor, and discursive framework. The metaphor becomes unsituated and an instance of totalizing theory, managing to be both everywhere and nowhere simultaneously.*¹⁸

In this regard, it is useful to think more specifically, if briefly, about the *function* of metaphor. To be fair to all of us who use metaphor (and who doesn’t?), we must acknowledge that metaphor is, by tropological nature, a *displacement*: a nominative term is displaced from its mundane (hence literal, nonfigurative) context and placed elsewhere to illuminate some other context through its *refiguration*. That is, by highlighting certain relations of structural or functional resemblance that might not be noticed without the transportation of a foreign object into an otherwise naturalized scene, an analogy is constituted. However, as Paul Ricoeur notes (quoting Pierre Fontanier), metaphor “does not . . . refer to objects”; rather, “it consists ‘in presenting one idea under the sign of another that is more striking or better known.’”¹⁹ Thus, primarily based on the relation of *ideas* rather than *objects* and on structural and functional resemblances rather than physical similarities, metaphorical usage does not owe any necessary allegiance to the literal object—such as a prosthesis—that generated it. Nonetheless, it does owe necessary allegiance to a “common opinion” about the object and context that needs to acknowledge the resemblance sufficiently to “get” the analogy. As Ricoeur sums up: “resemblance

is principally a relationship between ideas, between generally held beliefs.” Thus, not only does analogy operate between ideas of structure and function rather than between objects as such, but the “idea itself is to be understood not ‘from the point of view of the object seen by the spirit’ but ‘from the point of view of the spirit that sees.’”²⁰

It is not surprising, then, that the “spirited” individuals who use prostheses in the most literal (rather than literary) sense have some major problems with the prosthetic metaphor as it is seen (and used) by those whose point of view is positioned in some theoretical rather than practiced—and practical—space. In this regard (and following the work done by Jain), Kurzman emphasizes not only the short shrift given to actually substantiating the theoretical use of the metaphor (that is, justifying the analogy through careful comparison and contrast of specific structures and functions) but also two major and consequential reversals and reductions that have attended its current theoretical usage and that do not correspond to the common opinion of most of us who actually use prostheses.

First, despite the metaphor’s emergence from an apparent and critical interrogation that is meant to disrupt the traditional notion of the body as whole, unlike Donna Haraway’s nonhierarchical and hybrid cyborg the metaphor of the prosthetic and its technological interface with the body is predicated on a naturalized sense of the body’s previous and privileged “wholeness.”²¹ Furthermore, this corporeal wholeness tends to be constituted in purely *objective* and *visible* terms: body “parts” are seen (from an “observer’s” point of view) as missing or limited, and some “thing” other (or some “other” thing) is substituted or added on to take their place. This predication (and point of view) elides the phenomenological—and quite different—structural, functional, and aesthetic terms of those who successfully *incorporate* and *subjectively live* the prosthetic and sense themselves neither as lacking something nor as walking around with some “thing” that is added on to their bodies. Rather, in most situations, the prosthetic as lived in use is usually *transparent*; that is, it is as “absent” (to use Drew Leder’s term) as is the rest of our body when we’re focused outward to the world and successfully engaged in the various projects of our daily life.²² Ideally incorporated not “into” or “on” but “as” the subject, the prosthetic becomes an object only when a mechanical or social problem pushes it obtrusively into the foreground of the user’s consciousness—much in the manner in which a blister on a heel takes on an objective

presence that is something other even though the body’s own bodily fluid and stretched skin constitute it. Thus, the existence or use of a prosthetic does not determine whether a user feels that his or her body is disrupted. Indeed, in common use, as Kurzman writes, “Artificial limbs do not *disrupt* amputees’ bodies, but rather reinforce our publicly perceived normalcy and humanity. . . . [A]rtificial limbs and prostheses only disrupt . . . what is commonly considered to be the naturally whole and abled Body.”²³

Second, Kurzman points to the way in which the theoretical use of the prosthetic metaphor tends to transfer *agency* (albeit not subjectivity, as with the cyborg) from human actors to human artifacts. Paradoxically, this transfer of agency indicates a certain technofetishism on the part of the theorist—however closeted and often antithetical to the overt critique of certain aspects of technoculture for which the metaphor was mobilized. As an effect of the prosthetic’s amputation and displacement from its mundane context, the animate and volitional human beings who use prosthetic technology disappear into the background—passive, if not completely invisible—and the prosthetic is seen to have a will and life of its own. Thus we move from technofetishism to *technoanimism*. For example, Landsberg, in “Prosthetic Memory,” cites a Thomas Alva Edison film, made as early as 1908, called *The Thieving Hand*, in which an armless beggar is provided with a prosthetic arm that once belonged to a thief and, against his will—but not the arm’s—starts stealing.²⁴ A similar agency is cinematically granted to the prosthetic arm belonging to the crazed German nuclear scientist in *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (directed by Stanley Kubrick, 1964). In terms of body parts, more arms and hands (which in fantasy often slip and slide between the severed limb and the prosthetic) have been granted agency by the cinema than legs. Perhaps, and I speculate, this is because, having an opposable thumb, a hand has essentially a broad and dramatic range of acting skills.²⁵

