ATLANTIS
Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies
40.2 (December 2018): 63-80
ISSN 0210-6124 | e-ISSN 1989-6840
DOI: http://doi.org/10.28914/Atlantis-2018-40.2.04

"Partly American!": Sarah Bernhardt's Transnational Disability in the American Press (1915-1918)

Ignacio Ramos-Gay
Universitat de València
Ignacio.Ramos@uv.es

The aim of this paper is to analyze the representation of Sarah Bernhardt's physical disability in the American press prior to and during her last tour in the United States (1915-1918), and how the amputation of her right leg ignited a series of allegories associating the actress with both French and American national identities. Bernhardt's maimed physicality was rapidly construed as a metaphor of the mutilated French soldiers of the Great War and of a devastated France itself. However, as I will show, one of the prosthetic devices crafted by American manufacturers symbolically turned the tragedienne into "partly an American citizen" as well as into a token of modern western technology. Bernhardt's artificial leg encapsulated a number of cultural, economic and national attributes linking therapy with American industrial capitalism, and her conceptualization as an American icon thanks to prosthetics reflects the use of non-normative bodily metaphors to encourage national belonging in the press.

Keywords: American press; Transatlantic Studies; Sarah Bernhardt; disability; prosthetics

. . .

"Partly American!": la discapacidad transnacional de Sarah Bernhardt en la prensa norteamericana (1915-1918)

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la plasmación de la discapacidad física de Sarah Bernhardt en la prensa americana durante los años de su última gira estadounidense (1915-1918), y cómo la amputación de su pierna derecha desencadenó una serie de alegorías que vincularon a la actriz tanto a la identidad nacional francesa como a la norteamericana. La merma física de Bernhardt fue rápidamente objeto de una construcción metafórica representativa de los soldados franceses mutilados durante la Gran Guerra así como de Francia misma.

Sin embargo, el uso de una prótesis fabricada por una compañía estadounidense convirtió simbólicamente a la actriz en una "ciudadana americana en parte," así como en un ejemplo de la tecnología occidental moderna. La pierna artificial de Bernhardt vehiculó un número de atributos culturales, económicos y nacionales que asociaron la terapia con el capitalismo industrial norteamericano, y la conceptualización de la actriz en tanto que icono gracias a la prótesis reflejó el uso de metáforas corporales no normativas por parte de la prensa para la promoción del sentimiento de pertenencia nacional.

Palabras clave: prensa americana; estudios transatlánticos; Sarah Bernhardt; discapacidad; prótesis

When on August 12, 1891, *Los Angeles Times* published a parodic article asserting that "the great Sarah Bernhardt" was of American origin, the news came as no surprise for an audience well-familiarized with the rumors surrounding the actress's private life (4).[1] According to the reporter, the French tragedienne was "a plain Iowan by birth" whose manners and essence were so American that she showed no "foreign frills" (4). Moreover, Bernhardt was said to have a sister in the country who stood, it was revealed, as the authority for the claim. Although her name was not disclosed to the reader, subtle hints about her place of residence (she was said to live in California) attempted to provide proximity and authenticity to the statement. Such legitimizing strategies were nevertheless virtually debilitated when the reporter finally added that Bernhardt's sister was believed to be the original "Maid of Tulare," in reference to the Californian Lady of Fatima sanctity. The godliness of the "divine Sarah" seemed to spread easily to her siblings, and her alleged sister's sanctity ironically consecrated Bernhardt's reputation, in Jean Cocteau's words, as a "monstre sacré" (Broussky 2001, 19).

Indeed, fabrications of this sort relating to Bernhardt's private life in theatre gazettes and leading newspapers were not rare in either Europe or America at a time of intensive media coverage of the actress. Anecdotes surrounding her well-known eccentricities were constantly recounted in the press and acted as an impetus, propelling further far-fetched legends about her life. Indeed, Bernhardt was the first modern celebrity in the current sense of the term, not only due to her popularity but also to her thorough knowledge and mastery of publicity mechanisms, through which she constantly negotiated fact and fiction. Her outrageous scandals were duly transcribed in the media, sweeping audiences into a terrain of volatile, often contradictory, information. In her analysis of modern celebrity culture, Hazel Hahn observes that the real Bernhardt was "as elusive as smoke" (2009, 175)—so crammed was her life with vaporous stories and legends. Bernhardt herself seemed to ignite them by deliberately blurring a number of significant, objective facts about her most personal background. Her birthdate, for instance, was a mystery that the actress actively contributed to obscuring, the records of her birth having been destroyed in the Commune of Paris. As Robert Gottlieb puts it, "Sarah Bernhardt was born in July or September or October of 1844. Or was it 1843? Or even 1841? [...] She was a complete realist when dealing with her life but a relentless fabulist when recounting it" (2010, i).

