

Olga Vainshtein,
Russian State University for the Humanities.

Being Fashion-able: Controversy around Disabled Models.

Key Words: Fashion, Disability, Body, Prosthetics, Disabled models, Uncanny Valley, Emotion.

How does fashion negotiate disability issues? How do we perceive the disabled models on the cat walk? Drawing on methodology of fashion studies¹, body studies and the history of emotions² this paper is aimed at examining these questions, analysing the recent fashion events with disabled models. The paper is focused around the debates about the representations of deviant bodies in fashion. It argues that fashion as cultural production successfully generates new visual languages, breaking the barriers of invisibility traditionally associated with disabled bodies and contributing to human well-being.

Aimee Mullins: challenging the canons.

The American actress, model and athlete Aimee Mullins had both legs amputated below the knee in the childhood because of the rare illness Fibula Hemimelia. *People* magazine had named her one of the fifty most beautiful people in the world. Aimee Mullins set Paralympic records in 1996 running on her sprinting cheetah legs designed by Van Phillips³.

The most original and provocative pictures of Aimee Mullins appeared in September 1998 issue of *Dazed and Confused*, guest edited by Alexander McQueen. The photographer Nick Knight presented Aimee in the style of a fragile abandoned Victorian doll, a lived automaton.



She is dressed in a crinoline, a suede T-Shirt by Alexander McQueen and a wooden fan jacket by Givenchy. Mullins is wearing prosthetic legs that look old and stained, with dark nail varnish. The genealogy of this picture can be traced in the European romantic tradition: the images of mechanical doll Olympia from the «*Sandman*» by the German romantic writer E.T.A. Hoffmann or the woman-android Hadaly from the novel “*Tomorrow's Eve*” by Villiers de l’Isle-Adam. The beauty of these automatic dolls is here correlated with the cult of heroines on the borderline of death and life in the 19th century; decadent dying beauties, pre-Raphaelite pale stunners and pictures of drowned women (Bronfen 1992). This is a well-researched topic in cultural and literary studies (Dijkstra 1982, Kupperts 2006), but this interpretation needs to be put in the context of fashion history.



Significantly, the motif of dolls was a popular artistic device in the 1990s fashion shows of Alexander McQueen, Martin Margiela, Viktor and Rolf and Hussein Chalayan. Likewise Naomi Filmer has made porcelain chin plates for the show of Shelley Fox and covered the model hands with wax to depict them as living dolls. Caroline Evans appropriately noticed that Mullins' prosthetic legs reminded us about the historical predecessor of the shop-window dummy (Evans 2003:188). It could be added here that the perception of a mannequin contains an element of alienation, a barrier for touch (Melnikova-Grigorieva 2007:112).

On the cover of the magazine was another picture by Nick Knight: Aimee Mullins seductively half-dressed, in her running shorts, standing on her blades and looking sporty, active and vivacious. This image was accompanied by the special issue slogan «Fashion-able?»: fashion was facing disability. The word ‘ABLE’ severed from ‘FASHION’ was supposed to question whether the fashion industry might accommodate deviant bodily images. However the experiment of representing disability in fashion immediately raised many questions. Marquard Smith (Smith 2006) analysed technofetishism and the erotic fantasies that are being played out across medical, commercial, and later avant-garde images of the body of the female amputee in Western visual culture.



He argued that such images of Aimee Mullins could trigger sexual fetishist fantasies, replaying the technofetishism and that such photos transform her into an “eroticized Cyborgian sex kitten” (Smith 2006:47).



Still it is obvious that the public presence of differently abled bodies in the context of fashion challenges the traditional canons of beauty and advocates for the idea of diversity. These problems are extensively discussed on the web: many bloggers⁴ feel that public visibility of Mullins sometimes takes place at the expense of her identity as an amputee. Disability activists track the “So courageous!” attitude in the media coverage of Aimee Mullins, rooted in low expectations and pity⁵.

A question of language arises in the terms “cyborg”, “posthumanism” (Hayles 1999) and “transhumanism” when applied to disabled people with Hi-Tech prostheses. While researchers often indulge in overusing the concepts (Haraway 1985, O’Mahony 2002), disability activists refrain from these metaphors: “Please please please tell me Ms. Cyborg is one of us. I HATE the cyborg thing when it comes from fascinated academics”⁶. Researchers, like Vivian Sobchak, who has an amputated leg, try to take the unbiased position in this discussion (Sobchack 2006). Thus the image of Aimee Mullins displays the rich potential for being interpreted in completely different paradigms of erotic pictures, sports, fashion, films and advertising.