According to this seductive (and culturally recurrent) fantasy of the uncanny and willful life of limbs and objects, my prosthetic leg can go dancing without me and also can “will” me to join it in what, in effect, is a nightmarish *danse macabre*. And in the context of both technofetishism and technoanimism, I cannot help but recall my beloved *The Red Shoes* (directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1948). Antedating both my own encounter with a prosthetic leg and our current culture of “high technophilia” (which might regard shoes as a fetish

but certainly not a technology), the film, based on a Hans Christian Andersen story, concerns a young ballerina who gets her big break in a ballet about a woman who longs for a pair of red slippers that, when she finally gets to put them on, force her to dance until she dies from exhaustion. Such transfers of human agency to our technologies allow our artifacts to come back with a vengeance. Thus, in amused response to reading a theoretical essay on the prosthetic that was rife with technoanimism, Kurzman imagines his “modest collection of below-knee prosthetic legs” (kept in a box in his basement) developing “a collective consciousness of oppression” when they realize that he had “been using them to complete [his] identity” and “march[ing] upstairs to have a word with [him] about it.”²⁶

In effect, the current metaphorical displacement of the prosthetic into other contexts (because of its analogical usefulness in pointing out certain vaguely specified structural and functional resemblances between ideas) also—and mistakenly—displaces agency from human to artifact and operates, as Kurzman puts it, as a “silencing dynamic of *disavowal*.” Contemporary scholars (and many artists as well) are unwitting technophiles who, despite their critiques of global technoculture, too often “represent prosthesis and phantom limbs as agents, and amputees are present only as stumps and phantoms, which metonymically embody our lack of presence and subjectivity. Amputees . . . become ‘the ground’: the invisible, silent basis of the metaphor.”²⁷

Kurzman’s use of the term *metonymy* here seems to me critical to our understanding of the negative reaction that many prosthetic users have to the current “prosthetic imagination” and also of the specific figural differences and consequent relational meanings and functions that “the prosthetic” discursively serves. Metonymy is a figural operation that is quite different in function, effect, and meaning from metaphor (even as it is often imprecisely subsumed by it). It is even more significantly quite different from *synecdoche*, with which it appears almost—and problematically—symmetrical. These differences often discursively slip and slide into each other in ways that are confusing, but they also form the expressive and dynamic ground of the varying, confused, and ambivalent ways in which prostheses are seen in their relation to the human beings who use them.

In this regard, Ricoeur (again glossing Fontanier) is particularly helpful. He differentiates the figural operations of the three species of tropes—metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche—by their respective relations of *resemblance*, relations

of *correspondence* (or *correlation*), and relations of *connection* and goes on to explore these relations and their consequences in detail. Earlier I pointed out that predicated on relations of resemblance, metaphor operates to construct an analogy, presenting “one idea under the sign of another,” primarily through highlighting similarities between the structural or functional aspects of objects rather than between the literal objects as such. Hence the prosthetic as a metaphor easily—and often—takes on adjectival form, characterizing and qualifying other nouns rather than serving a noun function itself: “prosthetic memory,” “prosthetic territories,” and so forth. Unlike metaphor, however, metonymy and synecdoche *do* primarily refer to objects—albeit quite differently. Constructing relations of correspondence or correlation, metonymy “brings together two objects each of which constitutes ‘an absolutely separate whole.’ This is why metonymy divides up in turn according to the relationships that satisfy the general condition of correspondence—cause to effect, instrument to purpose, container to content, thing to its location, sign to signification, physical to moral, model to thing.”²⁸ In relation to the prosthetic, this variety of relationships plays out across the relevant literature as well as in the culture at large. For example, as Kurzman notes, the way in which agency is transferred from the amputee to the prosthetic is clearly metonymic in character; the cause-and-effect relation between two “absolutely separate wholes”—a human and an artifact—is exaggerated and becomes not an ensemble but the seemingly complete transference of force or influence from one species of object or event to another.

Synecdoche, unlike metonymy, constructs relations of connection through which “two objects ‘form an ensemble, a physical or metaphysical whole, the existence or idea of one being included in the existence or idea of the other.’” This relationship of connection, Ricoeur writes, like metonymy, also divides up into a variety of subordinate but constitutive relations—“relations of part to whole, material to thing, of one to many, of species to genus, of abstract to concrete, of species to individual.”²⁹ Particularly important to an understanding of tropes and to the troubled—and troubling—figural usage of the prosthetic is that, however symmetrical the functions of metonymy and synecdoche may appear, metonymic correspondence and synecdochic connection are radically different and “designate two relationships as distinct as *exclusion* (‘absolutely separate whole’) and *inclusion* (‘included in . . .’).”³⁰ In relation to Jain and Kurzman’s critiques—and to

the perceptual and discursive conflict between “the point of view of the object seen by the spirit” and “the point of view of the spirit that sees”—the metonymic discourse of scholars (who describe the prosthetic *objectively* as an absolutely different species from the body) is exclusionary and is at odds with the synecdochic discourse of amputees (who describe their prosthetic *subjectively* as of the same species as the body that has incorporated and therefore included it). Thus, significant figural movement occurs from metonymy to synecdoche—from *the* prosthetic viewed abstractly to *my* prosthetic leaning up against the wall near my bed in the morning to *my* leg, which works with the other one and enables me to walk. And here it is worth pausing to note how the notion of my “other” leg functions in the previous sentence: that is, my “real” leg suddenly becomes the “other.” But this is a false—and hence justly confusing—opposition, as well as a telling reversal of figure and ground. My “real” leg and my “prosthetic” leg are not usually lived as two absolutely different and separate things since they function as an ensemble and are each a part of my body participating in the whole movement that gets me from here to there. Thus, they are *organically* related in practice (if not in material) and are, to a great degree, *reversible* each with the other (my leg can stand in a part-to-whole synecdochic relationship with my body and vice versa). To refer back to Ricoeur and Fontanier, as I live them subjectively (and ambiguously), my two objective legs “*form an ensemble, a physical [and] metaphysical whole, the existence [and] idea of one being included in the existence [and] idea of the other.*”