Bernhardt's desire to engrave her public image within a myriad of modern, fixable artistic forms in the era of technological reproducibility (Musser 2013) contrasts with the perplexing provenance that so mystified her relationship with a particular nation. During her last visit to America, local and national newspapers repeatedly claimed that the actress was "partly American" in virtue of the prosthetic leg that she had attached to her body. Bernhardt had her right leg amputated in February 1915 in France due to

[1] This research was supported by the MECD/Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program for Senior Researchers and Professors between March 1 and May 31, 2015.

a bone condition that prevented her from continuing with her career on the stage. A number of artificial limbs were specially manufactured for her, and on her farewell tour of the United States, the "divine Sarah" sported a model designed by an American company.

To date, research on Bernhardt's trips to America has mainly focused on her first visit to the United States and Canada in 1880 (Hathorn 1996; Marks 2003). How Bernhardt, aged 73 and "minus one leg" (*The Republic* [Waterbury, CT], 13 March 1915, 1), was perceived by audiences during her last American tour has never been the object of study, let alone, as this article aims, how her physicality shaped a particular conceptualization of her national belonging.

Robert Bud, Bernard Finn and Helmuth Trischler have contended that prosthetic limbs are an intrinsic part of the construction of the cultural identity of the disabled subject. Technological artifacts, they claim, are "material expressions of human culture" (1999, xi) that cannot be scrutinized in an isolated manner. Following Patricia Hill Collins's notion of "intersectionality" (1999), their representation of the artificial limb as a heterogeneous appliance embeds modern notions of the individual's process of creating his or her public self that are at a crossroads between science, culture and history. Carolyn de la Pena expands this idea when defending the need to redefine political and cultural systems by scrutinizing the impact of technology "as both substance and ideology in American cultural life" (2006, 915). Bernhardt's corporeal fragmentation and the prosthetic device that she used to compensate for this during her last American tour encapsulated a number of cultural attributes which framed and reshaped her national identity for American playgoers. Her metaphoric incarnation of French amputees from the Great War, as well as the brandishing of her artificial limb as a commodity that had been made in America, projected an image of the actress as the embodiment of a mobile community, as a symbol of national belonging. Hers was a reflection of a sort of "flexible citizenship" (Ong 1999); one based on her bodily incorporation of products originating in divergent countries. Through her artificial leg she integrated a material, technological Americanness within the organic Frenchness of her anatomy. As such not only did she exhibit a symbiotic reunion of the organic and the artificial, but also a corporeal hybridity consisting in competing, if not colliding, nationalities.

I have based this study on several hundreds of American newspaper clippings and articles recounting Bernhardt's last visit to the United States, which took place between 10 October 1916 and 23 October 1918. For two years, the French actress toured more than sixty American cities, her repertoire including one-act plays and scenes from Alexandre Dumas *fils*'s *La dame aux camellias*, Émile Moreau's *Jeanne d'Arc*, Edmond Rostand's *L'aiglon*, Henri Cain and Maurice Bernhardt's *La mort de Cléopâtre*, and her own *Du théâtre au champ d'honneur*. During that time, Bernhardt's loss of her leg and the various prosthetic limbs that were used to replace it became iconic tools that linked the diva to a divergence of nationalities, namely French and American. In her study of how disability contributes to the symbolic construction of an imagined

political community, Julie Avril Minich argues that "corporeal images used to depict national belonging have important consequences for how the rights and obligations of citizenship are distributed" (2014, 2). Although Bernhardt made no claim of specific citizenship rights, her reception in America shows how non-normative bodily metaphors may be used to describe and ignite specific political belonging. More importantly, I will argue that Bernhardt's "American-ness" went against the grain at a time when the nation was conceptualized "as a whole, nondisabled body whose health must be protected from external pollutants" (Minich 2014, 2). At a time when disabled foreign immigrants were socially marginalized in America, Bernhardt's dissident anatomy was not construed as a challenge to the "image of the health national body" or to the "imperial national unity" (3). Rather, her corporeal fragmentation, together with the artificial device that she integrated into her body, was rapidly and proudly redefined as partially American by the press.

