Under and Beyond (the Skin)

Artistic process, trauma and embodiment in image-making

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines bodily presence and absence, points of connectivity, and negotiates the terrain of the body through two distinct projects. Engaging in a drawing-centered practice I consider embodiment through two projects (*Under the Skin* and *Beyond the Skin*), forming a dyad through which to negotiate and illuminate various bodily expressions and representations.

Throughout a lived existence, the body undergoes various transformations and adaptations; its ongoing mutation requires a continuous realignment and re-examination. A phenomenological approach acknowledges that an embodied experience is one which is physically aware and shapes our understanding of the world. Trauma, in varying degrees, forces the body to transform and adapt, potentially resulting in a different embodied perspective. *Under the Skin* takes up a study of embodiment through trauma and the body in pain.

Beyond the Skin engages the prosthesis from an artistic perspective, exploring the capacity for altering the figuration of the body, which in turn informs my artistic praxis. Engaging works by artists Rebecca Horn and Matthew Barney, my intention is to develop a context for my own practice and an expansive understanding of prosthetic terminology and the presence of a prosthetic metaphor in artistic practices. As a creative endeavour the refiguration of prosthetic terminology has the potential to enhance the cultural experience of loss, trauma and adversity, allowing an exploration of the body as adaptable and expandable.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

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I am ever grateful.

1

INTRODUCTION

The research generated in and outside the studio for the duration of the Master of Applied Arts program, and indeed as a life-time pursuit, has been realized in an examination of the body's relationship to embodiment and prosthetics. Through a drawing-centered studio practice, I have chosen to examine the body's relationship to trauma, extension and adaptation, as a means of better understanding my own lived experience and those living under similar circumstance. The research has guided me from collage work – the fractured, fragmented body exposed as a collection of parts – to exploring the re-interpretation of a bodily whole. In this way I take up the body in a variety of its modalities preferring not to privilege one incorporation over any other.

My primary research project has been largely determined by a grant I received from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, titled *The Fashionable Prosthetic: investigating the visibility and new fashion of prosthetic research*, contextualizing the role and impact of technology and medical engineering research on both the appearance of prostheses and the potential for greater embodied sensibility/awareness. This project (re-titled *Beyond the Skin*) has required a breadth of inquiry that in some ways drew me away from the studio, and has subsequently become the main focus for the written component of my thesis.

The choice to delve formally and artistically into prosthetics, trauma, adaptation and extension is both of personal and general interest. My experiences with trauma and its long-term effects has crept and settled into my own body, allowing access to what I believe to be an

expanded embodied knowledge. Additionally, prosthetics have appeared in past works as metaphor for loss and trauma; however engagement with this subject, while still operating in the realm of metaphor, has expanded to include the possibilities for adapted embodied experiences.

While working in the studio during this degree, it became increasingly clear that I was operating within two different, yet intertwined projects informed by bodily awareness: one that examined the appearance and visibility of prosthetic extensions and devices via adaptation (*Beyond the Skin*) and another involving a more instinctual, visceral and visual interpretation of being embodied (*Under the Skin*). The understanding that the work had two distinct components has allowed me to take up different ideas and influences. I soon grew to appreciate the ways in which one project informed the other and created a dyad, leading to an evolving relationship that reflected the grounding ambition of this thesis project, to become receptive to the adaptable nature of the body.

The artists discussed in this paper have been chosen specifically for their involvement and inclusion in the discourse surrounding prosthetics in art. In order to adequately contextualize my own research and resulting artistic praxis, I consider Rebecca Horn's body sculptures to outline a conversation of illness and loss, followed by Matthew Barney's *Drawing Restraint* series and collaboration with amputee Aimee Mullins as a means of discussing athleticism, adversity and opportunity. Though these artists represent examples of Performance and Body Art movements of the 20th Century, which contrasts my two-dimensional drawing practice, both Horn and Barney's involvement with the body has opened

not only a dialogue of prosthetics in art and a prosthetic metaphor, but an over-arching theme of embodied art practices.

Engaging in an embodied art practice, one which places equal importance on both studio production and textual research, opens the possibility for new creative expressions of the familiar and strange, and exploring alternative ways of knowing. Through my own reflective and creative methods, theoretical knowledge and lived experience have the potential to merge into an active and reciprocal relationship. In this way, an embodied practice can encompass intellectual, emotional, instinctual, social and artistic experience. The search for alternative means of expression often results in tensions and ambiguity within the drawings that may never be fully resolved for artist or viewer, however at this early stage of my inquiry, this tension only further compels me to continue this investigative avenue.

The question of technology haunts this paper, at times appearing straight-forward, though more often its numerous possible definitions and applications only generate more questions. My interest in technology stems from its affinity to permeate, at times unnoticed, all aspects of contemporary life. What is technology? A singular definition eludes me; instead I have chosen to take up different instances within my practice appealing to a curiosity and proclivity for potentially unanswerable questions or manifold answers.

The scope of my research extends beyond the themes discussed in this thesis essay, as I tend to become absorbed in literature. The writing, which represents a portion of the thesis project, has been a method to reflect on often disparate thoughts and ideas, and has become a means through which to provide myself with a greater understanding of the direction of my practice. As the written component reaches its conclusion, I continue to be captivated by the

impossibility and challenges of representing absence and interiority. The intention of the studio practice is to find a visual language, through bodily subjectivity, corporeal awareness and materiality that might express an embodied experience.

2

DRAWING AS TECHNOLOGY

My approach to image-making is mutable, much like the experience of the body. Engaging in a drawing-centered practice permits immediacy in its process, and flexibility in both material and method. Even work produced in the first year of this program exercised exactitude and care in the planning and execution stages. More recently I have found myself less invested in these characteristics becoming increasingly attracted to more fluid and amorphous approaches. Additionally, I have incorporated watercolour for its aqueousness and looseness, allowing more abstract, less rigid expressions of my subject matter which pen or pencil markings at times resist.

Often, the subject of my work finds its origins in literature and philosophical theory. The abject[1] has long held my interest, in theory and through my creative practice, and has infiltrated the way in which I approach image-making. The visceral appeal of abjection and formlessness[2], alongside the thematic appearance of the body within my practice, stimulates a

[1] In this instance, the reference to 'abjection' relates to *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* by Julia Kristeva. Integral to the relationship of the body to the 'other', abjection is described by Kristeva as that which disturbs order, existing on the border of an individual's limitations of being. In psychoanalysis, the abject is inherent in the discussion of the self's desire for meaning, and the exclusion of the other as a means of survival. The foundation of a critical discourse of the body, identity formation and the 'other', the abject enters into the theoretical discussion of becoming, through the recognition of the self by means of rejecting that which threatens to expose the human body as fallible.

[2] 'Formlessness' or the 'informe' relates to French Philosopher Georges Bataille's 1929 *Documents 1* definition of the formless: that which exists in un-fixed terms, at once sacred *and* horrific, attractive *and* repulsive. More than just the objects of disgust, it is "a matter of thinking the concept operationally, as a process of 'alteration,' in which there are no essentialized or fixed terms" (Krauss 98). Bataille was interested in the splitting apart of meaning, and the shifting nature of definition. 'Formlessness', as neither theme nor form, is, according to Bataille, a method for challenging limitations and constraints.

physical reaction which I feel compelled to investigate. Abject theory informs an artistic and material practice involving the body and has affected an engagement with the macabre, pushing the boundaries of corporeal interpretations/representations.

When lacking clarity or creative vision, I turn to other artists' practices, finding influence in the works of Wangechi Mutu, Hans Bellmer, and Berlinde Bruyckere, to name a few. I troll online art blog feeds and create what might be described as 'mash-up' image searches (ie: expanded + body, Rorschach + embodiment), drawing from disparate sources to find potential connections and new investigative avenues. There is a fascination in uncovering further representations of the body which provoke discomfort, awkwardness, and excitement. Images to which I am consistently drawn are those which both repel and inspire. The all-too-human body affects repulsion and arousal, being at once familiar and strange. Through an embodied practice I engage ideas of shifting corporeal awareness, taking up a challenge to expand the boundaries of what is recognizable and identifiable, human and beyond.

Within the thesis project, I have two separate yet complimentary projects, each with a different methodological approach. *Under the Skin*, to be discussed in Chapters 3.1 and 3.2 of this paper, engages primarily with the subject of embodiment and developed out of a need to create work in the studio, exploring corporeality through process, materials and the subject of bodily representation.

Beyond the Skin (Chapter 4) differs from *Under the Skin* in that it is informed by an equally pleasurable research-based practice, considering scholarly articles, interviews and scientific studies and allowing these findings to determine the direction of the project. Because of the dense textual nature of this process, *Beyond the Skin* has a greater presence in this

paper. Knowledge acquired through articles and other literary research has strongly influenced the course of this project; however as I immerse myself in the studio, the sensibilities of the *Under the Skin* have also begun to persuade the direction of its dissemination. The reciprocal nature of working across two distinct studio projects has had a significant affect on how research informs, leads and often delays making. In taking up different modes of research, and considering what it means to engage in an embodied art practice, it is important to acknowledge that not one mode is privileged over another: literary research provides knowledge through which to filter the physical, bodily nature of working in the studio and vice versa.