Regarding the tropological tendency to see the prosthetic (and sometimes to live it) in metonymic relation to the body, the inclusiveness of synecdochic connection is not always as complete in existence as it is utopian in desire. Robert Rawdon Wilson writes: “Any consideration of prostheses has to take into account their potential failure and, even, the conditions under which they might go wrong or turn against their users. The consciousness of machines always includes . . . a dimension of fear. There is also fear’s most intimate radical, an element of potential disappointment: the prosthesis may not work, or may work inadequately, or may entail unwanted consequences.”³¹ Although I really never feel as though my prosthetic leg possesses the agency or subjectivity to “turn against” me, I admit that it does have the capacity to become opaque, to turn into a hermeneutic object that I have to pay attention to and interpret and do something about (other than transparently walk with it). That is, my leg is transformed metonymically at

times to another (inhuman) species of thing—the prosthetic resisting its formerly organic function in an ensemble of action directed elsewhere. In these moments, it becomes an absolute other. This can happen suddenly—as when I lose a certain amount of suction in the socket that holds my leg in place, and I feel (quite literally) a bit detached from the leg and have to press the valve on its side to recreate a vacuum. Or as is more often the case, it can happen gradually—as when over a long and hot day of walking, a combination of sweat and the pressure of the edge of the socket begins to chafe my flesh and, if I don’t “do” something about it, causes an abrasion.

Like the turns and effects of language in use, my experience—and view—of my leg (and of the rest of my body) is not only *dynamic* and *situated* but also *ambiguous* and *graded*. Whether and to what degree I live (and describe) my prosthetic metaphorically, metonymically, or synecdochically is dependent on the nature of my engagements with others (how do they see it, avoid it, or talk about it abstractly, or can I keep pace with them?), with my environment (when I’m in unfamiliar territory, the question is always “How far can I walk on it?”), with my mood (how physically attractive or frumpy do I feel overall, and what part of myself will I single out for praise or blame?), and my project (how do I write about “my leg” or “it” within the context of cultural studies?). In sum, Jain, Kurzman, and I question two major aspects of the tropology of the prosthetic. First, it is vague, if not inaccurate, as a metaphor that is meant to foreground the similarity of its structures and functions with various other ideas and institutional practices. Second, it has an objectifying and often stultifying tendency to privilege and essentialize metonymic and oppositional relations that separate body and prosthetic, thus neglecting or disavowing both the synecdochic relations that posit the cooperation and connective union of body and prosthetic in world-directed tasks and also the complex and dynamic ambiguity of all these possible existential and tropological relations as they are situated and lived.

2

I now focus, as earlier promised, on a few specific prosthetic legs—first my own rather mundane one and then the much more flamboyant ones of double below-the-knee (BK) amputee Aimee Mullins, a successful model and record-breaking

paralympian sprinter, who has subsequently gone on to celebrity as a motivational speaker, a writer, one of *People* magazine's "Fifty Most Beautiful People" in 1999, and the leading lady of *Cremaster 3* (2002), the latest in artist Matthew Barney's series of art-house films filled with "impressive prosthetics and special effects."³² This move to the specific and material does not leave the realm of tropology but, rather, animates it—and the human-technology interface—with the complexity, ambiguity, and desire that are revealed both in "discourse" and by "real bodies" that are living both real and imaginative lives.

Here I want to stay grounded in (rather than displaced from) the materially, historically, and culturally situated premises of "the prosthetic"—even as the prosthetic also engages an experiential and discursive realm that is larger than that of its merely literal materiality, situation, and logic. As becomes particularly evident—and dramatic—in the case of Aimee Mullins's legs, such grounding of the prosthetic does not disavow figuration (which, in any case, cannot be avoided). Rather, metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche are put in the service of illuminating the nature and experience of our prostheses instead of the prosthetic serving to illuminate something else (and elsewhere). Furthermore, even in my own mundane instance, focusing on the specificity of the prosthetic in its primary context functions also to highlight the contingent and uncanny play of its (and my) tropological and existential possibilities. That is, the prosthetic's many inconsistencies in use and its elements that are theoretically paradoxical yet creatively functional not only account for the fascination it holds for others but also open up imagination and analysis to an expanded range of action and description.

Beginning with my own situation, I want to take the general and vague trope of "technology as prosthesis" that Jain and Kurzman criticize and *reverse* it—turning it back and regrounding it in its mundane context where, like my prosthetic leg, it stands objectively in common opinion as the general and vague trope of "prosthesis as technology." This reversal neither rejects the supposed purpose of the initial metaphor (which according to Jain's description, "attempts to describe the joining of materials, naturalizations, excorporations, and semiotic transfer that also go[es] far beyond the medical definition of 'replacement of a missing part'") nor does away with figuration. Rather, viewing the prosthesis as technology allows me to stake out (and stand) my ground in the *materiality* of the prosthetic and

its incorporation—and in the process to playfully reconnect such figurative descriptions as "standing one's ground" with their quite literal "underpinnings."