1. "A Glorious Mutilation"

Bernhardt's worldwide reputation garnered her enough fame to interest American newspapers in the amputation of her leg on 23 February 1915. News of the surgical procedure reached US soil approximately one year prior to Bernhardt's last American tour, and reviewers immediately began to inoculate readers with various images of the actress's physicality. The loss of her leg came at a time when amputees were gaining public visibility as thousands of men faced death and mutilation in the trenches in Europe. For the American imagination, her amputation thus evoked the ravages of the Great War, and the actress took pride in encouraging her identification with her fellow countrymen. Newspaper articles stated that the diva energized such connections "because of an almost frenzied desire to share in the sufferings and mutilations endured by the brave soldier defenders of her country" (*Omaha Daily Bee* [NE] 16 May 1915, n.p.). The day before the operation, local and national newspapers transcribed Bernhardt's telegram to French writer and Academy member Maurice Barrès, who was at the time working on a campaign to aid war cripples in his position as a deputy of Paris. "Your last article," Bernhardt wrote, "an appeal for the invalids of the war, touched me deeply, perhaps because I am going to have my leg cut off Sunday and thus join the great army of the mutilated" (*The New York Times*, 21 February 1915, 3). The diva asserted that the amputation had been her own decision and Catulle Mendes's widow wrote an open letter to the actress published by *The New York Times*, praising her heroic sacrifice: "like the soldiers at the front, she has fought for an ideal. Like them, she will suffer a glorious mutilation" (22 February 1915, 1). Bernhardt had once again assumed, in a way, a theatrical role in front of her audiences. Fully aware of her exemplary iconicity, the great actress's patriotic desire to stand shoulder to shoulder with the crippled soldiers of France concocted a public image that was to become a symbol of her country's fortitude and sacrifice during dramatic and tumultuous times.

An entire epic narrative of Bernhardt as an inspiration for French soldiers was constructed in America. "In all embattled France," pronounced *The New York Times*, "there is not a more malignant, determined desperate warrior than Sarah Bernhardt" (23 May 1915, 19). Her determination emblematized the martial courage of the soldier. On February 23, the day after the surgery, the *Morning Oregonian* (Portland, OR) declared the tragedienne had lost her leg, "but not an atom of her courage" (23 February 1915, 6). As if performing a new character, she stood as a role model for society, not only French but American too. The actress's undaunted sacrifice was "a blessing to herself and an inspiration to us all," the newspaper noted (6).

For American readers, Bernhardt's body was regarded as an anatomic "cultural text" (Mobley 2014). Metonymically inscribed in it were not only the mutilation of French men and women but also that of their country itself. The American playgoer could read in her "wounded and weakened" anatomy the "incarnation of the invincible spirit of her beloved France" (*The New York Times*, 10 September 1916, 6). Carved into her physicality were remembrances of the carnage of war, and her body became a metaphor of the battlefield, where ex-combatants, physically and psychologically traumatized, found themselves reflected. Her first performance in Paris following her surgery attracted throngs of damaged veterans in their uniforms. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* described a scene of "legless, armless, men with crutches, men leaning on canes" amongst a multitude of disabled men that patiently waited between acts to pass by her loge "to salute, to kiss her hand" or "to present children for the ever gracious Sarah to embrace" (23 December 1915, 4). Indeed, Bernhardt's sacrifice soon enough became an emblem of a devastated France and her strength mirrored the spirit of a nation in the process of healing its wounds. As the reporter of the *Evening World-Herald* (Omaha, NE) would have it, Bernhardt was "more than a human being [...] a symbol [...] [S]he seemed France incarnate" (6 January 1917, 6).

2. "Make Sarah a Leg"

From the very beginning, the combination of Bernhardt's persona and her amputation attracted American artificial limb companies because of the possibilities that it afforded to lure clientele. The same week that she was discharged from the Bordeaux hospital where the surgery had been performed and traveled to Andernos, near Arcachon, for recovery, American prosthetic companies sent representatives with samples to her home in order to try and secure an order for their product. Three weeks later, on March 14, 1915, the *New York Tribune* reported that the actress had already "closed negotiations" for her artificial limb (10). Bernhardt, however, was not content with a single prosthetic leg: the actress was said to have collected at least two dozens of them in her wardrobe, each one specifically tailored to a particular gown and part she played and each endowed with a specific nickname.