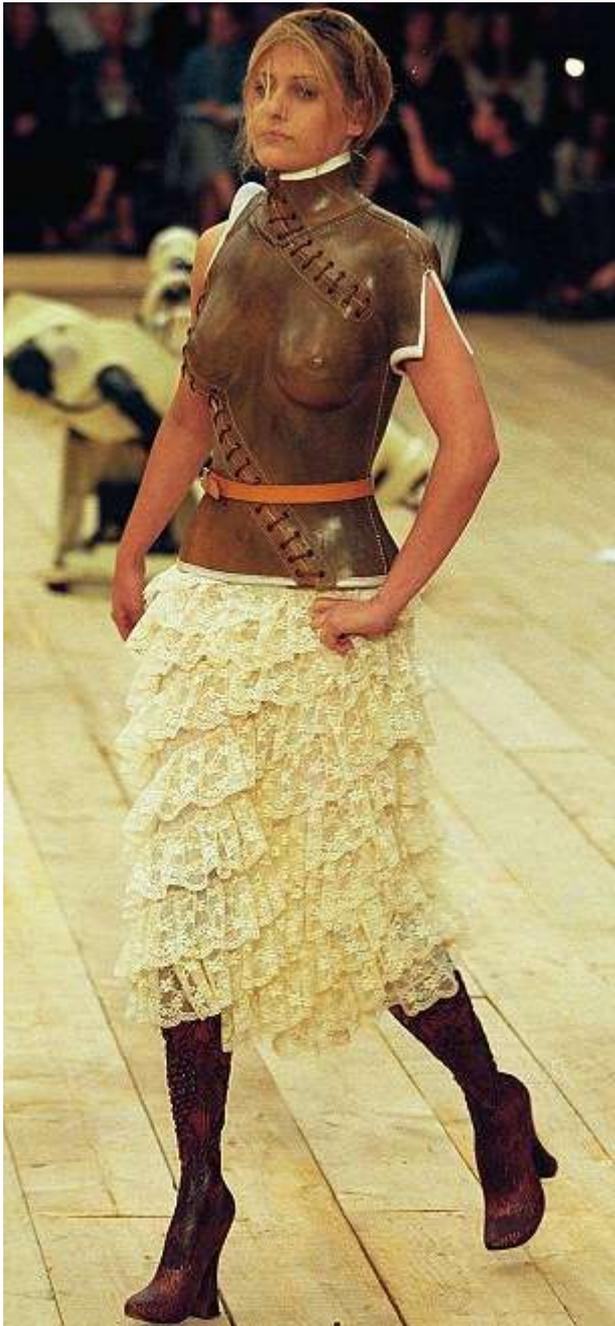
In 1999, Aimee made her runway debut in London at the invitation of Alexander McQueen. Aimee Mullins opened the show walking on a pair of intricately carved wooden legs made from solid ash that were designed by McQueen.

The prosthetic limbs that she wore had been made by Dorset Orthopaedic, and hand-carved over five weeks.



The spring-summer 1999 collection of Alexander McQueen was based on a counterpoint between nineteenth century Arts and Crafts movement and “the hard edge of the technology of textiles” hence the prosthetic legs were decorated with an ornament with clusters of grape motifs, typical for William Morris designs and the Arts and Crafts movement. The collection also contained

leather body corsets juxtaposed with cream lace ruffled skirt, punched wooden fan skirt and Regency striped silk (Evans 2003:177).



The dark colour and heavy weight of the wooden prosthetic legs created a contrast with a white lace skirt; the moulded leather corset further developed the implied opposition of artificial/natural, hard/soft. The obvious cultural play with artificial body parts and accessories like the corset (moulded leather equivalent to artificial skin) further referred to the themes of a fashion doll and dummy already elaborated in Nick Knight's photos of Aimee.

In 2002, Aimee Mullins starred in Matthew Barney's avant-garde film *Cremaster 3* where she played a number of roles, most impressive of which is the cheetah woman.



In the film she wears legs, fitted with shoes that slice potatoes, cheetah legs, and also non-functional jellyfish prostheses. Starring as Entered Novitiate, she appears partially naked, wearing a nurse's cap, surgical gown and long white gloves. She is standing on transparent polyurethane legs with high heels.



This powerful image combines the associations of a striptease nurse and Cinderella wearing glass shoes. For one of the scenes Barney wanted to shoot her without any prostheses, but it was impossible for her because it was too intimate, so they finally achieved a compromise with a purely decorative prosthetic device in the form of transparent jellyfish tentacles: “It worked for me because I don’t feel so bare where there’s something between me and the ground” (quoted by Smith 2006:64).



It is highly emblematic that even an ornamental jellyfish prostheses impossible to stand on functions for Mullins as a symbolic protection. The traditional protective and magic value of accessories emerges here in its original meaning; closing the access to the vulnerable body.

Twelve pairs of legs.

Aimee Mullins owns 12 pairs of prosthetic legs. They include a pair of Cheetah legs used for sports, designed by Van Phillips⁷; an everyday pair of Robocop legs with springs and shock absorbers, a shapely silicone pair, and decorative pairs that are used for the catwalk and photo shoots. She also

has a pair of “natural-looking” legs in her collection with hair follicles and freckles.



At present her collection of prosthetic legs has become the distinctive personal symbol of Aimee Mullins and she uses it not only as a set of fashionable accessories, but to challenge the normative perceptions of beauty. “A prosthetic limb doesn’t represent the need to replace loss anymore. - says Aimee Mullins. - It can stand as a symbol where the wearer has the power to create whatever it is they want to create in that space, so people that society once considered to be disabled can now become the architects of their own identities – and indeed continue to change those identities – by designing their bodies from a place of empowerment”⁸.

Most of the legs in her collection were designed by Bob Watts, a British prosthetist. Her special pride is the pair of “pretty legs” which Mullins likes to compare to Barbie’s legs.