The immediacy and tactility of drawing as a practice often provides distance from newer technological production. This is not to say, however, that drawing cannot involve technology and other forms of production. Through various lines of questioning and production I have grappled with the question of technology as it appears in my practice. Drawing's process has progressed to involve other mediums and disciplines through the investigation of line and mark-making. My continuing fascination with the drawing medium lies in its direct relationship to the body: the physical connection of the drawn line to the hand of the artist; the variety of tools and technologies available for mark-making; the proximity of the body to the finished work.

Technology strongly conditions the experience of ourselves and others, and thus can be seen as a type of mediation. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan wrote, "Physiologically, man in the normal use of technology (or his variously extended body) is perpetually modified by it and

in turn finds ever new ways of modifying his technology"[3] (51). Throughout history, the body has transformed and extended its limits. Professor of Women's and Gender Studies, Elizabeth Grosz hypothesizes in her essay "Naked," for *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future* that we don't know what bodies are capable of. Whether in the realm of genetics, molecular biology, or sports, we have a general understanding of bodily capacities but have refused to accept limits and boundaries of what is bodily possible and impossible (193). This constant state of becoming is an integral part of a natural cycle of human development: "the ever-transforming, ever-recontextualizing of what has been done so that it can be done differently" (193). Bodies and technologies can thus be seen to function in relationship: transformations and modifications in one will produce transformations in the other, in cyclical feedback. While it is generally recognized that technologies have transformed everyday life, the focus of this paper is not on specific technologies, but the appearance of those specific technologies as bodily extension in art. Using the drawing medium, it is my intention to test the limited "prosthesis" terminology in health research and find a re-articulation of the term "prosthesis" within an artistic context.

Expanding upon traditional drawing practices, I am interested in technology[4] and the place where technology meets the body. Pursuant to a discussion of the technologically

[3] Though 'mediation' in the McLuhan sense is not necessarily an integral element of my research, it is important to mention as part of the process of investigating the meeting of body and technology, both being susceptible to modification and adaptation.

[4] In 1937, American Sociologist Read Bain defined technology to include all tools, machines, utensils, weapons, instruments, housing, clothing, communicating and transporting devices and the skills by which we produce and use them. My use of the term 'technology' is meant to broaden the scope of a

enhanced body, my research involves bodily extensions and enhancements within which the medical prosthesis is an aspect of a larger exploration. Technology can be described as all tools, machines, utensils and instruments which in turn mirror, extend and enhance bodily capacities, therefore it is not only the function of the technology, but its original intention and modified application which may allow it to enter into a new dialogue and further artistic interpretation.

While the modern definition of technology is one fixed on instrumentality and valued as a means to an end, I would like to illuminate another possible definition. In his essay "The Question Concerning Technology," Martin Heidegger re-evaluates 'technology' from an instrumental and anthropological definition, characterized as a means and a human activity, to identify what he considers its essence and original, intended relation to *poiesis* (10). Derived from the Greek term meaning 'to make,' and from which we derive the word poetry, Heidegger defines poiesis as a 'bringing-forth,' or that which "let[s] what is not yet present arrive into presencing" (10). According to this definition, technology can be understood as not only means to an end, but also includes a poetic process of bringing something forward into presence, as a way of revealing: "If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth" (12). Using Heidegger's expansive description, there is potential to further interpret 'technology' in relation to an artistic practice, itself to be understood as a poetic method of revealing a truth, or bring something forward through process. In considering the term *techné*[5], the origin root of

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drawing practice to potentially include rather than exclude a wide variety of mark-making and investigative techniques.

[5] "Technology" stems from the Greek word *techné*, which means "to know" in the broadest sense: "[It] mean[s] to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it." (Heidegger 13) *Techné*

'technology,' Heidegger states: "There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name techné […] once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called techné. The poiesis of fine arts was also called techné" (34). Heidegger re-defines technology not only as a means of revealing, but also provides an historical context within the realm of artistic practice and aligns the act of making with that of a broader definition of technology.

Within my praxis, I engage drawing as a means of discovery, whether through representations of the body, or its extended potential by means of prosthetic metaphor. In this way, I associate drawing as an expanded metaphor of technology.

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is the rational method of production of an object, or the accomplishment of an end. It is also translated in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as either craft or art.

3

UNDER THE SKIN

Within a practice which also involves the intimate, personal and conceptual subject of embodiment – knowledge generated through corporeality – I explore the ability to convey an experience of the body. Here I turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology to contribute to an understanding of embodiment as a means of becoming conscious of the world through the medium of the body. Merleau-Ponty states: "I cannot understand the function of a living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises towards the world" (87). This body which rises to the world does not exclude intellectual knowing but rather is inextricably fused with it:

> "Man taken as a concrete being is not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts. Psychological motives and bodily occasions may overlap because there is not a single impulse in a living body which is entirely fortuitous in relation to psychic intentions, not a single mental act which has not found at least its germ or its general outline in physiological tendencies." (Merleau-Ponty 101)

While this phenomenological approach to embodied existence satisfies a particular recognition, our current historical moment also recognizes that "the kind of body to which we have been accustomed in scholarly and popular thought alike is typically assumed to be a fixed, material entity […] existing prior to the mutability and flux of cultural change and diversity"(Csordas 1). The habituated 'fixed' body, or Merleau-Ponty's 'concrete' body, can no

longer be sustained as new possibilities of being and having a body extend beyond the flesh. How then does the present moment – with multiple definitions and interpretations of what constitutes the 'body' – alter or shift the meaning and understanding of embodiment?

Embodied knowledge draws upon the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and his undoing of the Cartesian mind/body split, and has evolved into various approaches such as feminist epistemology, philosophy, anthropology and cognitive sciences. Current applications allow for the possibility for expanded ways of thinking, speculating that all knowledge can potentially be embodied: physical experiences form associations which can further shape our concept of the world. My own application acknowledges fluctuating boundaries, corporeal assumptions and an historical break from fixed notions of the physiological body as I attempt to negotiate the terrain of embodiment through my own bodily knowledge.

The complex history of embodiment requires a much deeper inquiry than this paper can afford: as I begin to scratch the surface of both the discourse surrounding embodiment, as well as the interpretation of my embodied experience, the exploration of its application resides, for the time being, in the early stages of knowing.

In her essay "Real Phantoms/Phantom Realities: On the Phenomenology of Bodily Imagination," cultural critic and amputee Vivian Sobchack discusses her own evolving embodied exploration as deeply personal yet accessible:

> "Although particular experiences may be idiosyncratic to a degree, they are also, and in the main, lived both generally and generically—generally, according to various inherent properties of embodied existence such as spatiality,

temporality, intentionality, reflection, and reflexivity; and, generically, according to usually transparent cultural habits that regulate the boundaries of human being and its meanings." (Sobchack)

Sobchack's candid discussion of body image/imagination resonates for me a desire to lay myself open to experience. In examining my own ability to visualize and represent knowledge gained through the body, I feel compelled by the possibility for drawing, in its immediacy and tactility, to produce some shared awareness, empathy and the commonality of the lived human experience.

The impact of trauma and loss on one's ability to both acknowledge and accept a shift in embodiment requires further investigation. While not every body experiences the same instances of trauma, what can, perhaps, be drawn from varying perceptions is a way in which to connect fully with our corporeality. For example, Sobchack's describes her "phantom limb" resting against the sofa cushion, providing the reader with both the subjectively and objectively perceived body: subjectively speaking, the phantom sensation of her missing leg provides an ambiguous yet sensorially 'real' connection with her remaining limb; objectively, the amputated leg no longer exists. This conjures, for this reader, a sensory experience not of a phantom limb but an acute awareness of my own subjective/objective body: I imagine the contours of my leg and 'feel' its weight and simultaneously observe my leg as being present.

It is perhaps important at this juncture to acknowledge the issue of fetishization and different bodies. I want to make clear that while I have used Sobchack's phantom limb sensation as a means of relating the possibility of a general/generic embodied experience, I do so in so far as I might illustrate that sharing a different body's experience allows me, in turn, to

access my own body. Desiring to categorize, describe and interpret human experience engages, as Sobchack states: "[…] in the intentional and reversible activity of perception and expression as its [the body's] primary mode of being in the world (indeed, of having a world at all)" (Sobchack, *Real Phantoms*). By entering my own body into dialogue with a different bodily existence, the emergent phenomenological consideration is one that perhaps engages greater corporeal presence and reflection.

According to sociologist Marcel Mauss, the body is the first and most natural instrument, through which we learn techniques of action and perception: "The constant adaptation to a physical, mechanical or chemical aim […] is pursued in a series of assembled actions, and assembled for the individual not by himself alone but by all his education, by the whole society to which he belongs, in the place he occupies in it" (79). Throughout a lived existence, the body undergoes various transformations and adaptations; its ongoing mutation requires a continuous realignment and re-examination. A phenomenological approach acknowledges that an embodied experience is one which is physically aware. Trauma, in varying degrees, forces the body to transform and adapt, whether visibly or invisibly, requiring with each adaptation a synthesis of the subjective and objective characteristics, potentially resulting in a different embodied perspective. Is, then, an embodied experience – having a body (in whatever subjective/objective instance) and being embodied – simply the recognition of a body being in the world, or is there a greater task at hand?