This leg "hoarding" ignited a frantic rush amongst American firms to manufacture the ultimate, state-of-the-art leg for Bernhardt. On March 29 *The Topeka State Journal*

(KS) published an article under the title "Make Sarah a Leg," calling for bids for what it called "the privilege of supplying Sarah Bernhardt with an artificial limb" (6). The tragedienne's announcement of her comeback to the stage fueled fierce competition between suppliers, as two rival companies, one based in Washington D.C. and the other in Baltimore, fought to secure the prize of landing the order. The firm in the capital had traditionally monopolized the production of artificial legs, but the new contender fought to snatch the trophy. Anecdotal narratives of the "leg rush" appeared in local newspapers across the country, often parodying the tone of early twentieth-century colonial travel writing. For instance, an article published in the *Akron Beacon Journal* (OH) on April 3, 1915 ridiculed, in its hyperbolically grandiose style, the frantic rush of the American salesmen involved:

> Who says there is no romance in business? Two salesmen, leaders in their lines, are racing across the ocean for the purpose of giving a leg to Sarah Bernhardt. Artificial, of course. Madame lost the original, a perfect specimen of its kind, upon the operating table. Now these bold commercial men brave the terrors of submarines and the inconveniences of life in a warring nation in order to hang a limb on the divine Sarah. With the irrepressible enthusiasm which endears the American drummer to all of us, each is no doubt coaxing the captain of his respective liner to speed up and beat his opponent to port. To her that hath shall be given (4).

It was not simply a matter of competing companies; the pride of the cities where they were based was also at stake. In his analysis of Pittsburgh's involvement in the prosthetics industry at the turn of the century, Edward Slavishak argues that such business bore cultural and social implications that affected the public image of the city itself. The burgeoning industry revealed itself as "the key to success or failure after traumatic amputation" and therefore a city's capacity to secure the manufacture of a proficient artificial limb acted as a proxy of its concern with "the fate of the industrial worker in the Steel City" (2003, 365). At a time when Pittsburgh epitomized the inequities, damages and ruins of industrial society, triumphant prostheses companies were devised as an answer to this industrial devastation. In Slavishak's words, artificial limbs "represented a series of potential solutions for the industrial worker and the city as a whole. Just as a prosthesis might restore the working body to work, so, too, might it restore the image of Pittsburgh as a vibrant and working city" (366).

Similar notions apply to the two cities competing to "re-complete" Bernhardt. No sooner had the company in Washington D.C. revealed that it was sending agents to Paris than the business in Baltimore made the same claim. The name of neither company was disclosed in the papers; instead, they were referred to by the names of the cities where they were located, thus establishing a sound connection between the urban administrative nucleus and its industrial emblems. *The Boston Daily Globe* (MA) declared on 30 March 1915 that such an "exciting contest" rested upon which particular

city would have the "honor" of furnishing the actress with an artificial leg (16). The *Washington Herald* published an article the same day under the title of "Maybe Sarah's Leg Will Make this City Famous," hence connecting the fate of the town's industry and popularity with Bernhardt's prosthetic limb (2).

Slavishak remarks that although amputation was not necessarily the principal type of injury in the modern American city, "it was the most glaring and eloquent evidence of industry's hazards" (2003, 369-370). In this sense, the manufacturing of artificial limbs stood as a metaphor of modern industrial capitalism. As the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (VA) stated on 1 April 1915, the Oriole City's "latest venture"—the manufacturing of Bernhardt's prosthetic limb—proved "Baltimore's ambition and enterprise" (6). Moreover, the newspaper observed that although Baltimore was not "a city of Federal Reserve Bank calibre," it had to be admitted "that it is an ambitious and enterprising business center" (6). In the reporter's opinion, it deserved "some compensation for not getting the bank. And what consolation could be pleasanter than that of putting Sarah Bernhardt once more on her feet!" (6). The business of Bernhardt's leg not only evinced the economic rivalry between American firms; it also revealed how smaller but prospering cities ventured bravely into the terrain of modernity at a time when prosthetics stood, in Erin O'Connor's words, "as the quintessential triumph of industrial culture" (1997, 767).

The production of artificial limbs was propagandistic of the modern industrialized America and raised the expectation of increased production and sales for local companies. It was an indicator of progress, an igniter of contemporary capitalist dynamics, and it reflected a city's productive efficiency, ranging from company benefits to urban prosperity on a larger scale. The prosthetics industry was stimulated by European hostilities, and it stood at the crossroads of science, medicine and commerce. As stated earlier, mass production of artificial body parts was a buoyant activity during the second part of the 1910s, as hundreds of thousands of artificial legs were required for cripples of the Great War. Seth Koven (1994, 1186) states that the conflict resulted in an estimated ten million crippled combatants in the warring nations, as well as millions of crippled civilians who were the collateral damage of the war. Technological therapy and productivity going hand in hand, *The Baltimore Sun* (MD) announced that the agent sent from Washington to France had instructions to obtain, if possible, an "order from the French government to outfit soldiers maimed in the war" (30 March 1915, 16). Since an order from the actress would "begin the boom in this American industry" (*Washington Herald*, 30 March 1915, 2), American companies saw in Bernhardt a source of endless revenue, transforming her disabled anatomy into a token of modern capitalistic production.