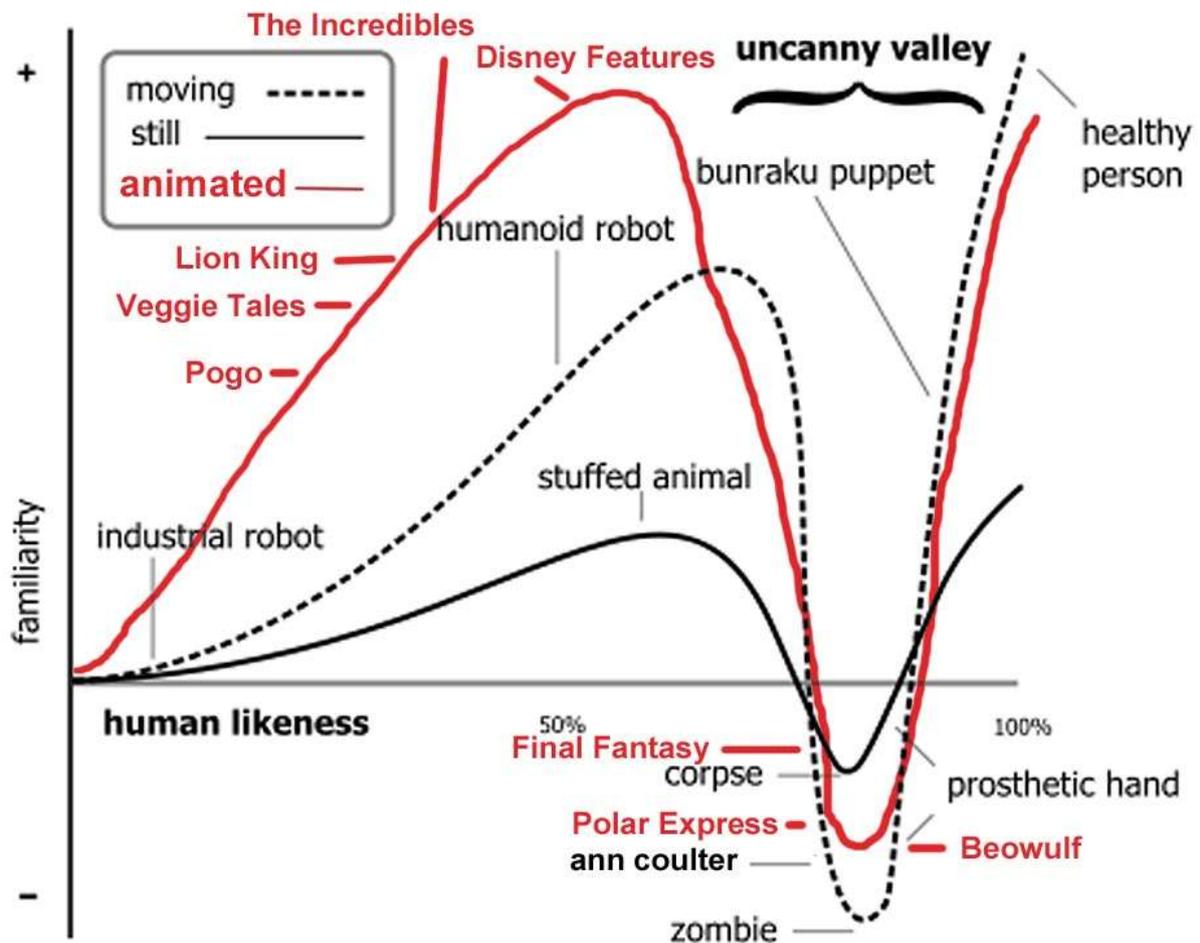
Even though Barbie’s figure is anatomically impossible, Mullins thinks the “the doll’s ideal is liberating rather than limiting”, the arch of these legs demands 2 inch heels (Sobchack 2006: 34). Bob Watts was proud of his creation, because for him it was a chance to be twice creative, as he did not have to imitate the healthy leg. He was free to produce a pair of absolutely identical and ideal legs.

Accessorizing prosthetic legs creates new problems, as fashionable legs demand fashionable shoes. "Each pair of fake legs is designed to be worn with a different heel height. I take the shoes to Bob and he makes me legs to go with them"(Mullins 2009). Thus when Prada sends her new shoes with five-inch heels, Mullins has to order a new pair of legs. That's why she needs four pairs of cosmetic legs made of silicone; they are made for different heel heights. The prosthetic legs, substituting the absent body parts, are used by Mullins both as a functional device, but also as a fashion accessory and body equipment. "I have a suitcase just full of legs because I need options for different clothing" (Mullins 2009): this phrase of Aimee Mullins signals a new way of understanding the concept of prostheses as changeable accessories, introducing the idea of design and the importance of individual aesthetic taste. "How many colours do iPods come in? Apple doesn't presuppose everyone wants a white one, and any prosthetic is like that", says Mullins (Mullins 2009). The difference is that these accessories allow her to be the architect of her own body. Mullins is able to change her height between 5ft 8 in and 6ft 1 in by changing her prosthetic legs. In the future she hopes to be able to get the prostheses constructed by the principle of targeted muscle reinnervation⁹ that is now used for artificial arms.

The Uncanny Valley

"I don't have any issue wearing legs that aren't human-like, but I want the option to have human-looking legs", - said Aimee Mullins in one of her interviews (Mullins 2009). The avant-garde style of Cremaster 3 gave Mullins the freedom to move away from the need to replicate humanness as an aesthetic ideal. Some sophisticated legs from her collection are indeed "wearable sculptures" and are perceived differently than realistic prostheses. What is at stake here is the law of perception: the precise mimicking of human appearance seems 'creepier' than more stylized artifacts. Hence the creative prosthetic devices seem to be more aesthetically attractive and secure. This principle is called "the Uncanny valley" ¹⁰ - the region of negative emotional response towards robots and fantastic characters that seem "almost human" ¹¹.

The concept of "the uncanny valley" was suggested by the Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori in 1970. Mori proposed a graph describing the range of emotional reaction to the robots and specifically discussed the response to prosthetic hands.



“Some prosthetic hands attempt to simulate veins, muscles, tendons, finger nails, and finger prints, and their color resembles human pigmentation. So maybe the prosthetic arm has achieved a degree of human verisimilitude on par with false teeth. But this kind of prosthetic hand is too real and when we notice it is prosthetic, we have a sense of strangeness. So if we shake the hand, we are surprised by the lack of soft tissue and cold temperature. In this case, there is no longer a sense of familiarity. It is uncanny. In mathematical terms, strangeness can be represented by negative familiarity, so the prosthetic hand is at the bottom of the valley. So in this case, the appearance is quite human like, but the familiarity is negative. This is the uncanny valley” (Mori 1970).