My own experience of bodily trauma and resulting chronic pain has greatly informed an ongoing interest and investment in the body. As a result of trauma I have found myself taking up a practice of self-examination, delving deeper into what it means to be embodied, and

engaging a phenomenological approach to corporeal awareness, highlighted by sensorial experience. This process of revealing/unveiling manifests in the first project titled *Under the Skin,* discussed in the next two chapters of this paper.

3.1

THE WOUND

Fig. 1 Kristina Fiedrich. *The Wound (2 of 4), detail.* 2011. Watercolour and artificial sweetener on paper, 22 x 30 in.

The Wound [fig. 1], an autobiographical series of studies and drawings generated from the observation of a recent flesh wound, marked the beginning of a self-motivated discussion of the visibility and invisibility of the body in pain. In his book titled *The Absent Body*, philosopher Drew Leder examines corporeal absence, or the lack of external and interior consciousness, analyzing the phenomenological and physiological body as present in experience, thought and

action, while simultaneously absent from our awareness. The neglect or forgetfulness of our embodiment can shift, according to Leder, in the presence of dysfunction, in the form of illness, disability or pain. Where otherwise one might experience feelings of neutrality, the body in pain is spatially, temporally, and qualitatively brought to our attention.

In the case of a tear or a break in the skin's surface, attention is brought to the body's abrupt transformation, "punctur[ing] the scene with novelty" (Leder 72). Only a moment before, the body intact was neutral, less than embodied, its normal mode and function requiring no marked beginning or end. Suddenly a fall, the body's position, a visceral act, creates a new beginning, drawing attention to the source of the pain and the body, interrupted. The physical appearance and recognition of a transformation through dysfunction highlights a corporeal fragility and fallibility, requiring a different engagement and treatment of the sensory experience, and "must take account of the body as living process" (30).

The Wound is an entry to the body, both in its presence and its past manifestations. Through *The Wound*, I recall not only more recent corporeal alteration, but similar childhood experiences of sudden painful bodily transformations, visible and invisible, and the body's ability to heal itself. How might this sense of embodiment be new or different? Bringing to mind Sobchack's discussion of the capacity for shared embodied experience, *The Wound* performs as common ground: though it makes reference to an autobiographical incident, the viewer may recall a similar experience, potentially leading to an informed, embodied, and even visceral appreciation. The abject nature of the content and the materiality of *The Wound* may repel, but also perhaps engages the viewer in a palpable memory of their own (wounded) body.

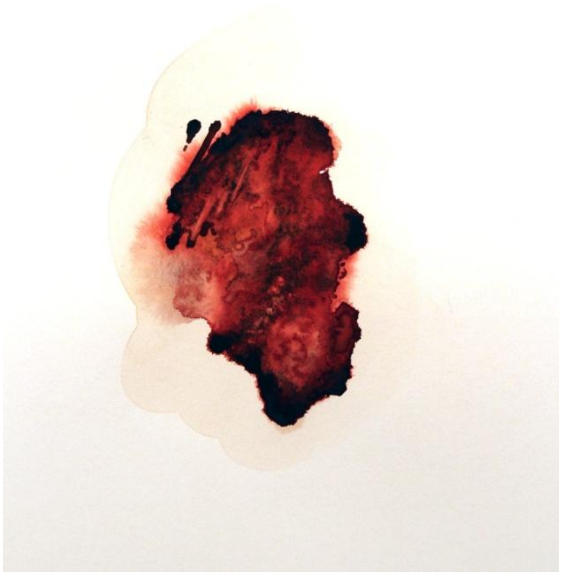


Fig. 2 Kristina Fiedrich. *The Wound (1 of 4), detail.* 2011. Watercolour and artificial sweetener on paper, 22 x 30 in.

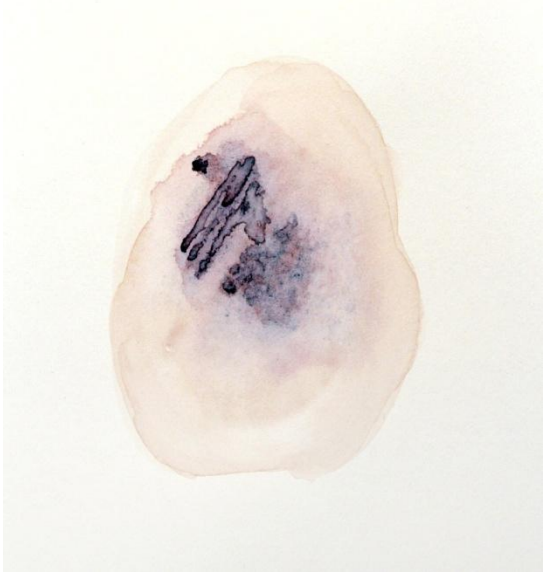


Fig. 3 Kristina Fiedrich. *The Wound (4 of 4), detail*. 2011. Watercolour on paper, 22 x 30 in.

The materiality of the watercolour – its unpredictability, changeability and fluidity – mimics the body in its healing process: the colours bleed into one another, spreading away from where the brush touches the watery surface, affecting the surface the way a wound alters the skin. Just as a bruise blooms or a scab forms days after the occasion of the wound, the watercolour shifts and dries with unexpected changes and results. The fluidity of watercolour also gives a sense of delicacy, an impermanent medium on a fragile surface.

Implying bodily absence, the representation of the wound occupies only a fraction of the paper's surface. It is my intention to demonstrate the way in which, through pain, the absent body is revealed: the presence originates at the wound. As a serial work, *The Wound* [fig. 2, 3] is a physical discovery and creative expression of the healing process, and marks the beginning of an ongoing investigation into the body altered and in pain.

3.2

PEEL

As a continuation of *The Wound*, *Peel* looks beyond the surface of the body to bring forward an invisible dimension of embodiment. The inspiration for this work originated from human dissection illustrations created during the Edo Period, Japan (1603 to 1868). These anatomical illustrations, dated 1798, are examples of the ongoing desire for greater knowledge of human anatomy, a questioning and revealing of what lies beneath the surface. According to Leder, the 'surface' body is the site of our interactions with our surroundings and is the focus of phenomenological studies (11). However, the 'visceral' body, which lies beneath the surface body, retreats from our awareness and is a rather mysterious region over which we have little control: "Buried within the bodily depths, my viscera resist my reflective gaze and physical manipulation" (Leder 53-54). Anatomical drawing, as a means of revealing, is a technique of uncovering the visceral body, necessitating a reanalysis of our bodily perceptions. When faced with the knowledge of my viscera, I become more aware of bodily realities: not all is what it appears to be.

Peel [fig. 4] explores the visceral, showcasing the abstracted, mysterious nature of the body striped of its surface. The re-presentation of the body, while a provocative proposition, might be better served when charged through "refiguring, transforming and functioning at the very limit of the body's capacities – especially if […] the origin of art is the very exploration and use of the body" (Grosz 193). The intention of this work is to uncover not only that which lies beneath the surface, but to demonstrate a fascination – attraction and repulsion – with the

body. Regardless of superficial appearance, dissection – the peeling back of the surface body – and anatomical drawings "flesh out" the body in its entirety. However, rather than solving its mysteries, these drawings further confound and confront with their fragility and associated mortality.

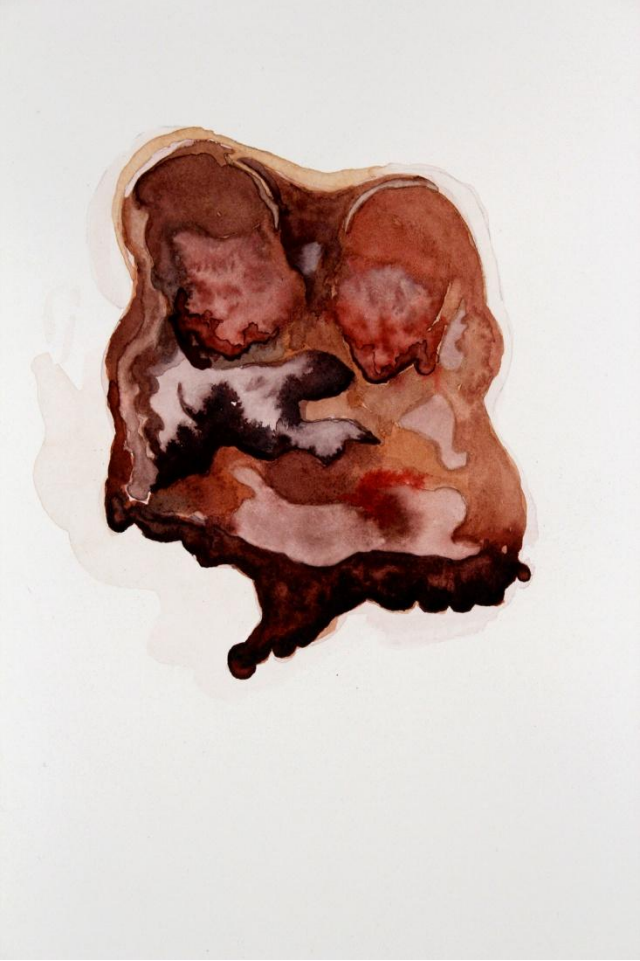
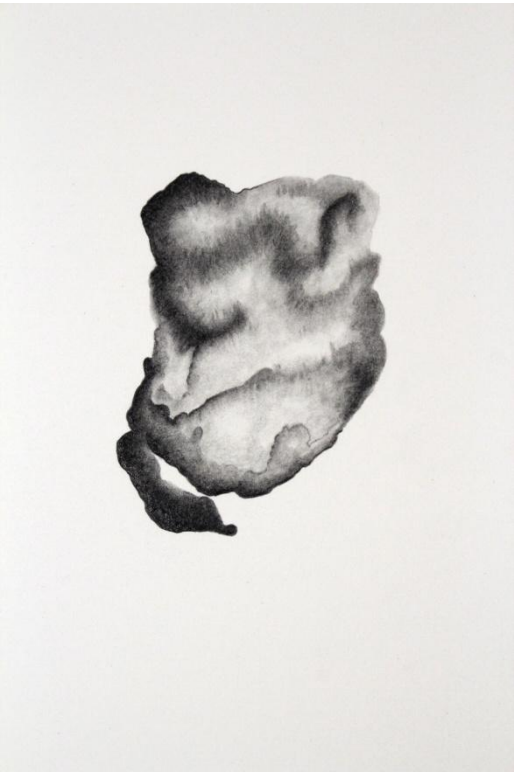