In the summer of 1993, as the result of a recurrent soft-tissue cancer in my thigh, my left leg—after three operations, literally as well as metaphorically, "a drag"—was amputated high above the knee. For six months or so, while my flesh was still healing and I was engaged in strenuous preliminary rehabilitation, I got about using crutches (and here we might wonder not only how but also if crutches "hold up" in today's high-tech prosthetic imagination). Finally, however, my body was ready to go through the arduous plaster casting, fiberglass molding, and microfitting of a prosthetic leg so that I could begin to learn to walk again—a fairly lengthy and complex process that imbricated both intensive mechanical adjustment and physical practice. There were all sorts of physical things that I had to learn to do consciously in quick sequence or, worse, simultaneously: kick the prosthetic leg forward to ground the heel, tighten my butt, pull my residual limb back into the socket, weight the prosthetic leg to lock the knee, take a step with my "own" leg and unweight the prosthetic leg as I did so, tighten my stomach and pull up tall to kick the prosthetic forward, and begin again. This nonetheless took a great deal less time than I feared it would, given my middle-age, general physical clumsiness, and almost willful lack of intimacy with my own body. Although it took much longer for me to develop a smoothly cadenced gait, I was functionally walking in a little over a month.

A prosthetic leg has many components and involves dynamic mechanical and physical processes, as well as a descriptive vocabulary all its own. As an above-the-knee (AK) amputee, I have had four successive sockets that were molded of fiberglass and "thermo-flex" plastic to conform, over time, to the changing shape of my stump. The first socket was secured to my body tenuously through a combination of suspension belt and multilayered cotton "socks" of different thickness, which were added or subtracted depending on my fluid retention, the weather, and my slowly changing shape. Several sockets replaced that first one, and they were secured snugly through suction. Now I put the leg on by pulling my flesh into the socket with a "pulling sock" and then screw a valve into a threaded plastic hole embedded in the fiberglass, depressing it so that all the air escapes and my stump and the socket mold themselves each to the other. I have also had three different

metal knee mechanisms that are made out of aluminum and titanium, all of which were attached to a small wooden block that was bonded to the socket. The first was a mechanical knee with an interior safety “brake” that could be set to freeze at a certain angle to stabilize me in “midfall” inflexion; the second, a double-axis hydraulic knee that I didn’t like because its reaction time seemed to lag behind my increasingly accomplished and fluid movements; and the third, my current single-axis hydraulic knee whose extension and inflexion move transparently (at least most of the time) in isomorphic concert with my own bodily rhythms.

Over time, two different lightweight metal leg rods (replacing my tibia and fibula) have run from the knee mechanism down into the foot—the first a dull silvery aluminum rather like the stuff of my crutches and the second a glowing chartreuse green titanium that I sometimes think a shame to hide. (Before the cosmetic cover was added, I remember an eleven-year-old boy coming over to me to admire it and crow, “Cool. . . Terminator!”) Ultimately, these metal rods, like the rest of the leg and thigh, were covered with foam that my prosthetist sculpted and shaped to complement, albeit not exactly match, my fleshy leg. (The prosthetic thigh is a bit thinner than my real thigh since it’s not as malleable as flesh is in relation to clothing.) And then I’ve also had two feet although I’ve only needed one at a time—both of hard rubber composition with an interior spring that allows me to “roll over” and shift my weight from heel to ball even without an ankle joint, both the same model Seattle Foot. (Prosthetics often have place names like the Oklahoma Socket, the Boston Elbow, the Utah Arm.) Given my replacement and accumulation over time of all these prosthetic parts, I now have a complete spare leg in the depths of my closet behind some winter coats that I have no need for in California, and somewhere in the trunk of my car, there’s an extra socket (put there and never taken out after I got a new lighter-weight one). Finally, along with the crutches that I use in the early morning before I shower or when I wake up late at night to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom, I have about six or seven metal, plastic, and wooden canes. Because my remaining femur is extremely short—little more than two inches in length—I need the cane for stability. It basically counters the slight torquing and consequent “wobble” of the pliable mass of flesh within my socket and thus helps ground my walk (but, again, we might ask if canes count in today’s prosthetic imagination).

I’ve paid as much as \$79.95 for the best of my canes (they can run into hundreds of dollars when they have silver handles shaped as the heads of hunting dogs to disguise physical need as aristocratic attitude), but I really do not know precisely how many thousands of dollars my prosthetic legs cost. Since I am one of a fortunate few who belong to a health maintenance organization (HMO) that covers such expenses and sends me no bills, I have been spared contemplation of the enormous and quality-of-life-threatening sums of money spent on producing, purchasing, and maintaining my prostheses.³³ Nonetheless, my research tells me that my full (and rather ordinary) AK leg probably cost no less than \$10,000 to \$15,000, since a top-of-the-line carbon fiber BK prosthesis used for sports competition (with a special flexible foot that its inventor calls the Cheetah) costs at least \$20,000 per leg. Should I wish it (which I don’t), I could request that my HMO approve the purchase and fitting of Otto Bock’s latest c-leg—whose micro-processors, strain gauges, angle detectors, hydraulics, and electronic valves “recreate the stability and step of a normal leg” and that, as the *New York Times* reports, was a “lifesaver” for Curtis Grimsley who used the leg “to walk down from the 70th floor of the World Trade Center on September 11th.”³⁴ On the other hand (or leg?), the HMO might refuse me—because the c-leg costs \$40,000 to \$50,000 and also because I’m a woman of a certain age who is generally perceived as not needing to be so “well equipped” as someone who is younger (and male).