According to Mori, prostheses should be clearly artificial and preferably stylish – this is the challenge answered by the trend of aesthetic prosthetics, otherwise it risks getting into “the Uncanny valley”. Adding movement increases the possibility of the Uncanny effect. “If we add movement to a prosthetic hand, which is at the bottom of the uncanny valley, our sensation of strangeness grows quite large” (Mori 1970). The theory of Masahiro Mori goes back to the famous definition of the “uncanny” by Sigmund Freud, who connected the feeling of the “uncanniness” to the feeling of intellectual

uncertainty, whether an object is alive or not, when an inanimate object becomes too much like the animate object. Freud quoted several corporeal examples:

“Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist, as in a fairy tale of Hauff’s, feet which dance by themselves ... — all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, as in the last instance, they prove capable of independent activity in addition” (Freud 1985: 366).

A contemporary spectator might feel a similar sensation of the Uncanny viewing Victorian mourning jewellery, like brooches, bracelets and other keepsakes woven from human hair. Victorian “fascination with the horrible”, as the *Punch* magazine put it in 1847, was based in “deformito-mania” – the popularity of circus sideshows with human freak spectacles¹² (Karpenko 2003, Bogdan 1988, O’Connor 2000). Likewise automatic dolls and mannequins might produce the Uncanny effect – this could partially explain the ambivalent reaction to the pictures of Aimee Mullins by Nick Knight styled as an abandoned Victorian doll.

As we saw, the *Uncanny Valley* effect is rooted in the deep emotional complexes like the Freudian subconscious or the fear of the spectacle of trauma. Yet we should not forget about the cultural construction of emotions. The feeling of anxiety is also culturally and socially conditioned. In her TED lecture Aimee Mullins spoke about children’s reaction to her prostheses how kids perceived her prosthetic legs without any prejudice and even suggested new fantastic variants of walking devices, like kangaroo legs or artificial wings¹³. The conclusion prompted by her presentation is that the atmosphere of fear and curiosity around prostheses is mostly created by traditional up-bringing, but when society opens to diversity and disability issues, cultural conditioning becomes a powerful instrument and might change the perception of disability.

In fact, modern design often successfully accommodates the Uncanny effect, including it in the range of predictable reaction. For instance, the “dangerous” jewellery of Shaun Leane for Alexander McQuinn’s Spring-Summer collection 1997 are “lethal-looking pieces that wrap a single, long, silver spike round the model’s heads in a range of ways” (Evans 2003:233) or brass and human hair necklace by Lars Sture, reconfiguring the tradition of Victorian mourning jewellery.

The contemporary British designer Naomi Filmer also suggests a new understanding of bodyscapes; celebrating body parts as experimental interface between the body and space around. This process implies an active interaction with materials. Using fine metals and such innovative materials as chocolate and ice, in her “*A Focus on Flesh*” collection, Filmer focuses on the sensual reaction of the human body. “The actual experience of wearing ice is cold, uncomfortable, wet and, after some time, painful....goose bumps and red marks are a physical reaction, which in themselves pose as a form of

decoration. The temperature of live flesh breaks down the state of ice to water, which evaporates, so the reaction is temporary, but the memory remains. Is the memory of experience precious?" (Filmer 2010).



As water is integral to human existence, the ephemeral materiality of ice jewellery acquires additional symbolic value. Such “wearable art” metaphorically mimics the natural texture of the body,

organically incorporating signs of pain and trauma. Modern bodyscapes¹⁴ successfully incorporate “dangerous” jewellery and prosthesis, so such accessories could contribute to widening the range of the normative emotional response.

Fashioning Disability.

At the time when Aimee Mullins made her debut at the catwalk in 1999, the disabled models were rarely seen in the world of fashion. After the show Mullins suddenly found herself on the front pages, being labelled as the new, disabled supermodel. She detested the label, insisting on the positive term “super-ability”. But in spite of the optimistic beginning, it took a long time for the next public attempt to push the boundaries of how we see “beautiful”. In 2008 the BBC3 programme Britain's Missing Top Model (BMTM) stirred up debate around the theme. The reality show followed the competition among eight women with different disabilities battling for the chance to win a photo spread by Rankin in Marie Claire magazine cover (U.K. edition). Marie O'Riordan, editor of Marie Claire, said: 'To get disability discussed on the sofas throughout the land is no mean feat and using a popular format of a reality show was a clever way of seducing viewers into a more complex world. We hope this does pave the way for girls with disabilities to get into modelling in the future’¹⁵. Among the original eight were two deaf women, three with missing limbs, one in a wheelchair, one with ataxia and one with a nervous system disorder. The winner of the competition was Kelly Knox born without a left hand and lower arm.



In the interviews she said that since her school years she refused to wear prosthetic hand and made no attempt to hide her missing limb: “Mostly it’s a mindset, I don’t try to hide it. I’m cool with it. So people are always telling me they don’t see it”¹⁶.

This policy of challenging visual stereotypes regarding disability has recently become popular. In September 2010 Tanja Kiewitz, appeared in the advertisement that was part of a fundraising campaign by a non-profit organization, CAP48, which promotes the rights of handicapped people in French-speaking Belgium. The attractive woman wearing a black bra smiled to the viewers exposing her left arm that ended, just like in the case of Kelly Knox, handless, just below the elbow. Unlike Kelly Knox, Tania admitted that her arm has always been something very intimate for her. The inscription said, “Look me in the eyes ... I said the eyes”. That was the direct allusion to Eva Herzigova’s famous 1990’s Wonderbra advertisement both in the image and the slogan. “The idea was to try to change the way so-called normal people view the handicapped,” said Johan Stockmann, the speaker for CAP48. “They look at the handicap, not at the person. We want to change that”¹⁷. After the advertisement was placed in Belgian newspapers, Kiewitz became a celebrity and her image was actively discussed on the net.