Fig. 4 Kristina Fiedrich. *Peel (1 of 4)*. 2011. Watercolour on paper, 22 x 30 in.

This subject matter is abject. According to theorist Julia Kristeva, the corpse defines the boundary and the limits of our lived existence: to be acquainted with mortality is the ultimate abjection (Kristeva 4). Alternatively, Drew Leder describes the corpse as residing *within* the living body: "Exhaustion reminds me of the sheer weight of my limbs; an X ray reveals my skeleton to vision; accidents remind me of my exquisite vulnerability […] The corpse is always approaching from within" (144). Following Kristeva, the corpse in anatomical drawings warns of the limits of existence and an inevitable fate. Leder, on the other hand, exposes the possibility that the corpse is my own. Whether choosing to be reminded of my own body's fallibility or identifying another's, I recognize a common humanity and unity in

anatomical representations and the fragile nature of the body. The drawings created for *Peel* attempt to penetrate the skin and confront this vulnerability with curiosity.

Peel [fig. 5, 6] is a series of four methodical drawings, each created as a response to the previous. The first drawing considers the original anatomical illustration, its context and colour. The fluidity of the watercolour and liberties of artistic process reveal a new form. The second drawing reflects on the previous, translating incremental shifts of pigment into different shades of graphite. The reduction of materiality narrows my focus to only part of the whole, and what was once recognizable is now unfamiliar and strange. Just as the body constantly changes, taking up this methodical drawing process allows me to continuously re-interpret my material



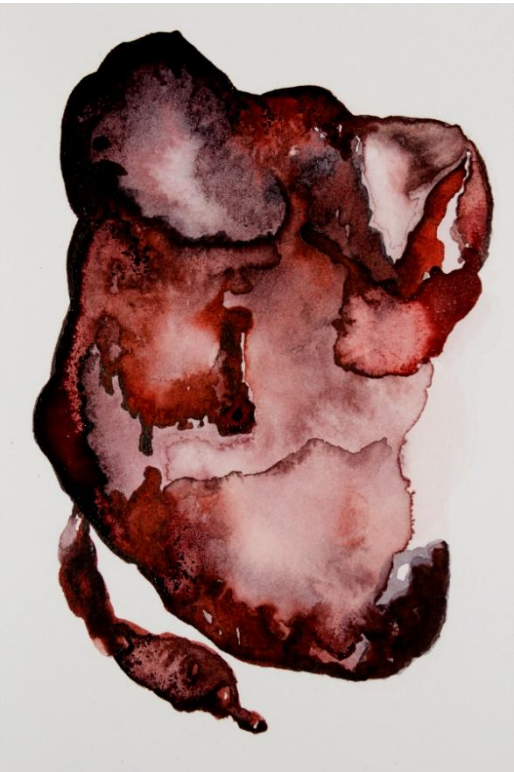


Fig. 5 (left) Kristina Fiedrich. *Peel (3 of 4), detail*. 2011. Graphite on paper, 22 x 30 in.

Fig. 6 (right) Kristina Fiedrich. *Peel (4 of 4), detail*. 2011. Watercolour and artificial sweetener on paper, 22 x 30 in.

and representational consideration of the original anatomical drawing. What transpires is a process that on one hand generates ambiguity and mystery, but perhaps still asserts a visceral, bodily response which resonates sensorially for the viewer.

By placing the drawing on the paper in relationship to the face within a portrait, the viewer is confronted at eye-level with what appears to be an abstract image. The "face" floats as a formless mass, and though the viewer may never fully recognize the origin of the image, there is nevertheless an engagement in looking and a desire to understand that which is being revealed. The mutability of the watercolour medium appeals to the transience of capturing a fleeting moment, and the colours conjure the tactile and fleshy body. There is a pleasure in confronting the abject and a desire to conquer the mystery of this formlessness. Equally important to my process is the intentional concealment and abstraction of the original subject matter, as I admit to a sense of satisfaction in knowing what the viewer might never discover within the work.

Peel is an exploration which requires continued investigation and interpretation. The outcome is not to gain knowledge of human anatomy but to provide a different perspective on the phenomenological body. To name the body and its parts requires a willingness to discover and lay vulnerable deeply personal expressions. The challenge of representing embodiment sets forth a desire to create a visual language of bodily interaction, and explore the capacity of the viewer to consider, empathize and acknowledge not only the artist's sense of embodiment but also their own.

The two projects discussed here, *The Wound* and *Peel* while not explicitly related to technological extensions haunt the next section with its preoccupations of the body in pain, in/visibility and bodily realities. The next chapter, which takes up the second part of the dyad, prosthesis in art, reflects larger themes of trauma, athleticism, adversity and technology within three case studies.

4

BEYOND THE SKIN

The artists and works introduced in the following chapters examine bodily presence and absence, points of connectivity, and negotiate the terrain of the body enhanced by technology. By exploring various interpretations of "prosthesis" in the work of artists Rebecca Horn and Matthew Barney, it is my intention to develop a context for my own practice and an expansive understanding of prosthetic terminology and the presence of a prosthetic metaphor in artistic practices.

Performance, beginning with the Body Art movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and integral to an authentic representation of the physical experience, allows for explorations, interpretations and figurations of the body. Drawing as performance has a strong presence in Rebecca Horn and Matthew Barney's praxes, which I acknowledge differs substantially from my two-dimensional, non-performative drawing practice. The search for prosthetics in art revealed a trend toward three-dimensional and performative practices, and a lack of representation within drawing and other two-dimensional media. Though Horn and Barney employ drawing techniques, the emphasis of their practice relies on the act of mark-making and less on the production of finished pieces. While it was my intention when taking up this line of inquiry to pursue a practice involving performance, which would more directly align my work with the artists discussed in this paper, I soon discovered that the *act* of drawing did not satisfy my need for image-making.

It is my belief, nevertheless, that the investigation into the work of Horn and Barney has had an influence on the direction and outcome of the work created in the studio as well as the line of questioning researched for this paper. Through their practices I have expanded my understanding of prosthetic terminology and pushed the boundaries of my artistic praxis in directions I would have never followed otherwise. *Beyond the Skin* has since begun to unravel the borders of my imagination, making way for new considerations of the body, and allowing for a multiplicity of prosthetic interpretations.

Philosopher Jean Baudrillard described the prosthesis from a more traditional perspective as "an artifact which replaces a defective organ, or an instrumental extension of the body" (134). While this definition suffices to describe the expected medical function of the prosthesis, it fails to include the potential of the body-technology relationship. From a cultural and social anthropological perspective, Sarah Jain has expanded on this traditional understanding of prosthesis, stating: "'Technology as prosthesis' attempts to describe the joining of materials, naturalizations and excorporations […] that go far beyond the medical definition of 'replacement of a missing part'" (Jain qtd. in Sobchack, "A Leg to Stand On" 19). Using the example of a stick to find one's way among things, Merleau-Ponty explains that by becoming familiar with the instrument, the tactile world recedes and begins no longer at the hand, but at the end of the stick. The instrument becomes an extension of the body's sensory abilities, expands perceptual capacities, and becomes a tool to perceive the world (176). If the contemporary discourse of prosthetics is assigned to corporeal extensions and the joining of materials, then can a drawing tool be interpreted as an extension of the artist?

In forming a practice around the use of prosthetics in image-making, I question what it means to be at a distance. The interpretation of 'distance' can be quite literally the measure of space between the drawing tool and the hand, as suggested by Merleau-Ponty, or alternatively a dislocation of the physical body and the technology creating the mark. What is of interest to me is the paradox of looking for connections by investigating disconnections, whether informed via medical prosthetic devices or image-making technologies. These 'disconnections' can be interpreted as a difference in physical appearance or identification between the prosthetic device and the body or the varying definitions and metaphorizations of prosthesis as extension/enhancement. How can I then convey the potential of the body through drawing as an expanded understanding of the prosthesis?