Indeed, landing a deal with Bernhardt implied financial and symbolic growth in many aspects. Firstly, from a socio-clinical perspective, the limb signified physical rehabilitation, economic compensation and reintegration of the patient/client into society. Secondly, the artificial limb industry used state-of-the-art technology, machinery

and methods, embodying Promethean modernity. In O'Connor's words, "the prosthetic man became a symbol of all that was possible in the modern world of manufacture, a walking advertisement for the personal and social benefits to be had from a full-scale embrace of machine culture" (1997, 767). As such, the business was publicized as "the culmination of decades of scientific and mechanical effort" so that "wearing an artificial limb made the injured worker a walking advertisement for American engineers' lofty achievements, a billboard for mechanized production" (Slavishak 2003, 377). No wonder that *The Boston Daily Globe* assured its readers that the Washington company was going to do "everything in its power to land the 'Divine Sarah' first and foremost," as it would mean "big things" for the company "to set Madame Bernhardt on her feet once more" (30 March 1915, 16). As press reports put it, "the firm which secures the post of leg enterer to Madame Bernhardt and presents the fact to the leg-consuming public has a fortune in its grasp" (*Akron Beacon Journal*, 3 April 1915, 4). In this way, Bernhardt's leg actively contributed to the development of a larger, more diversified structure of American consumer identity. It represented the nation's emergent capitalistic impulse. In this way, Berhardt's image contributed to the creation of a prospective market of prostheses that would bring success to the manufacturers.

For American manufacturers, a sales agreement with a celebrity such a Bernhardt meant winning "the great international prize" (*Washington Herald*, 30 March 1915, 2). Needless to say, the competition was just as fierce across the Atlantic since European manufacturers were also imagining the promising results of doing business with the actress. "In spite of the travail of war," the *Akron Beacon Journal* claimed, Europe was not going to "yield such a rich prize to America without struggle" (3 April 1915, 4). As expected, British and French companies also dove into the competition, mirroring the competition between American cities at a transnational level. Within the American press, narratives of the struggle and rivalry between companies translated, this time, into duels between nations. If newspapers displayed a penchant towards substituting company names for those of cities, allegorizing the competition with entire nations as players proved just as captivating, particularly when the countries' images were so attached to industrial efficacy. All the other legs in Bernhardt's wardrobe, *The New York Times* declared, were originally French, and "in that fair land of France the making of wooden limbs is not yet an art" (14 November 1915, 19). The diva also reportedly sported a new 1915 model made with American cork that was claimed to be "the best of the 25 that she has" (*Boston Daily Globe*, 15 November 1915, 6). At a time when America had not yet become an ally of France, the race to land a deal with the actress fittingly symbolized a transcontinental war. Newspapers stated that "if American dash and inventiveness triumph there will be deeper gloom in certain European offices than if the allies lost a battle" (*Akron Beacon Journal*, 3 April 1915, 4). Beyond, therefore, the associations between Bernhardt and wounded soldiers, there lay the connotations of the contrasting economic forces: the emerging American industry confronting the old, decaying world of Europe. American corporations were well aware of the fact that

winning Bernhardt's body symbolically implied an economic victory of worldwide consequence. As the reporter for the *Akron Beacon Journal* claimed, "after the war is over there will be a bigger market than ever in history for artificial legs and the firm which can go before the public with Sarah Bernhardt's official o.k. in fac simile and with photographs as in the tobacco advertisements holds crippledom by the heel" (3 April 1915, 4). Provisioning the actress's artificial leg guaranteed a company a prominent place in the fledgling but growing prosthesis market as it fortified the new leading economies of the western world.