REGARDEZ-MOI DANS LES YEUX...
...J'AI DIT LES YEUX.



POUR QUE LE HANDICAP NE SOIT PLUS UN HANDICAP, 000 000037 37

The main focus of the discussion was the politics of the gaze. The majority of viewers applauded to Tania's message: "They have to see that I'm a woman above all and that I can be beautiful and sexy, and the handicap is secondary."¹⁸ The purposeful objectification of female body is used here as the argument against being classed as disabled person – much in the same way as Aimee Mullins liked to be compared to Barbie. However, there were also sexist remarks and some commentators explicitly resisted to forcing the direction of the gaze: "I look where I please. Telling me where I can and can't

look tells me that you are ashamed or uncomfortable. I am not uncomfortable with you, why are you?”¹⁹

The discomfort of the viewers could tentatively be explained through the underlying connection between vision and touch. The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued that “vision is a palpitation with the look... every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space. There is a double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and the tangible in the visible” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 134). He developed the concept of the embodied nature of subjectivity, explaining that human experience comes out of a corporeal position. So perceiving the spectacle of disability could be in fact a traumatic experience with the viewer, subconsciously identifying themselves with the model through the visual/tangible aspects and thus facing the sensation of the missed body part.

A more recent event in this series is Debenham’s Autumn 2010 window campaign featuring disabled model Shannon Murray who has been in a wheelchair since she broke her neck aged 14.

Being Fashion-able: Controversy around Disabled Models.



Shannon previously appeared in the Debenhams advertising for the relaunched Principles range designed by Ben de Lisi, the first disabled model to feature in an advertising campaign for a high street fashion brand²⁰.



Shannon estimated it “another small step towards inclusion and representation”, yet again this campaign caused a range of contradictory responses from “What took them so long?” to “Is it progress or publicity stunt?”²¹. ‘Is this finally an acceptance of disabled people? Or another kick in the teeth?’ wrote one blogger. ‘Good for her,’ wrote another, ‘But I don't like it when companies announce it and hold themselves up as paragons of acceptance. Perhaps it's just me being cynical, but I believe that this world will only be truly tolerant when stuff like this can happen and we don't have to report it²². It should be noted that of all the companies Debenhams has in this regard the most consistent politics: it had also done an airbrush-free swimwear campaign and used size 16 mannequins and plus size and petite models²³.

Debenhams campaign was followed by the special event during London Fashion week in autumn of 2010 when HAFAD (Hammersmith and Fulham Action on Disability), an independent organization in London that promotes disability awareness, organized the show with disabled models “Fashion With Passion”. The participants included Asos.com, John Smedley and Full Circle, and as a result the sold-out event raised over £5000²⁴. Another fashion show with disabled models – “Disabled and Sexy” was organized recently at London's Notting Hill. These shows also provoked a range of responses. “I approach disability-fashion hybrid endeavours with slight trepidation because I'm not one to put a positive spin on things because they happen to have disabled people involved. Disability is no excuse for mediocrity, and when it comes to modelling – blind, deaf, one leg or two heads – you've either got it, or you haven't” – commented Lora Masters at the British site disabilitynow.org.uk²⁵.

Thus making the cultural spectacles of the non-normative bodies, as we see it, is a double-edged practice: the darker side of this glamorization is that fashion houses, brands and media publications clearly profit from the commodification of disabled models, but the good thing is the

breaking of conventional stereotypes of beauty in advertising and fashion shows, widening the frame of public tolerance. Yet "tolerance should really be only a temporary attitude; it must lead to recognition", as Goethe said.

In spite of all these recent developments even now the appearance of a disabled model on a catwalk is still likely to create the sensation, as demonstrated by the recent case of Mario Galla. The 24 year old model Mario Galla participated in the show of Michael Michalsky during the Berlin Fashion week in summer 2010. Galla walked on a prosthetic leg, dressed in shorts, so that his prosthesis was clearly visible. His prosthetic leg attracted everybody's attention and as a result Michalsky's collection became the hit of the Fashion Week²⁶. Galla, possessing a classical face, started his modelling career for beauty companies.



He had already worked for brands like Hugo Boss and the French designer Alexis Mabille. But he always appeared at the catwalk wearing long trousers covering his prosthetic leg²⁷. The pictures of Mario Galla with a prosthesis previously appeared in a fashion editorial by Franck Glenisson "Beyond my eyes, my muscles'll survive". The character of Mario Galla performs the symbolic "Coming Out"

demonstrating his prosthetic leg, which is also the literal coming out of the sea. Franck Glenisson got the French Talent award 2009 for this work.

So what was happening in the audience of the fashion show when Galla appeared on the catwalk revealing his “Beinprothese”? The initial affective reaction - shock and curiosity - was provoked by the violation of the unwritten rules of the game: “beautiful” people wearing “beautiful” outfits. The audience suddenly saw “something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light”: this is one of the definitions of the Uncanny according to Freud. At this stage the perception predictably risks falling into the Uncanny valley, yet the glamour of the catwalk makes it possible to change the emotional frames before the spectators even realize their views have been challenged. The unsettling quality diminishes as they become increasingly involved. This oscillation between fascination and shock is typical for post-modern sensibility. The splitting of the corporeal image of the model in this example mirrors the splitting of emotional reception.