This part of my research involves interpreting the visibility and invisibility of prosthetic devices and embodied experience. By examining the medical prosthesis from an artistic perspective, I investigate its capacity for altering the figuration of the body, to be both extension of, and integral to the body, and for this discourse to inform my artistic praxis. My approach to prosthetics acknowledges the term's primary contextualization within medical research, materials research for the advancements of prosthetic development and its literal function for amputees. The recognition of medical prosthesis terminology is imperative to informing my praxis in order to illuminate other potential contexts. The medical prosthesis when used as a metaphor points to an addition, replacement, extension or enhancement and to interactions between body and technology. In functioning as a metaphor, the prosthesis "by tropological nature, […] is displaced from its mundane (hence literal, nonfigural) context and placed elsewhere to illuminate some other context through its *refiguration*" (Sobchack 21).

I must also acknowledge the absence of psychoanalytic theory, more specifically reference to Freudian analysis of the fetish object, within this investigation. The displacement of the prosthesis from literal function to that of metaphor might be interpreted as transferring agency from the user of prosthetic technology to the prosthetic object itself (Sobchack 23), becoming "some inanimate object which bears an assignable relation to the person whom it replaces" (Freud 153) resulting in the prosthesis as fetishized object. Though I am aware of the inherent technofetishism which arises from displacing the prosthetic from its original context, the prosthetic metaphor introduced and discussed within this paper maintains grounding within the structural and functional terms of a prosthesis incorporated with the body. While inquiry into psychoanalysis and fetishism of prosthetic technology has the potential to be a fruitful one, it would require an exploration of such issues as castration anxiety, sexual difference and perversion, currently beyond the scope of this thesis essay.

As a creative endeavour the refiguration of prosthetic terminology has the potential to penetrate the experience of loss (of ability, bodily function, or a previous embodied experience), trauma (in the form of a superficial wound, corporeal disturbance and/or psychological distress) and adversity. The following chapters (4.1, 4.2) take up an historical contextualization of artists who operate within a prosthetic metaphor as a means of exploring these experiences.

4.1

REBECCA HORN

Working within the Conceptual and Body Art movements of the 1960s and 1970s German installation artist, Rebecca Horn exploits the entire physicality of the body. With an oeuvre spanning several decades and largely characterized by kinetic structures and machines, Horn continues to place importance on drawing and the drawing apparatus within her practice. In 1968, after a long illness which kept the artist isolated and unable to leave the hospital, Horn began creating body sculptures as a means of communicating her loneliness. Meditating on the body's paradoxical ability and inability to communicate, these prosthetic extensions provide insight into the artist's interpretation of the body as a limited, fragile system. Early works representing physicality and vulnerability spoke to the artist's interest in the body as an object of manipulation, transformation and extension (Felton et al. 9). Often her figures are restricted, bound or bandaged as a metaphor for the captive and disabled body, a theme further enacted in her body sculptures and kinetic works. Exploring and pushing against boundaries, whether physical or psychological, Horn employed images of amputation, bondage and prosthetic extensions of extremities and other parts of the body. These alterations can be read as metaphor for traumatic experience and though they are of an autobiographical nature, Horn's work has the capacity to bridge everyday life and art by placing familiar objects in different contexts, allowing the viewer to consider their own bodily experience as an entry point into her work.

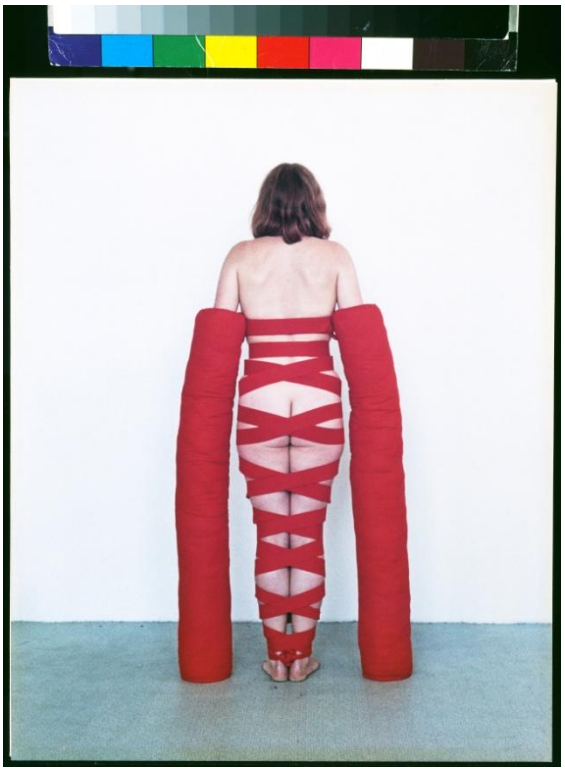


Fig. 7 Rebecca Horn. *Arm Extensions.* 1968. Fabric, wood and metal, 23.6 x 48.4 x 20.1 in. Used by permission of the Tate Collection.

The nature of the prosthesis in Horn's work fits within the medical definition of bodily extension however she uses artistic license to further interpret the prosthetic device as a metaphor for trauma, limitation and adversity. There is both a desire to overcome loss and to expose the sense of loss itself, intrinsically linked to Horn's personal experience of illness and confinement. What transcends Horn's practice is a longing for communication, through the body transformed. The medical bandages that acted as both healing support and bondage, transformed into body sculptures like *Arm Extensions* [fig. 7], which, when strapped onto the wearer's extremities, render the limbs useless. The purposeful binding of bodily movement and sensory perception can be interpreted as loss of communication and a need to better understand the body. This in turn provides insight into the artist's themes of personal struggle and an incapability of fully sharing an embodied experience.

The discourse of prosthesis within a medical context is one that generally exhibits/manifests rehabilitation, empowerment, stability and mobility. While the appearance of prostheses in Horn's work is in direct conflict with the medical intention of prosthesis as assistive or instrumental device, perhaps the artist's intention is instead to consider the

enlarged limbs as a visual indication of the body in crisis and the examination of difference and failures in our own bodies.

Working with a balance between body and space, *Handschuhfinger (Finger Glove)* [fig. 8] extends the physical presence of the body and creates an illusion of interaction and touch. The artist performed one instance of *Finger Glove* in Berlin, the sculptural extensions scraping along opposite walls as she walked back and forth the length of a room. The long wooden finger-extensions on one hand allow the physical boundaries of the body to be expanded, keeping the wearer at a distance from a more intimate and direct level of bodily touch. The failure of the prosthetic extensions to convey the body's sensory perception and a restricted physicality speak to the failure of interpersonal communication (Zweite 15) and recalls Merleau-Ponty's stick, which in its function "conceals the organic relationship between subject and world" (Merleau-Ponty 176) and employs different bodily perceptions.

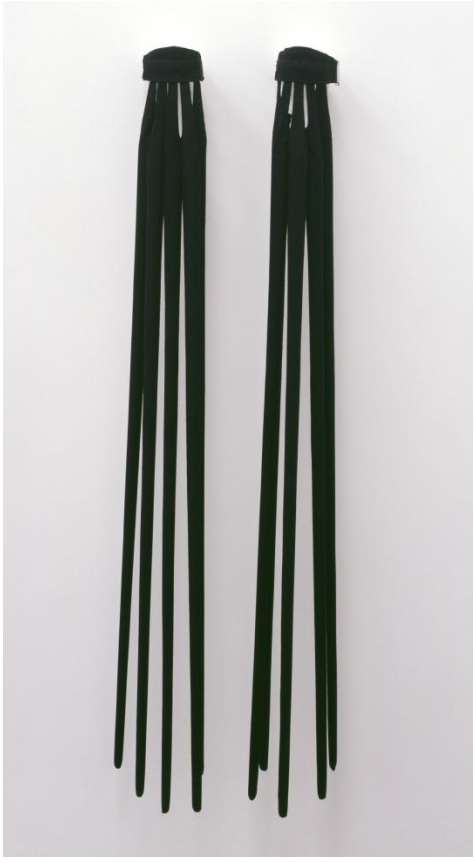


Fig. 8 Rebecca Horn. *Handschuhfinger (Finger Glove).* 1972. Metal, fabric, wood, paper, card and photograph, dimensions variable.
Used by permission of the Tate Collection.