Moreover, such tensions between national economies transformed Bernhardt's prospective prosthetic leg into an industrial battlefield that further mirrored the European conflict. "Making a wooden leg for Sarah Bernhardt seems to be the event of world-wide interest that is second in importance only to the ending of the European war," stated *The Topeka State Journal* on April 1, 1915 (4). Reference to Bernhardt's leg at the same textual level as allusions to the Great War in newspaper headings was meant to associate the limb with a specific nationality as well as with old transnational rivalries. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* declared that although no news had been received of the actress's final purchase, one thing was certain, "and that is that Sarah will never tread the stage on a limb labeled 'made in Germany'" (1 April 1915, 6). Since Teuton manufacturers were ruled out, and since industry and nationality went hand in hand, the actress's apparent refusal to wear a wooden leg of German origin revealed her self-awareness as a French national icon and her anatomic and political involvement with her country through the ideology conveyed by modern instrumentality.

3. "A Work of Art in Itself"

The whole process of manufacturing and selling the prosthetic leg was rife with connotations; from American industrial modernity and artistic proficiency, to national pride. David E. Nye argues that for Americans, technology was primarily a means through which community bonding could be forged, thus consolidating the "belief in national greatness" (1994, 43). Similarly, Joel Dinerstein asserts that technology "structures the American sense of power and revenge, the nation's abstract sense of well-being, its arrogant sense of superiority, and its righteous justification for global dominance" (2006, 569). Because of its cultural undertones, a leg manufactured in America embodied a technologically imperialistic device which superseded the more rudimentary items developed in Europe. Bernhardt's leg needed to be not only produced to a high quality but also to be artistic enough for the most eminent tragedienne in the world to wear: for a product sourced and produced on American soil to be integrated with the body of this classical icon, there needed to be an acceptance of the notion that the new world had excellent esthetic taste with which to complement its technological prowess. Designing her leg, in other words, meant creating an artistic object, one that would be deserving of the "divine Sarah's" dramatic talent. Drawing inspiration from

the muse herself, the manufacturer bore the responsibility of crafting an item that had to be as unique, instinctive, genuine and glamorous as Bernhardt's idiosyncratic acting itself, while ensuring the best in practical precision and mechanical functioning. In so doing, the artificial limb would reconcile the divide between object, technology and the esthetic grandeur of the nation that had produced it.

During the manufacturing process, the actress had rejected more than half a dozen models and had participated in the development to some extent by giving the makers some indications of what she was envisioning. The product was never meant to be an exact replica of the actual leg, but rather an idealized version of it. The foot was, for instance, smaller at the request of Bernhardt, who apparently had always had "a passion for little feet" (*Kansas City Star* [KS], 31 May 1915, n.p.). In order for the actress to re-emerge as a *perfected* version of herself, a high degree of expertise with respect to both technical and artistic issues was essential, and these traits were exemplified by a certain American manufacturer by the name of Mr. John R. Clarke. A one-legged man himself, Clarke had recently returned from Paris, where he had an atelier which produced artificial limbs. His manual craft skills made him, according to *The Kansas City Star*, an "architect" (13 May 1915, n.p.). *The New York Times* similarly described him as an "artist" (14 November 1915, 19), and so magnificent and technical were his skills that his product was labelled by Bernhardt "a work of art in itself" (*Grand Rapids Press* [MI], 12 September 1915, 4).

The leg's "American-ness" transcended its having been produced by an American craftsman. The circumstances surrounding the design process and the various fittings and trials that the actress had to undergo were also reflective of a certain American idiosyncrasy which the manufacturer took pride in informing the media of. Clarke apparently visited his client on several occasions for a number of fittings and found himself having to deal with the actress's whimsical nature. "For the first measurement" he declared to *The New York Times*,

> I had to rise at night and go out of Paris, for she insisted that I be at her home at 7 o'clock in the morning. That was too much [...] The next time she asked for an early appointment, I explained that if she wanted an American leg she must have it fitted in the shop just as other persons did. (14 November 1915, 19)

Clarke's statement reveals a democratic conceptualization of the customer based upon a notion of essential equality that is reminiscent of Tocqueville's legendary "general equality of conditions" ([1835] 2004, 3). His impeccable work ethic could be characterized as democratic insofar as he was impervious to the capriciousness of celebrities or other popular individuals, thus conceptualizing all paying or potential customers as equals, regardless of social hierarchies. As Clarke reasoned with ease, "one cannot take tools and workers all over the country. She said she could not and she would not go to the shop. The other makers had attended her at her home, why not I? But I was firm" (*New York*

Times, 14 November 1915, 19). Clarke's vision denied any aristocratic prioritization of the customer over his work principles and routine. All purchasers were treated equally and impartially, a clear sign of the times' belief in the democratizing and leveling powers brought by a person's commitment to his/her work. The business's integrity had to be protected, regardless of the identity of the potential patron. In this sense, Clarke was no mere manufacturer; his enterprise also embodied the foundations of a new world order untainted by class privileges. If there was something that made his product even more truly American, it was his attitude as a professional.