The context of the fashion show legitimizes prosthetic body parts as new accessories, making them visible and publicly acceptable. Although this tentative trend is oppositional to the normative fashion show content and presentation, it helps to overcome intellectual uncertainty of viewers by switching emotional frames. Recent studies showed that emotions are largely constructed by specific cultural context (Wulff 2007). William O.Beeman demonstrated that performance aims to change the emotional and cognitive state of participants (Beeman 2007: 275). In the field of emotions, fashion as performance possesses a vast transformative potential that it can create new emotional communities. The fashion system has always made the body of the model a place for projecting collective desire, and in this case the mechanisms of transferal work in favor of the disabled model, working as the exercise in empowerment for the model and the public.

Fashionable Prosthetics: new developments in ethical design

One of the aims of this paper is to analyze prosthetics as body-equipment and the new fashion object. Prostheses²⁸ are usually designed to substitute the absent body part, but they can also function as fashionable accessories, the distinctive additions to a person’s identity and looks. A new tendency – “prosthetics with aesthetics” is currently becoming significant and has already attracted critical attention (Pullin 2009).

A Norwegian designer Hans Alexander Huseklepp²⁹ has recently constructed the newest version of a technological prosthetic arm.



The conceptual prosthetic arm called "*Immaculate*" by Huseklepp was designed to link to the nervous system of the user. The joints of the device allowed a wider range of movement than a normal healthy arm!

The traditional prostheses are supposed to blend with the human body without being conspicuous, yet the discourse of fashion places them in the field of vision. The "*Immaculate*" arm was visual – it did not imitate the look of a natural arm. It is styled as techno aesthetic - Huseklepp wanted to get away from traditional designs "which conceal their technological skeleton under silicon rubber"³⁰.

"*Immaculate*" is presented as an accessory for people who do not want to conceal their disability. Demonstrating a similar evolution, glasses were until recently seen as a medical device: wearing glasses meant eye problems. Now expensive glasses can be easily classed as fashion accessories, reflecting the style preferences of the wearer. Optical glasses are produced by famous brands; whose design depends on the trends of the season. Once the medical device becomes an accessory, fashion imposes its own visual regime; the accessories should attract attention and this is precisely what is happening to aesthetic prosthesis. The hearing aid could look, for instance, like an earring. A hearing appliance called *Delta* produced by the Danish company Oticon has a triangular shape and comes in bright colours like orange, green or cabernet red and leopard skin patterns. Both functional and trendy, *Delta* was designed to be the object of desire in its own right.

In 2003 the designer Damian O'Sullivan³¹ coined the term 'proAesthetics', thus giving the name to a new tendency. Experimenting with medical prosthetics, he made porcelain eye patches and porcelain cast for broken arms decorated with floral designs³².



The idea was to modify the material. “The exploration lay not so much in the chosen forms, as they are largely dictated by the human body, but rather in a change of material such as porcelain. This is a fragile yet strong material, hygienic whilst elegant, in other words with all the right paradoxical sought after qualities”³³. The fragility of porcelain mirrors the fragility of human bones. O’Sullivan’s conceptual approach changes the status of this prosthetic device. It becomes the aesthetic artifact to be treasured. “The result, perhaps more poetic than practical, does however reflect the inherent beauty of recovery and mirrors the healing process of our mending bones. Upon recovery, disposing of these trustworthy companions is simply not an option. Instead, they can be kept and treasured, and exhibited amongst our finest (bone) china”³⁴. Celebrating the body also means arriving at a more dignified solution for sufferers with broken limbs – “Pity them who have broken their leg, not for the inconvenience of their condition, but for the sheer ugliness of the prosthetic devices they have to contend with. Why can’t we offer more solace in such moments of need, be exalted to latter-day-dandies instead of having to traipse around with such plastic contraptions?”³⁵ states O’Sullivan. Redesigning the medical device reinscribes the emotional context of post-injury trauma: prosthetics transformed into fashionable accessory helps to preserve human dignity. This is the point where the true well-being is at stake and design meets ethics.

The Italian designer Francesca Lanzavecchia³⁶ has produced the whole series of new aesthetic prostheses. The series includes canes and crutches, neck braces and back braces. The designer interprets them as extensions of the body, aimed at achieving comfort in different situations.



One

of the canes in this series is combined with a coffee table (echoing the famous coffee table dress by Hussein Chalayan). Another device - a plastic back brace has been designed in the style of a corset to help wearers “recover the pleasure of getting dressed”, says Francesca Lanzavecchia³⁷.



The corset is decorated with perforation, like piercing. In this way the corset represents the second skin. Other proaesthetic devices explore the idea of similarity between body and prostheses. Externalizing the bodily process, the designs of Lanzavecchia ironically mimic the medical problems –

Being Fashion-able: Controversy around Disabled Models.

a cane with a pitted surface which refers to a bone with osteoporosis. A handle of another cane in this series has the shape of a hip joint. Neck braces are designed in a variety of styles;



as a metallic necklace, as a scarf with a hood or as a Victorian lace collar. Blending form and function, they provide comfortable inner space for holding personal belongings such as a pack of cigarettes or a cell phone.



Such smart designs might serve as convenient conversation pieces, creating a possibility for an easy and nonjudgmental discussion of disability.

The aesthetic prosthesis often plays on the idea of visibility/invisibility. Carli Heggen designed the feather cuff, which gives the wearer a choice, if they don't want to mask their missing limb completely with prosthesis.



The stump could be either hidden in the feathers, or out in the open. Such feather wing arm can either be fitted over a residual limb or used to decorate a conventional prosthetic device. This accessory encourages the amputee to wear something fanciful and delicate, rather than utilitarian and industrial.

A similar feathered wing was made by Tonya Douraghy: "It is meant to be worn over the residual



"In one sense, it is aesthetic adornment but also an alternative to being forced to complete the amputated limb in a life-like way"³⁸. Both poetic "wings" imply the idea of flight and emphasize the concept of lightness, by contrast to the heavy, standard prostheses. The porcelain cast by Damian O'Sullivan was constructed using by a similar principle. Banning the life-like aesthetics and changing the traditional materials are creative design decisions common for the prosthetic devices described in this section.