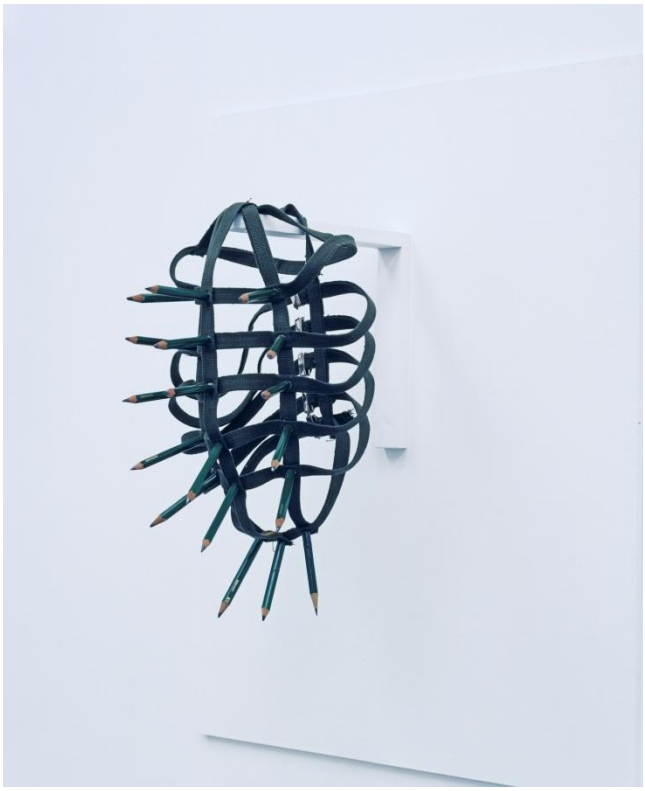


Fig. 9 Rebecca Horn. *Bleistiftmaske (Pencil Mask).* 1972. Pencils, metal, fabric, wood, paper, card and framed photograph, dimensions variable. Used by permission of the Tate Collection.

Bleistiftmaske (Pencil Mask) [fig. 9] is an example of body sculpture employing drawing elements, the artist wearing a lattice mask covered in a web of twenty-one protruding pencils. Swinging her body back and forth, Horn became the instrument of a drawing performance, creating a wall drawing later described as a portrait of the artist. The absence of the hand in this particular work analyses the adaptability of the body and the variety of mark-making created by extending the body. The gesture generated by the *Pencil Mask* is uncomfortable and evokes painfulness in its production. In conversation with Rebecca Horn, Joachim Sartorium of Berliner Festspeile, says, "Don't all the best things start with illness?" (Sartorium 189), interpreting Horn's entire oeuvre as an in-depth consideration of the body's ability to react in a state of crisis in ways you never thought it capable (189).

My specific interest in Horn's practice is the appearance of prosthetic extension as communicative device, whether through a drawing apparatus or body sculpture. Illness and

disability are themes which remain present throughout Horn's practice. I am particularly drawn to the autobiographical nature of the artist's oeuvre, as communicating through the body must invariably come from personal experience and investigation. Horn's work finds a balance between communication and isolation, separation and interaction, distance and intimacy. The oppressive personal experience suffered by the artist was also the means through which Horn generated extraordinary insight into the body, its limits, complexity and fragility.

4.2

MATTHEW BARNEY

American artist Matthew Barney began working on various incarnations of *Drawing Restraint* in 1987, with over 18 versions to date, all varying in their complexity, narrative elements, staging and collaborative involvement. I am focusing on *Drawing Restraints 1, 2 and 6* (1987-1989) and the performances' relationship to examples of bodily extension. In an interview with the Museum of Modern Art from the SFMOMA YouTube channel, Barney expresses his interest in the body as a tool of creation, using his own body to develop a relationship to, and express experience through the work ("Matthew Barney discusses his influences"). Early in his career as an artist, Barney mined what he refers to as his profound bodily experience as an athlete, training on the football field in high school, as a means of accessing and inserting his body into his work. In athleticism training, Barney explains, resistance is put against the body as means of breaking down muscle tissue in order to encourage it to grow ("Origins of Drawing Restraint").

Influenced by the Body Art movement of the 1960s and 70s and Performance movements of the 1980s, specifically Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra, Barney recognized his own physical form as a tool through which to develop an understanding of body-based work. To work with the corpus in art and to express a sense of embodiment through art is to return to the site and source of productivity and pleasure, adversity and trauma. To act with and on the body can lead to different interpretations, understandings and sensibilities of one's own body. Recalling McLuhan's definition of mediation, Grosz states: "Acting differently

also leads to being acted on differently – to sense differently, […] and inquiring into the limits and transformability of biology itself" (200). Like Horn, Barney uses the experiential knowledge of the body to inform the nature of the extension pursued in each variation of the *Drawing Restraint* series. Through athleticism, Barney is investigating the capacity for his own transformability and the restraints evolve in response to each previous experience.

Barney utilizes the physiology of body development through resistance as his medium. The artist filmed *Drawing Restraints 1 - 6* as performance works, jumping, reaching and lunging against various self-restraints. Using various homemade drawing tools, Barney recorded the often random marks as repeated evidence of overcoming adversity.

Reminiscent of the drawing performance *Up To And Including Her Limits* (1970)[6] by multidisciplinary artist Carolee Schneeman, *Drawing Restraints 1 - 6* emphasizes the artists' self-imposed bodily struggles. While the artist's body creates traces made on paper, the drawing process also affects the body through transformation, physical traces on the skin's surface, or through physical exertion and exhaustion. As is the case with Schneeman and Horn, Barney's body becomes the instrument of the work itself.

The appearance of athleticism within Barney's practice, however, highlights a machismo that was not present in either Schneeman or Horn's body-based performances. The repetition, endurance, physicality and presence of the body in this series of work demonstrate both the importance of the process of drawing more than the result (as in some cases where no

[6] Partially suspended in a harness, artist Carolee Schneeman held crayons in her extended arm, moving only as far as the harness would allow. The accumulation of colored marks acted as traces of a body in motion on the large seamless paper backdrop.

drawings were produced as a result of the performance), and the triumph of the masculine form.

The first in a series of performances, the set for *Drawing Restraint 1* (1987) was constructed in Barney's Yale studio. Two slight inclines were constructed on either end of the studio, with the point of resistance in the center of the floor. The artist strapped the elastic line from the floor to his thighs, the first variation of a self-restraint. As Barney's body moved away from the center of the room up the incline, resistance increased, and drawings were generated at the top of either slope and along the walls. Drawings from this performance were diagrammatic, frantic and repetitive.

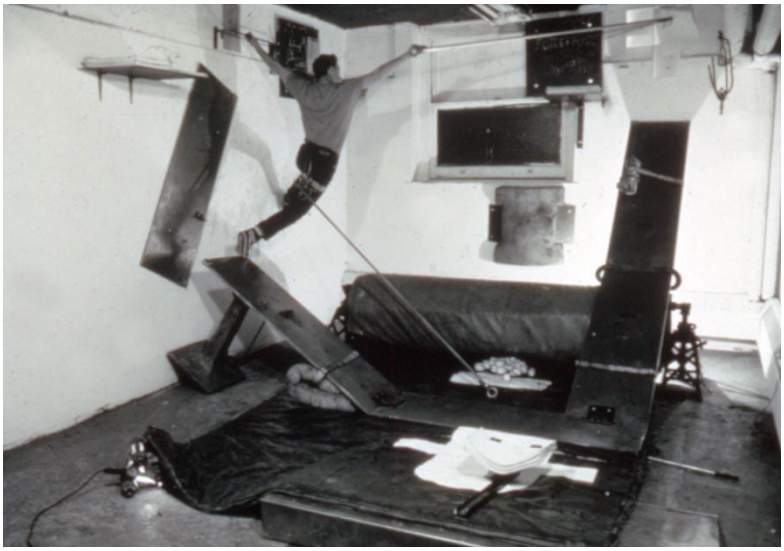


Fig. 10 Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 2.* 1988.
Documentary Photograph
Copyright Matthew Barney 1988
Photo: Michael Rees.
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

As an elaboration on *Drawing Restraint 1*, *Drawing Restraint 2* (1988) [fig. 10] involved steeper, more challenging ramps. Using longer and heavier tools to generate drawings, Barney hoisted himself on climbing holds, struggling against his restraints. *Drawing Restraint 2* is described as "mediation on the desire to make a mark, and the discipline imposed on that [desire]" (Barney, *Drawing Restraint*). Finished drawings were never produced, but the collection of marks generated in this performance

exemplifies the artist's determination, endurance and struggle. Variations of this performance included the artist wearing hockey skates, which undoubtedly would affect balance, grip and the ability to use climbing holds placed around the set.

Fig. 11 Matthew Barney. *Drawing Restraint 6.* 1989/2004.
Documentation Photograph.
Copyright Matthew Barney 1988.
Photo: Michael Rees.
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

Drawing Restraint 6 [fig. 11] differs from 1 and 2 in that there were no physical restraints worn by the artist. The minimal set for the performance included a mini-trampoline, fixed at a fifteen-degree angle. Using a simple drawing tool the artist recorded one mark on the ceiling of the studio with every jump, and over the course of a day, the marks merged to form a self-portrait. The angle of the trampoline creates a situation where Barney must repeatedly reinvest the energy required to reach the ceiling.

If we return for a moment to the definition of prosthesis set forth by Jain as a joining of materials, Barney's *Drawing Restraint* series continuously and variously explores the joining of his body to the environment in which he performs, evidenced by the repetitive mark-making both in the space and on drawing surfaces distributed through the space, demanding a continuous physical exertion on the part of the artist and the body's need to adapt to an environment of limitation restraint. In the case of *Drawing Restraint 2*, the lack of finished drawings speaks simultaneously to frustration and determination, the body's ability to excel even when in crisis, self-imposed or otherwise.