Indeed, like the movement that it enables, prosthetic technology is highly dynamic and always literally incorporating (in both the bodily and business sense) the newest materials and technology available. Nonetheless, as Dr. Richard A. Sherman notes in a booklet written for amputees: “Just like any other machine, [prostheses] get out of whack and break with time and use. They need to be kept up properly and tuned up. The newer devices have computers, muscle tension and motion sensors, computer-controlled joints, tiny motors, etc. You can expect them to give you and your prosthetist more problems and have more ‘down time’ than relatively simple mechanical prostheses.”³⁵ As it is, I have to see my prosthetist at least once a year: the mechanisms need checking and cleaning, and my cosmetic foam cover always needs some repair or “fluffing up.”

I hope, by now, that you—the reader—have been technologized and quantified into a stupor by a very narrow and “objective” register of meaning—this

bland (or at least straight-faced) enumeration, detailing, and pricing of my prosthetic parts (whether on my body or in the closet) meant to ground and lend some “unsexy” material weight to a contemporary prosthetic imagination that privileges (and, like the eleven-year-old boy quoted above, is too often thrilled by) the exotic (indeed, perhaps erotic) *idea* rather than the mundane *reality* of my intimate relations with high technology. (Hence my wonderment about the prosthetic status of my low-tech crutches or canes.) Missing here (albeit suggested) is a description of the variety of phenomenological, social, and institutional relations that I engage that have been partially transformed by my prosthetic. My consciousness, for example, has been altered at times by a heightened awareness of such things as the availability of “handicapped” access and parking and also of the way in which city streets, although still the same objective size, have subjectively expanded in space and contracted in time so that crossing the street before the traffic light changes now creates a heightened sense of peril and anxiety that I never felt before my amputation.

Missing, too, is the way in which learning to walk and incorporate a prosthetic leg has made me more—not less—intimate with the operation and power of my body: I now know where my muscles are and am physically more present to myself. I also enjoy what for me (previously a really bookish person) always seems my newfound physical strength, and I have discovered my center of gravity (which, in turn, has transformed my entire comportment in ways that include but also exceed my objective physical bearing). And, then, too, there are the encounters I’ve had with others that my prosthetic leg enabled—for example, a support group I attended at the request of my prosthetist (who had just started it and wanted to show me off in my short skirt and one-inch heels as a success story). There I met the most extraordinary individuals who might not otherwise have crossed my path: an older quadriplegic man who for years had been locked away by his parents and now, with some assistance, was living on his own for the first time; a whining, self-pitying woman who had lost one of her legs BK to diabetic gangrene and obviously “got off” on being in a position to tearfully order her husband to respond to her beck and call; a furious young woman, just graduated from college, whose legs were crushed in a car accident and whose boyfriend had just broken up with her but who went on (still furious), with two AK prosthetics, to become a Special Olympics athlete. And, of course, there was my prosthetist—

who knows my aging body and my ageless will perhaps more intimately and approvingly than has any other man in my life.

My objective description of the prosthetic as technology also doesn’t begin to touch on the great pride that I’ve felt in my physical accomplishments or the great delight that I take both in the way my prosthetic leg can pass as real and the desire I have to show it off. This paradoxical delight and desire have led to a strangely unself-conscious and exuberant exhibitionism that always catches me by surprise. As Kurzman points out: “In a social context, artificial limbs are ideally invisible in order to facilitate mimicry of nonamputees and passing as able-bodied,” yet many “amputees are proud of their ability to walk well and pass, and often disclose because one’s ability to pass is most remarkable when people are aware of it. . . . Prostheses do become visible, but often under amputees’ terms of pass and trespass.”³⁶ Indeed, I often find myself revealing as a marvel what the prosthetic leg is cosmetically supposed to hide (that I have a prosthetic leg), and even more often, I tend to talk about—and demonstrate—the coordinated and amazing process of walking that we all don’t normally think about but that the prosthetic leg is able to foreground and dramatize both to myself and for others.

These paradoxical desires and delights become particularly dramatic in relation to Aimee Mullins—both her legs and their “figuration” (discursive and literal). Consider, for example, the following passages from an article on Mullins by Amy Goldwasser that appeared in 1998 in an issue of *I.D. : The International Design Magazine*:

Men devote themselves to Aimee Mullins’ legs. Two men, in particular, have made it their business to know every millimeter of the expanse that runs from Mullins’ knees down to her heels. One of these men can tell you precisely how many foot-pounds of torque she stores and releases with every running stride. The other can speak authoritatively about the spacing of hair follicles on her shins and the width of her Achilles tendons. Then there is a third man, who is a glass-blower. “He wants to make glass legs for me. Isn’t that amazing?” Mullins says, genuinely awed by the poetic offer. “He said, ‘Cinderella had a glass slipper, I could give you glass legs.’”