The final product was believed to be the most technologically advanced prosthetic leg on the market. Clarke asserted that "no finer leg was ever produced than that" (*New York Times*, 14 November 1915, 19), and both the materials and the machinery employed in its confection were considered state-of-the-art by American newspapers. The leg was made of wood, catgut and a little rubber webbing. The materials were light—the leg weighed only 1.8 kilos. Its most intriguing feature was its capacity to adapt itself to the human body, its serenity in "adjusting the delicate fabric to the moods of dramatic art" (19). It was reported that "the American creation supplies a deficiency easily, flexibly and rhythmically" (19). As such, Clarke succeeded in infusing his product with the qualities of Bernhardt's acting that had made her so unique. He prided himself on designing a limb that blended with the personality of the person who wore it. With sufficient practice, Clarke further declared that Bernhardt would revive her natural talent and appear onstage "with the ease and grace of other years" (19). The leg was therefore a token of what Carl Elliott terms "enhancing" technology (2003, 20), a grail that rejuvenated the amputee, allowing her to retrieve her former, authentic self and to showcase it before her audience. Beyond the mere functional properties, the prosthetic limb was also regarded as an improvement on Bernhardt's original limb. This upgrading signified the communion between essence and artifice, to the extent that the concept of "techné" (i.e., technical perfection) can be applicable to the actress's body. Indeed, her corporeality may be regarded as a space that organically linked nature, art and technology, thus stressing the fundamental protagonism of the latter. Such communion of apparently contradictory ontologies reflects the type of historical shift that Leo Marx describes in his classic *The Machine in the Garden* when analyzing how "technology as an agent of change" became a hallmark of American cultural identity in periods of industrial expansion ([1964] 2000, 150).

The leg's high-tech properties revealed perfection in its mechanism as well as its materialization as "a living thing" (*Kansas City Star*, 31 May 1915, n.p.). David Wills contends that prostheses operate upon "two heterogeneities" (1995, 30)—the animate and the inanimate—that reconcile mechanic and organic attributes. Emulation of an actual leg was essential to evaluate the quality of the prosthesis, and newspapers stated that every joint and movement of Bernhardt's new limb was like that of a real leg. Slavishak states that during the first decades of the twentieth century, the pinnacle of prosthetic engineering consisted of those devices that "recreated the walk, the balance, and the complete repertoire of common motions that made the uninjured body perform

easily and without conscious thought" (2003, 374). Accordingly, the functionality of Bernhardt's leg was an illusion of a genuine leg, an apparatus so cutting-edge that hardly any difference could be perceived between the artificial and the natural. Its external appearance was, of course, of prime importance when it came to simulation of realness. At the time, prosthetics tended to prioritize practical efficiency over the realistic visible look of a piece. "It almost goes alone," exclaimed the diva when interviewed in Bordeaux (*Pittsburgh Press* [PA], 12 September 1915, 38). The actress personified her leg as a living, dissociated and yet integral part of her body, and so perfect was its organic nature that she considered her new leg "a substantial thing, my best friend" (*Salt Lake Telegram* [UT], 12 September 1915, 38).

The industrial efficacy of the product had amalgamated the natural and the synthetic in its Frankenstein-like impulse to instill life into dead matter. "Thanks to the miracles of surgery and mechanics," the *Watauga Democrat* (Boone, NC) stated, the actress's disability was practically imperceptible (2 September 1915, 1). Those amongst Bernhardt's friends who saw it defied anyone "to tell unless they knew that it was not real" (*Kansas City Star*, 31 May 1915, n.p.). Indeed, Bernhardt trained and disciplined herself in the use of the artificial device so as to have absolute control over it on the stage. Although most of her performances required very little mobility (the diva would usually sit on a chair throughout the whole play, a rug over her knees, and only stand up during dramatic climactic scenes) reviewers argued that the freshness and vigor of her art persisted. As a sort of modern Venus de Milo, the actress's corporeal fragmentation even seemed to embellish her acting in the mind of the playgoer. In the Philadelphia (PA) *Evening Ledger*'s words, "Bernhardt's leg may be wooden, but her Art! Ah, that is alive!" (17 August 1915, 8).