It is also important to mention Matthew Barney's use of prostheses in collaboration with double below-the-knee amputee Aimee Mullins in cycle 3 in his series of *Cremaster* films. American Paralympian, model and activist, Mullins appears in this film wearing various prostheses, symbolizing for Barney different stages of Masonic initiation rituals. In the film's final sequence, Mullins is shown wearing clear, anthropomorphic, tentacle prosthetic legs that do not permit her to stand by herself, let alone walk. This was a compromise on the part of the artist, having originally requested that Mullins be without any prosthesis, her residual limbs exposed. *Cremaster 3* (2002) has been criticized for its careless disembodied technofetishism, the artist's attempt to strip Mullins of her legs raising issues of vulnerability, intimacy and a fetishization of the image of the amputee, a far cry from the prosthetic imperatives of rehabilitation, empowerment and stability. As an amputee, Mullins has herself contributed to the fetishistic discourse around prosthetic devices, having several interchangeable legs, appearing on Alexander McQueen's runway wearing a pair of intricately carved wooden legs.

Material removed due to copyright restrictions.
Colour photograph of Aimee Mullins wearing 'C-legs' with double below-the-knee amputee, engineer and rock climber, Hugh Herr.
Photograph by Jill Greenberg for the cover of the April 2009 issue of WIRED Italy.

http://www.jillgreenberg.com/Work/photos/covers#/28

Material removed due to copyright restrictions.
Colour photograph of Aimee Mullins sitting in a chair wearing her 'pretty legs.'
Photograph by Jill Greenberg appeared in the April 2009 issue of WIRED Italy.

http://www.jillgreenberg.com/names/show/aimee-mullins/image/1

Fig. 12 (left) has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is Aimee Mullins and Hugh Herr on the cover of WIRED Italy.
Jill Greenberg. *Cover of Wired Italy: Evoluzione in Corso.* April 2009. *Jill Greenberg Studios*. Web. 21 Nov. 2011.

Fig. 13 (right) has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The information removed is Aimee Mullins, photographed by Jill Greenberg for Wired Italy.
Jill Greenberg. *Aimee Mullins.* April 2009. *Jill Greenberg Studios.* Web. 21 Nov. 2011.

Mullins presents herself to the public as a shape-shifting figure, each of her prosthetic legs performing a different function, whether athletic (C-Legs)[fig. 12], cosmetic (dubbed 'Pretty Legs')[fig. 13] or fetishistic (Barney's cheetah woman)[fig. 14]. The ability to choose an identity, whether fantastical or functional, gives Mullins more-than-human abilities, a figure in flux, embracing opportunity. In a 2009 article for Wired Italy, she explains: "Adversity is just another word for change. In society, we tend to put the negative connotation on it, we see it as 'hard times,' but we could give ourselves the gift of re-imagining adversity as 'change that we haven't adapted ourselves to yet'" (Mullins, "Splendidamente abile"). Most importantly in relation to Barney's practice, she embodies athleticism, physical strength and the artist's desire in *Drawing*

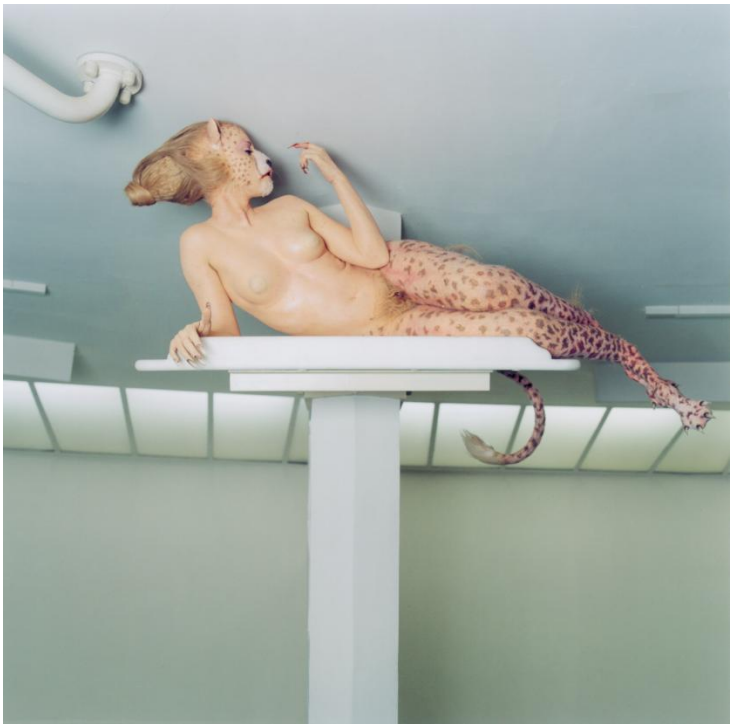


Fig. 14 Aimee Mullins as a cheetah woman.
Matthew Barney, *Cremaster 3*, 2002
Production still © 2002 Matthew Barney
Photo: Chris Winget
Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

Restraint to use the body as a tool of empowerment and determination, a true symbol for the opportunities/possibilities presented through adversity.

The issue of prosthesis-as-metaphor, where 'prosthesis' is simply a symbol of something else, whether loss, disability or body-machine interfaces, is that it misses the fact that the prosthesis is itself an incredibly complex device. Art historian Marquard Smith writes of Mullins' role in *Cremaster 3* and the fetishization of prosthetics in his essay "The Vulnerable Articulate" for *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*, that we need to observe the shift between the animate and inanimate nature of the prosthetic, and "its effect on our understanding of both the material and metaphorical prosthetic body" (67). The ability,

then, of artistic expression to undermine the preconceptions of what a prosthetic *should* be is of great importance to the contemporary prosthetic conversation and the enhanced body: the marginalized prosthetic minority and the prostheses' historical representation of loss and disability is beginning to break loose. Barney's use of prosthetic imagery in *Cremaster 3*, as well as Mullins' endorsement of the fetishization of the different body plays directly into the discourse around possibility, and a surpassing of existing human function.

In this investigation into the appearance of prostheses in artistic practice, I have had to acknowledge various terms and potential problematic content. Historical and medical definitions of the prosthesis have bound both the device and it's visibility in social and cultural contexts to a discourse surrounding disability, loss and trauma. Challenges from the prosthetic community to engineer and design better prostheses, alongside the image of the improved, modified human body has propelled the prosthesis toward a multitude of new possibilities and metaphorizations of prosthesis as emergent technology. With figures such as Aimee Mullins shattering the public perception of the disabled body, contemporary discourse surrounding prosthesis-as-extension and prosthesis-in-art provide potential re-figuration.

Both Horn and Barney deal with direct experience of the body as a means of understanding and coming to terms with the limitations and capabilities of the human form. As is the case with both artists, the focus remains on bodily presence and the impulse to translate expression. The role of technology acknowledges the attachment, connection and mediation that exist in both the prosthetic metaphor and the expanded art practice. Without undermining its traditional implications, I am interested in making visible various interpretations of the prosthesis-as-extension and the prosthesis-as-metaphor.

I have discussed Rebecca Horn's use of prosthetic imagery to uncover a sense of failed communication and a self-imposed restriction of physical and sensory perception. The trauma experienced by the artist, both psychologically and physically, contributed to an embodied practice that explored and exposed a deep sense of failing and desire. What appeals to my sensibilities is Horn's confrontation of her corporeality and the need to express a movement out, away and beyond it within her work. Through these expressions we, the viewers, are given a momentary entry into her embodied experience and question the limitations of the body.

Matthew Barney used his athletic training to create a practice steeped in experiential knowledge and adversity. The reiterative nature of Barney's practice evokes the physical brutality of athleticism, to break down and rebuild the body through repetition and obsession with ritual. Though the work examined for the purpose of this paper is primarily performative – the drawings created acting as rough indications of the actual work behind *Drawing Restraint* – I am engaged with Barney's thematic reference to adversity, the capacity for the body to overcome and the way in which physical difficulty can manifest within an artistic context. This theme reverberates with the appearance of Aimee Mullins in *Cremaster 3*, and my fascination with her as a public figure factored greatly into the development of *Beyond the Skin,* the final project addressed in the following chapter, and rounding out the second half of the dyad.

4.3

FLESHED OUT

As an appendage of *Under the Skin*, *Beyond the Skin* takes up the exploration of prosthetics in art. At the time of this writing, the project is on-going, the manifestation of prosthesis-as-extension slowing evolving through my studio practice, and includes *Fleshed Out* (working title), to be discussed in this chapter.

Aimee Mullins is a dynamic and engaging public figure, a poster-girl for beauty campaigns (L'Oréal Paris) and the future of prosthetic possibilities. A double below-the-knee amputee since early childhood, Mullins is responsible for envisioning and embodying a reality which does not dwell on trauma and loss, but rather – and more importantly – on opportunity and possibility. In a 2009 lecture for TED, a speaker series dedicated to sharing inspired ideas about technology, entertainment and design, Mullins asked the audience to interpret an innovative visualization of a body enhanced by prosthetics, stating: "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" (Mullins, "12 Pairs of Legs").

The potential to have power over the transformability of the body suddenly moves the focus away from dys-ability toward super-ability, taking up a possible bodily reality devoid of limitations and enlightened by expanded possibilities. It is beyond tantalizing to imagine possessing the capacity to create and re-create one's identity, to consider the body as a canvas

awaiting inspired ideas, and a physical appearance limited only by imagination. Mullins sets the stage for these new possibilities, celebrating her body's super-ability with twelve different pairs of prosthetic legs, equally varied in appearance and purpose. Ranging from more traditional imperatives of form and function to impractical yet aesthetically astounding examples of body extensions, Mullins has become the architect of her collection of identities.