In a modern literal twist to the old tale, it’s not the beautiful heroine’s hand but her legs that have inspired such courtly attention. And the kingdom at stake spans fewer than four feet, the lower-leg prosthetics, left and right, that Aimee Mullins wears. Mullins,

22, was born without fibula bones in her shins. Both of her legs were amputated below the knee at age one, a decision her parents made when doctors told them that otherwise she'd be confined to a wheelchair. On what Mullins refers to as her "sprinting legs," she is an elite athlete who holds world class records in her class in the 100- and 200-meter dash and long jump. On her "pretty legs," she is the only amputee in the country who looks magazine-model ideal in miniskirt and strappy sandals. If design can be seen as the quest for human solutions, then the challenge of creating legs to meet Mullins' bio-mechanical and beauty needs is an irresistible one to engineer and artist alike.³⁷

What we have here is certainly the "high technology" of practical prosthetics. However, even more apparent—and to jaw-dropping degree—is the particular and contemporary "technological high" that comes from imagining and in Aimee's case from realizing prosthetics tropologically. For example, Van Phillips, who designed Mullins's "sprinting legs," said in 1998 of the Sprint-Flex 111 foot that is the legs' most prominent component: "I like to call it the Cheetah Foot because if you look at the hindquarters of the cheetah, the fastest animal there is, it's basically a c-shape."³⁸ And then there is Mullins's own description of her "pretty legs": "They're absolutely gorgeous. Very long, delicate, slim legs. Like a Barbie's. Literally, that's exactly how it is." Even though Barbie dolls are anatomically impossible (the breasts too big and the legs too slim to support the torso), Mullins finds "the doll ideal is liberating rather than limiting"; her "cosmetic prostheses make her a leggy 5'8" and she has an arch that demands two-inch heels."³⁹ And this "liberation" is experienced not only by Mullins alone but also by Bob Watts, the prosthetist who materialized her desire for "Barbie legs." He tells us, "These are sort of my fantasy legs. With a single amputee, it's easier to get an artificial leg to look like the sound leg. But when you're making two legs, it's twice as much work. But there's twice as much freedom, because there's also no reason why you can't make them absolutely identical and ideal. Aimee offered me an opportunity to produce the perfect female leg."⁴⁰

The mind boggles—at the complicit male and female gender fantasies that literally are materialized here and at the complex and paradoxical desires that are uncannily articulated through and by the prosthetic. Cheetah legs? On the one hand (or is it leg?), this materialization is all about the desire for the superhuman power and prowess that are afforded by highly specialized technology. On the

other, its highly specialized technological enhancement of human motion and speed in sprinting paradoxically foregrounds the human costs of such technologically achieved and focused animal power. Thus, what is gained on one side is lost on the other. Mullins finds sprinting easy, and she finds that "it's standing still that's hard." As the article points out, "One limitation of legs that move like the fastest animal on earth: the fastest animal on earth is more stable than Mullins when not in motion." Thus, in photo shoots featuring her as an athlete, Mullins tells Goldwasser: "The photographer has to hold me and kind of prop me in position before I fall over."⁴¹

And then there are those fabulous glass legs. Unrealized in 1998, they formed the basis for a grandiose Cinderella story in which a romantic prince looks for an ideal woman with just the right legs (or lack of them) so that he can outdo previous narrative heroes and their glass slippers with something more and bigger. But the prince here is also a prosthetist—revealing both his and the imagined prosthetic's confused substrate of desire and fear. That is, the very physical and social transparency that prosthetists wish to achieve and amputees wish to experience with their artificial legs entails in such an extreme figuration slippage—in the esthetics of transparency, delicacy, and thus femininity and also latent awareness of the awful fragility of glass.

Except for the glass legs, the tropes that are articulated here discursively ("Cheetah foot" and "Barbie legs") are also materialized *literally*—but materially realized as legs, they maintain their figurative status as tropes nonetheless. That is, like language used figuratively, they are literally "bent out of shape" both in context and material form. Furthermore, as realized figures, they literalize both male and female gender fantasies and confuse such categories as human and animal or animate and inanimate in precisely the ironic way that Donna Haraway's cyborg was originally meant to do. This confusion is embraced quite matter-of-factly by Mullins, who, recalling a technology and design conference she attended, tells us:

The offers I got after speaking . . . were from animatronics designers and aerospace engineers who are building lightweight but strong materials, and artisans—like the guy who works for Disney and creates the skin for the dinosaurs so that it doesn't rip when their necks move. . . . These ideas need to be applied to prosthetics. . . . With all this new technology, why can't you design a leg that looks—and acts—like a leg? I want to be at

*the forefront of these possibilities. The guy designing the next generation of theme parks. The engineers. The glass-blower. I want everyone to come to me with their ideas.*⁴²

Aimee Mullins—at least in this article in 1998—is entirely sincere but hardly naïve. However ironically paradoxical and politically incorrect, for Mullins’s practical purposes the prosthetic fantasies articulated here are all potentially liberating. Indeed, Aimee Mullins’s “Cheetah legs” have allowed her to set world sprinting records and her “Barbie legs” have allowed her a successful career as a fashion model.⁴³