All these artistic prostheses mark the birth of a new type of accessory, serving as fashionable extension of the body and blurring the conventional boundaries of the body. These developments in contemporary design give a new dimension to the idea of "Bodyscapes": fashion and technology as access to the new body, not only expanding human limits, but also signalling the expanding realm of fashion and challenging stereotypes.

Fashion is driven by novelty which is one of the reasons why fashion dream spaces can easily generate new visual languages, breaking the barriers of invisibility traditionally associated with disabled bodies. The role of fashion as cultural institution in this process can be salient. Aimee Mullins often repeated that her achievements in the realm of fashion and the arts have done "as much if not more" than her sporting successes to challenge the notion that wearing a prosthetic limits what a person can do. This special accent on the role of fashion leads us to a new understanding of its social function. Fashion emerges as the permanent experiment with our corporeal sensibility and a vehicle of retuning our emotions in the face of otherness. This is the point where fashion meets diversity, helping to set a more globally aware and accepting environment.

References

- Beeman, W.O. 2007. The performance hypothesis: practicing emotions in protected frames. In Wulff, H. 2007 (ed.). *The Emotions. A cultural reader*. Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers: 273-299.
- Bogdan, R. 1988. *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,.
- Bronfen, E. 1992. *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Clark, J. 2004. *Spectres. When Fashion turns back*. London: V&A Publications. Antwerpen: Mode Museum.
- Crutchfield, S. and Epstein, M., eds. 2000. *Points of Contact*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Dijkstra, B. 1982. *Idols of Perversity. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siecle Culture*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Entwistle, J. 2000. *The Fashioned Body. Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity press.
- Evans, C. 2003 *Fashion at the Edge*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Farren, A., Hutchison, A. 2004. Cyborgs, New Technology and the Body: the Changing Nature of Garment // *Fashion Theory*, vol 8, issue 4: 461-477.
- Filmer, N. 2010. Interview with the British designer of accessories Naomi Filmer. In *Teoria Modi* 16: 233-238.
- Fischer, E. 2009 *Body Equipment: on the Relationship of Ornament with Dress and the Body*. Paper given at the Symposium Fashion and Materiality, University of Stockholm, 2 October.
- Freud, S. 1985. *The Uncanny*. In Freud, S. The Pelican Freud Library. Vol.14. *Art and Literature*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin books.
- Haraway D. 1985. The Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's. In *Socialist Review* 80: 65-108.
- Hayles, K.N. 1999. *How we became posthuman. Virtual bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*. Chicago and London, University of Chicago press.
- Karpenko, L. "A Sort of Fascination in the Horrible': The Spectacular World of the Victorian Freak Show", paper given at the conference "Nineteenth-century worlds: local/global". London, 13 July 2003.

- Kuppers, P. 2006. Addenda, Phenomenology, Embodiment: Cyborgs and Disability Performance. In Broadhurst S., Machon. J., (eds.) *Performance and technology: practices of virtual embodiment and interactivity*. London, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan. pp.169-180.
- Lester and Oerke 1940, 2004. - Lester, K.M. and Oerke, B.V. *Accessories of Dress: an illustrated Encyclopedia*. Dover edition, 2004, Original edition: Peoria, The Manual Arts press, 1940.
- Melnikova-Grigorieva, E. 2007. "Granitsi tela". *Teoria modi*. 5: 99-118.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Mitchell D. T. and Snyder Sh.L.(eds) 1997. *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*. Michigan U.P.
- Mori, M. 1970. The Uncanny Valley. In *Energy*, 7(4): 33-35. Translated by Karl F. MacDorman and Takashi Minato.
- <http://www.androidscience.com/theuncannyvalley/proceedings2005/uncannyvalley.html> accessed 10.03.2011
- Mullins, A. 2003. The model with metal legs. Interview with Precious Williams. // *The Evening Standard* . May 2. 2003. <http://preciouswilliams.typepad.com/precious-williams-blog/2010/11/a-model-example-by-precious-williams-daily-mail.html> accessed 11.03.2011.
- Mullins, A. 2008. *Catching Up with the Amazing Aimee Mullins*. Interview with Elisabeth Donnelly.
- http://www.tribecafilm.com/event-guide/sports/Aimee_Mullins.html accessed 11.11.2010.
- Mullins A. 2009. *Two legs good, 24 legs better*. Jessica Griggs talks to Aimee Mullins // *New Scientist*, 05 October. Issue 2728.
- O'Connor, E. 2000. *Raw Material: Producing Pathology in Victorian Culture*. Durham: Duke U.P.
- O'Mahony, M. 2002. *Cyborg: the Man-Machine*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Ott K., Serlin D, Mihm S., (eds.), 2002. *Artificial Parts, Practical Lives: Modern Histories of Prosthesis*, New York: New York University Press.
- Pullin, G. 2009. *Design Meets Disability*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Smith, M. 2006. The Vulnerable Articulate: James Gillingham, Aimee Mullins, and Matthew Barney. // *The prosthetic impulse: from a posthuman present to a biocultural future*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press: 43-73.
- Shildrick, M. 2010. Some Reflections on the Socio-cultural and Bioscientific Limits of Bodily Integrity // *Body & Society*. № 16 (3):11-22.
- Siebers, T. 2008. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Sobchack, V. 2006. A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality // *The prosthetic impulse: from a posthuman present to a biocultural future*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press:17-43.
- Vainshtein, O. 2011. Nogi Aimee Mullins : moda, protezi, aksesuari. In : *Teoria modi*. 18: 117-137.