Fleshed Out, while still in its early stages of realization, expands upon Mullins' prosthetic prerogative for corporeal re-formation to explore through an artistic praxis the ways in which the prosthesis might affect the body. The exchange of previous perceptions of the disabled body for one which might engage with possibility and potential opens a creative avenue through which to negotiate the image of the prosthesis. Every individual connects with the body and becomes embodied in different ways. Corporeal perception establishes how an individual acts in the world and on the body. More than just a change in outward appearance, what Mullins implies through the interchangeability of her limbs is an essential re-formation of the body and a continuous re-interpretation of an embodied existence.

According to philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi, "the body's obsolescence is the condition of change" (Massumi qtd. in Fernandez 107). The idea of obsolescence might initially suggest a disappearance or death of the body; however it could also be understood as a more fluid concept allowing for expanded possibilities of corporeal appearance. With the limitations and boundaries of our bodies yet undetermined, taking into consideration Massumi's concept of the body as "obsolete" might prove to be the catalyst for greater embodied awareness and at the very least begin to shift the notions of our human abilities.

If corporeal obsolescence is the condition of change and the inevitable evolving nature of the body expanded by technology, Mullins embodies the obsolete. Whether donning a pair of Barbie-like cosmetic legs, extending her height to a statuesque 6'1", or sporting Swedish engineered "C-legs," modeled for greater agility and speed, Aimee Mullins is 'able' to adapt to her surroundings, conditions and desires. With the evolution of the body as a compelling point of departure, and the consideration of corporeal extensions and expansion through technology, the prosthesis as an object might be seen to exist in mutual relationship to the body:

> "'Body' and 'thing,' and by extension 'body' and 'object,' exist only as implicated in each other [and] are extensions of each other […] Things and objects are literally, materially, prosthetic organs of the body. But if bodies and objects exist only as implicated in each other, in necessary and useful reciprocity, then isn't it just as accurate to say that the body is literally, materially, an organ of its things?" (Massumi 95)

The appeal of Massumi's perspective is in breaking-down a long-standing assumption that the prosthetic's role is to replace something missing. The mediation of the prosthetic 'object' to the body acknowledges the continued susceptibility of each to modification and adaptation in the other. In light of this, what bodily modifications will evolve through a creative investigation into different prosthetic adaptations? *Fleshed Out* takes up and challenges the perception of a previous bodily whole, allowing the body to be interpreted as prosthetic, and the site for radical experimentation.

When first conceiving of *Fleshed Out,* several issues plagued my imagination: how to approach the subject matter delicately, to be considerate yet alluring, to let go of my own

bodily perceptions, to be wary of fetishizing different bodies. Determined early in the process, these works would not be traditional portraits. Writing notes in the margins of my sketchbook, I began by considering Mullins as a public figure, a private life, a commodity, an inspiration and a muse: in what way could the discourse of change manifest within my artistic practice? Massumi's compelling argument for the mediated relationship of body and prosthetic began revealing concepts and drawings informed by both practical knowledge and fictional, imagined representations. With multiple examples of prosthetics, each unique in form and function, the challenge became imagining how the body – any body – would adapt, extend, and modify itself to reciprocate the appearance or role of a prosthesis, and ultimately become something else.

As I work through various iterations of extensions, adaptations, and enhancements, each drawing brings forward different considerations, as though they grow out or mutate from the last. The intention is to create a series of drawings, each taking into consideration a different example of prosthesis. However, the longer I reflect on this intention and the more studies generated, the further I am drawn into the possibility for infinite conceptions of bodily representation. The anthropomorphic tentacle prosthetics worn in Barney's *Cremaster 3* might lend itself to a body that could pulsate and float lazily like a jellyfish through open water; it is equally possible to imagine an overly-articulated figure, its many extremities extending in all directions, groping through a tactile experience of the world. And what of invisible prosthetics – buried in the body but still capable of altering corporeal perception? Perhaps an even greater project has begun to emerge?

Artistic expression sets in motion a redefinition of prosthetic metaphor, giving over to phantasy and unlimited potential to recreate the body and therefore also redefine possible

embodied knowledge. If the prosthetic is no longer required to stand-in for loss and trauma, and instead opens, expands, and enhances the body, dys-ability is sequestered to the furthest reaches of creativity. In writing this, I cannot help but wonder whether I am overlooking prosthetic realities for a more pleasurable, grander corporeal future, fetishizing the super-human and enhanced body. I choose instead to take a page from Mullins's autobiography, engendering a poetic approach and exposing imperfections and differences as opportunity in the face of adversity.

Fleshed Out has begun to mutate into many more instances as I continue to explore the body/technology relationship. This prospect both excites and overwhelms: possibilities multiply and bodies morph; rather than achieving clarity of subject, new shapes evolve and distort, giving rise to even more complex corporeal considerations. While this project points to the development of new, fantastical prostheses – and occasionally appear within drawings as prosthetic eyes, hearts or limbs – what has begun to surface is a tenuous relationship between the physical body and its environment. Embodied knowledge results from a unified mind and body, and experience is a product of being in the world. Where, then, does the body end and the world begin? The studies and drawings produced so far incorporate the fleshy palette of the body and insinuate realism through attention to detail, yet the origin of the subject matter remains obscure. What I am attempting to achieve is a sensorial experience that questions what is real: what is flesh and what is not?

Though this project takes up different considerations than those explored in *Under the Skin*, there is a consistency in its materiality – the use of watercolour lending free-flowing and malleable applications – the appeal of bodily representation – its presence and absence – and

the desire to capture fluid, fluctuating corporeal manifestations. As another line of inquiry, *Beyond the Skin* attempts to visualize difference and multiple interpretations of embodied knowledge. In a cultural moment which acknowledges the adaptability and shifting nature of the body, and recognizes the mediation between body and technology, or body and object, my intention for this project is to articulate the blurring boundaries of human existence. As I continue to engage in new artistic avenues and interpretations of the body, *Fleshed Out* has become a pursuit toward greater embodied perception, dissolution of the dys-abled stereotype and the discovery of corporeal representations that may exist beyond the limits of the skin.

5

SUMMARY

Embodiment begins with the everyday attunement and experience of physicality. Corporeal consciousness can enlighten bodily presence; trauma and pain inflicted on the body highlights an absence that has the capacity to be replaced with greater knowledge and awareness. Contemporary illuminations of the body in flux, the blurred boundaries of both physical capacities and realities enabled by the proliferation of technology and enhanced capabilities, complicates an already mysterious experience of the body with an even greater open-endedness of embodied perception. Within the limited scope of this thesis project, it has been my on-going intention to probe the measured personal experience of bodily trauma and pain, to be in dialogue with an unfolding understanding of the body and to envision its potential for adaptation and expansion.

Engaged with various drawing processes, I continue to explore the body through a material approach. By drawing on specific media, like the fluidity of watercolour, to enable a visceral response, generating a more palpable, fleshly visualization of the body, I attempt to provide an occasion for embodiment. Accessing my own bodily knowledge and exploring images which illicit experience of a sensorial nature, I continuously push the boundaries of un/familiarity.

The first of two projects explored in this paper (*Under the Skin*) is propelled by moments of embodiedness concealed just beneath the skin's surface. The wound and corporeal pain has the capacity to reconnect and make conscious the disappearing body: in an altered state, what

was once a disembodied experience rises to awareness and becomes embodied. Though this project takes up the wounded body as a means of accessing physicality, it is offered as only one possibility through which to consider a common instance of corporeal awareness.

Furthering my engagement with embodied knowledge and representation, I also examine through an artistic practice the appearance of prosthetics in art, as both extensions of and attachments to the body (*Beyond the Skin*). The artists considered in this paper helped uncover a second, equally enticing investment in the body, enhanced by technology. Through an expanded understanding of technology as both tool and concept, I work through different interpretations of how a body, extended, becomes modified and mutated by its various technological attachments.

Though the projects examined within this paper developed differently, both are propelled by the desire to explore the body and embodied knowledge. The work created throughout this investigation, regardless of the project, sets out with the intention to elicit a physical response of attraction and repulsion, familiarity and ambiguity, in an attempt to access the commonality of corporeal experience. As the philosophical and theoretical component of this research draws to a close, I anxiously anticipate what my continued studio practice can further reveal about the body. While the impulse to return to textual references for inspiration remains, the lure of the studio as the locus of my praxis, will ultimately lead to an ongoing revitalization of making as a means of revealing.

The challenge of the thesis project has been to let go of the old methods of working, of carefully planning and neatly executing my ideas, and release a more vulnerable and intimate response to my subject matter that takes up research in new ways. An embodied art practice

facilitates equal measures of intellect and emotion, their unity a direct result of having and engaging with the body. Though poetics in language do not always come to me with ease, I am compelled by the possibility for poetics to influence and infiltrate my studio practice. This project will continue to be personal, emotional and expansive. The subject of the body continuously brings into focus my experiences, a fallibility and mutability which only heightens an impulse to dig deeper and grasp the elusiveness of bodily knowledge.

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