3

There is something truly uncanny about the literalization of desire—whether prosthetic or discursive. We find it utterly strange when figures of speech and writing suddenly take material form, yet at the same time, we find this strangeness utterly familiar because we wished such existential substantiations through the transubstantiations of thought and language. Thus, it was both uncannily strange and familiarly “right on” when, quite by accident and within two weeks’ time, I suddenly encountered both Barbie and Aimee Mullins in two extraordinarily suggestive prosthetic scenarios—both discursive and both very real. Here we find prosthetic figuration literally and materially realized and the literal and material prosthetic reversed on itself reflexively to become figurally the trope of a trope. First, listening to the radio, I learned that Ruth Handler, Barbie’s creator, had died. The news obituary recounted how, after achieving corporate success at Mattel Toys, she was ousted from its leadership for “covering over” the company’s “losses.” Then, a survivor of breast cancer, she went on to establish a successful company that manufactured “prosthetic breasts.” Impossibly breasted Barbie on those unsupportable legs, cosmetically “covering over losses,” a hidden mastectomy, prosthetic breasts: this admixture and this further reversal of the literal and figurative, the projective and the introjective, reflexively refer back to earlier figurations and make metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche seem, by comparison, figurally straightforward.

And, then, a week later, I read that Aimee Mullins had finally gotten her glass legs—and more. Browsing through a current issue of *The New Yorker*, I came

across a short piece on the New York art-house opening of artist Matthew Barney’s latest addition to his epic *Cremaster* film cycle. Suddenly, there was Aimee:

*Hardly less daring was the gown worn to the premiere by the movie’s leading lady, Aimee Mullins: a beige, floor-length number with a deeply plunging backline skimming buttocks that could star in “StairMaster 3.” Mullins, who is a double amputee, plays a number of roles in the film, including one in which she wears a backless dress over a pair of translucent high-heeled legs, and another in which she is changed into a cheetah woman, stalking her prey—Barney, in a pink tartan kilt and pink feathered busby—on hind legs that end not in human feet but in feline paws.*⁴⁴

This literalized figuration goes far beyond the narrower compass and function of the usual prosthetic imagination—whether that of the cultural theorist or that of a prosthetic user like me. Indeed, I can barely keep pace with Aimee Mullins’s legs here. Figuratively, they won’t stand still: the “glass legs” (made, however, of clear polyethylene) are now literalized to function figurally in a movie, and the “Cheetah legs” (the literal prosthetic Cheetah foot) are now figurally extended to incorporate and transform the whole woman. And, further, there is leading lady Mullins offscreen at the premiere “teetering slightly” in strappy sandals because, she explains to the reporter, “these legs have, like, Barbie feet, and the heels of the shoes are an inch too short.”⁴⁵ Indeed, in Barney’s film, she also has legs fitted with shoes that slice potatoes and, as a giant’s wife, “legs cast out of dirt and a big brass toe,” and another set of transparent legs “ending in man-of-war tentacles.”⁴⁶ Again, we are far beyond simple irony here, far beyond metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche. Indeed, we are both discursively and “really” in the tropological realm of *metalepsis*—the “trope of a trope.” This is not simply repetition at a metalevel. Rather, as Harold Bloom (glossing tropes and the “psychic defenses” that inform them in his *A Map of Misreading*) writes:

*We can define metalepsis as . . . the metonymic substitution of a word for a word already figurative. More broadly, a metalepsis or transumption is a scheme, frequently allusive, that refers . . . back to any previous figurative scheme. The related defenses are clearly introjection, the incorporation of an object or instinct so as to overcome it, and projection, the outward attribution of prohibited instincts or objects onto an other.*⁴⁷

Here, with Aimee Mullins's legs (both onscreen and off), we have both—and simultaneously—incorporation and projection, an overcoming and a resistance, an unstoppable “difference” that is not about negation but about the alterity of “becoming.” Aimee Mullins's legs in all their variety challenge simple figuration and fixity. Here the literal and the figural do not stand on oppositional ground, and the real and the discursive together dance to Aimee Mullins's tune—and choreography.

As for me, despite my awe and admiration for Mullins and the complexity of her life and projects, I have no desire to keep pace with her. I tend to locate my difference and variety elsewhere than my legs and just want to get on with things both mundane and extraordinary. Indeed, I remember long ago attending that first meeting of the support group at which my prosthetist proudly showed a video of amputees (without Cheetah legs) racing in the Special Olympics. As I sat there, I watched the people around me—and knew that all they wanted, as I did, was to be able to walk at work, to the store, and maybe on a treadmill at the gym. In sum, I've no desire for the “latest” in either literal or figural body parts. All I want is a leg to stand on, a limb I can go out on—so I can get about my world with a minimum of prosthetic thought.

Notes

1. The vernacular expression “a leg to stand on” is also used by phenomenological neurologist Oliver Sacks as the title for a book that deals with a topic somewhat related to the present one—Sacks's experience with a neurologically damaged leg. See Oliver Sacks, *A Leg to Stand On* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984). A similar version of this chapter also appears in Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
2. Bruno Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles*, trans. Celina Wieniewska (London: Penguin, 1963), 59.
3. Roland Barthes, “The Jet-Man,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), 72–73.
4. It is worth noting here that *trope* has a philosophical definition as well as a rhetorical one: a trope is a figural use of language, but it is also an argument advanced by a skeptic. In this regard, a tropological phenomenology would take into account both senses of the word and would proceed in its “thick description” both fully aware

and productively suspicious that lived-body experience is always also being imaginatively “figured” as it is literally being “figured out.”

5. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 309.
6. Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum, “Introduction,” in Helen Deutsch and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *Defects: Engineering the Modern Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 1–2.
7. Sarah S. Jain, “The Prosthetic Imagination: Enabling and Disabling the Prosthetic Trope,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 24, no. 1 (1999): 32.
8. Robert Rawdon Wilson, “Cyber(body)parts: Prosthetic Consciousness,” *Body and Society* 1, nos. 3–4 (1995): 242.
9. Alison Landsberg, “Prosthetic Memory: *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner*,” *Body and Society* 1, nos. 3–4 (1995): 175–189.
10. Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith, eds., “Introduction,” in *The Prosthetic Aesthetic* (special issue), *New Formations* 46 (2002): 5.
11. See the back-cover copy of Gabriel Brahm, Jr., and Mark Driscoll, eds., *Prosthetic Territories: Politics and Hypertechnologies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).
12. Jennifer A. Gonzalez, “Autotopographies,” in Brahm and Driscoll, *Prosthetic Territories*, 134.
13. Chris Hables Gray and Steven Mentor, “The Cyborg Body Politic and the New World Order,” in Brahm and Driscoll, *Prosthetic Territories*, 244–245.
14. Diane M. Nelson, “Stumped Identities: Body Image, Bodies Politic, and the *Mujer Maya* as Prosthetic,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001): 314–353; Melissa W. Wright, “Desire and the Prosthetics of Supervision: A Case of Maquiladora Flexibility,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001): 354–373.
15. Diane M. Nelson, “Phantom Limbs and Invisible Hands: Bodies, Prosthetics, and Late Capitalist Identifications,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001), 303–313.
16. Jain, “The Prosthetic Imagination,” 33, 39.
17. For a moving and specific discussion of mass amputations in Sierra Leone as a political counter to the slogan “The future is in your hands,” see George Packer, “The Children of Freetown,” *The New Yorker*, January 13, 2003, 50–61.
18. Steven L. Kurzman, “Presence and Prosthesis: A Response to Nelson and Wright,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001): 374–387.
19. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 57. Ricoeur is quoting from Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1968 [1830]), 99.
20. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 57–58, interior quotation is from Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, 41.

21. Donna Haraway, "Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Socialist Review* 80 (1985): 65–107.
22. Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
23. Kurzman, "Presence and Prosthesis," 380–381.
24. Landsberg, "Prosthetic Memory," 175.
25. Freud himself possessed an oral prosthetic. In "The Uncanny," he writes of phantasies of "dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist . . . feet which dance by themselves," these chilling and *unheimlich* because "they prove capable of independent activity." See Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Pelican Freud Library*, Vol. 14, *Art and Literature*, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1985), 366.
26. Kurzman, "Presence and Prosthesis," 380.
27. *Ibid.*, 383. In this regard, I note that I have a small etching on my wall at home called *Break a Leg* that was given to me by a close friend. Referring to a theatrical phrase perversely meaning "Good luck," the etching shows an onstage chorus line of disembodied legs and is, for me, a delightful figuration of my own early preoccupation with my prosthetic and the general fantasy of the transference of agency—through metonymy—from subjects to objects.
28. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 56 (interior quotation is from Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, 79).
29. *Ibid.* (interior quotation is from Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, 87).
30. *Ibid.* (interior quotation is from Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, 87).
31. Wilson, "Cyber(body)parts," 242.
32. Rebecca Mead, "Opening Night: An Art-House Epic," *The New Yorker*, May 13, 2002, 35.
33. Kurzman, in "Presence and Prosthesis," also discusses these issues—considering, in particular, how the materials and design of his leg are "based on the same military technology which has blown the limbs off so many other young men," how he has benefited from "the post-Cold War explosion of increasingly engineered sports equipment and prostheses," and how the man who built his leg "struggles to hold onto his small business in a field rapidly becoming vertically integrated and corporatized" (382).
34. Ian Austen, "A Leg with a Mind of Its Own," *New York Times*, January 3, 2002, D1.
35. Richard A. Sherman, *Phantom Pain* (New York: Plenum, 1996), 231.
36. Kurzman, "Presence and Prosthesis," 379.
37. Amy Goldwasser, "Wonder Woman," *I.D.: The International Design Magazine*, May 1998, 48.
38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, 49.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, 51.

43. It is worth noting that, as a model, Mullins does not always use her "Barbie legs" or opt for "passing." See, e.g., a fashion advertisement for haute couture clothing, photographed by Nick Knight, that appeared in *The Guardian*, August 29, 1998. Mullins, purposefully doll-like in her seated pose, is revealed with two distinctly "mannequin-like" lower legs, the knee joints apparent, their condition rather worn, adding to Mullins's abandoned doll-like appearance.

44. Mead, "Opening Night," 35.

45. *Ibid.*

46. Nancy Spector, "Aimee Mullins," in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2003), n.p.

47. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 74. Unfortunately, although I think it well worth doing, there is not room enough here to take "the prosthetic" as figure through all the tropes and attendant psychic defenses that Bloom lays out in a resonant—and relevant—argument and diagram (69–74, 84).