Welters, L. (ed.). 1999. *Folk dress in Europe and Anatolia. Beliefs about Protection and fertility*. Oxford, N.Y.: Berg publishers.

Wills, D. 1995. *Prosthesis*. Stanford:University of Stanford Press.

Wulff, H. 2007 (ed.). *The emotions. A cultural reader*. Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers.

Notes

¹ The work of J.Entwistle (Entwistle 2000), Elizabeth Fischer (Fischer 2009), Anne Farren and Andrew Hutchinson (Farren and Hutchinson 2004) and Caroline Evans (Evans 2003) have formed the theoretical framework for this research.

² See Wulff, H. 2007 (ed.). *The emotions. A cultural reader*. Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers.

³ For details see <http://www.aimeemullins.com/>

⁴ <http://thegimpparade.blogspot.com/2007/07/what-would-that-look-like.html> accessed 11.11.2010

⁵ <http://abled.blogspot.com/2007/10/so-courageous-disability-in-media-act-2.html> accessed 11.03.2011

⁶ <http://thegimpparade.blogspot.com/2007/07/what-would-that-look-like.html> accessed 11.11.2010

⁷ Van Phillips lost part of his leg in the water-skiing accident at age 21. Being motivated by the limitations of then-existing artificial limbs, he invented a prosthetic foot the Flex-Foot Cheetah, a breakthrough design that simulated the spring action of the human foot. It was used by Aimee Mullins and Paralympics gold-medalist Oscar Pistorius.

⁸ http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/aimee_mullins_prosthetic_aesthetics.html accessed 22.07.2010

⁹ Targeted reinnervation is a method developed by Dr. Todd Kuiken at Northwestern University and Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and Dr. Gregory Dumanian at Northwestern University Division of Plastic Surgery for an amputee to control motorized prosthetic devices and to regain sensory feedback.

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncanny_valley accessed 11.11.2010

¹¹ The character Gollum from the film “Lords of the Rings” has animal-like hands and feet combined with human body shape – this creates the effect of the Uncanny Valley.

¹² See Lara Karpenko, “A Sort of Fascination in the Horrible’: *The Spectacular World of the Victorian Freak Show*”, paper given at the conference “Nineteenth-century worlds: local/global”, London, 13 July 2003.

¹³ http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/aimee_mullins_prosthetic_aesthetics.html accessed 22.07.2010

¹⁴ “Bodyscapes” could be tentatively defined as the shifting zone of interaction between body and the adherent objects, including both “dress-equipment” and “body-equipment”, implying that “all items provide some functional or communicative extension while being in close association to the body” (Farren and Hutchinson 2004: 464).

¹⁵ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1039730/I-born-left-arm--I-modelling-contract.html> accessed 11.11.2010

¹⁶ http://www.torontosun.com/news/columnists/mike_strobel/2010/11/20/16239211.html accessed 11.11.2010

¹⁷ <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/belgium/101015/handless-model-goes-topless> accessed 11.11.2010

¹⁸ <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/belgium/101015/handless-model-goes-topless> accessed 11.11.2010

¹⁹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1321945/Handless-model-Tanja-Kiewitz-posing-bra-handicap-awareness-advert.html> accessed 11.03.2011

²⁰ <http://www.shannonmurray.co.uk/> accessed 11.03.2011

²¹ <http://www.graziadaily.co.uk/talkingpoints/archive/2010/09/03/debenhams-first-to-cast-disabled-model.htm> accessed 11.01.2011

²² <http://www.graziadaily.co.uk/talkingpoints/archive/2010/09/03/debenhams-first-to-cast-disabled-model.htm> accessed 11.01.2011

²³ <http://presscentre.debenhams.com/Press-Releases/Debenhams-Breaks-New-Ground-with-National-Disabled-Model-Campaign-af.aspx> accessed 11.01.2011

²⁴ <http://www.tonic.com/article/disabled-models-make-fashionable-headlines-in-europe/> accessed 11.11.2010

²⁵ Lora Masters. Fickle Fashion's crisp craze. <http://www.disabilitynow.org.uk/living/style/fickle-fashions-crip-craze> accessed 31.08.2011.

²⁶ <http://www.stern.de/lifestyle/mode/fashion-week-berlin-michalsky-und-das-model-mit-der-beinprothese-1581931.html> accessed 11.11.2010

²⁷ <http://www.stern.de/lifestyle/mode/model-mario-galla-ich-mag-meinen-koerper-1586341.html> accessed 11.11.2010

²⁸ Some of the contemporary researchers use the term "prosthesis" in the wide metaphorical sense (Wills 1995), meaning any technological body extension. Vivian Sobchack justly points that as a result this term became "tired" and inflated (Sobchack 2006: 19). In this article the author prefers to use the term "prostheses" in the direct physical sense.

²⁹ See <http://www.hah-id.com/>

³⁰ <http://www.newscientist.com/gallery/dn17832-prosthetics-with-aesthetics/> accessed 14.03.2011

³¹ <http://www.damianosullivan.com/> accessed 11.11.2010

³² Decorating the cast is typical in children's orthopedic hospitals: young patients frequently draw on the plaster casts with markers and decorate them with stickers.

³³ <http://www.damianosullivan.com/page1/page13/> accessed 11.03.2011

³⁴ <http://www.damianosullivan.com/page1/page13/> accessed 11.03.2011

³⁵ <http://www.damianosullivan.com/page1/page13/> accessed 11.03.2011

³⁶ <http://www.francesca.nu/>

³⁷ <http://www.newscientist.com/gallery/dn17832-prosthetics-with-aesthetics/4> accessed 14. 03. 2011

³⁸ <http://www.newscientist.com/gallery/dn17832-prosthetics-with-aesthetics/9> accessed 14. 03. 2011.