Bernhardt's virtuosity seemed to bring the inanimate to life, and it instigated an entire mythology based on the symbiotic relationship between the leg and her persona. The resilience and beauty of the American wooden leg, so worthy of admiration, strengthened the actress who, in turn, demiurgically *resurrected* the limb through the might of her performance. In such a manner did Bernhardt burst onto the stage after her surgery and recuperation, thanks to American industrial power. As Clarke professed, "now that she is partly American [...] she will again reveal the very goddess in her gait" (*New York Times*, 14 November 1915, 19).

4. "Partly American!"

Bernhardt's new leg was portrayed in America as the birth of a new nationality. Newspapers across the country carried headlines celebrating the Americanness of the actress, something that a few months earlier, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* had anticipated when stating that she would become "by partial adoption a Baltimorean" (1 April 1915, 6) should the company triumph over its competitors in Washington D.C. On November 14, 1915, the *Sunday Herald* (Boston, MA) applauded the closing of the transaction with the words "Artificial Leg Makes Bernhardt Partly American!"

(2) and on the same day *The New York Times* published a similar headline with a follow-up on how the actress had taken "unto herself an artificial leg created by our craftsmen" (19). As the strategic use of the pronoun suggested, the *colonizing* of Bernhardt's body was regarded as an American deed, for it implied a distinction between *us* (Americans) and *them* (Europeans). Furthermore, it remained consistent with the presentation of Bernhardt's identity as mobile and fluctuating. Although she already possessed twenty-four other legs of different origin, the new American leg was believed to be responsible for rescuing her dramatic glory from eclipse. The triumphant tone of the article invited readers to identify themselves with the victors, with our group.

In her study of the connection between technology and imperialism, de la Pena argues that "machines and tools often constituted the 'front line' in imperial efforts" (2006, 923). As such, the leg can be construed as a colonizing device reflecting the invasion of European markets by American products. Incorporating within her body a resource from another country turned the actress into a symbolic citizen of that nation. In this sense, Clarke's words anticipated David Serlin's cultural analysis of prosthetic technology as a means to enhance the individual's belonging to a specific social group. In his work *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America* (2004), Serlin claims that an artificial body part could socially rehabilitate the individual in such a way that the exclusion he/she previously felt on the grounds of his/her dissident body was totally annihilated. Thanks to groundbreaking technology, prostheses could make the subject "more tangibly and visibly American than ever before" (2004, 14).

In line with Serlin's argument, the homogenizing powers of prosthetic devices meant that the individual could acquire the authenticity necessary to integrate the self within a potentially divergent political community. In Bernhardt's case, such a process of transnationalization and social assimilation must be read under the parameters of what work in itself represented at the time within the American context. It was, indeed, the possibility of a new leg that made Bernhardt's theatrical comeback viable—it was, in other words, her passport to return to social activity as a working person. "With the member created from fabrics brought from the country and modeled by American craftsmen, the distinguished actress will be able to walk easily through *Camille*," stated Clarke in reference to the American version of Alexandre Dumas *fils*'s immortal play (*New York Times*, 14 November 1915, 19). Nation and profession went hand in hand, and this was of particular significance given the fact that Bernhardt had, after all, *chosen* to have her leg amputated precisely because she could not endure a future of professional dormancy. "I give my consent to being mutilated because I cannot bear to remain idle" (*Evening Ledger*, 22 February 1915, 2), she declared strongly. Suggestions regarding the postponing of the operation were immediately dismissed, for her career was her one priority: "Work is my life. So soon as I can be fitted with an artificial leg I shall resume the stage and all my good spirits will be restored" (2). Her fighting spirit reverberated throughout the words she wrote to a charity leader from the hospital on the eve of her operation, and which made headlines: "I would rather be mutilated

than powerless" (*Salt Lake Telegram*, 20 February 1915, 4). Statements such as this not only added to the propaganda surrounding the celebrity but they also encrypted some semblance of a work manifesto. Bernhardt represented courage and bravery in the face of medical adversity as much as when confronting professional difficulties and unexpected challenges. Her resilience and commitment to her career, despite her advanced age, were not lost on her American audience.

Bernhardt's iconicity of hard work matched the American consecration of work ethics. Her demeanor as a professional was the key to this association, as she chose to regard her amputation not as a painful impediment, but as a means that would release her from the physical bondage that was damaging the quality of her acting and her productivity as a working person. The actress was well aware that although the leg provided her with corporeal completion, what was of fundamental importance was that it rendered the circumstances under which she could exercise her craft possible. The rhetoric of work as a liberating force for the individual was constantly alluded to in articles transcribing the diva's body as a relentless means of production. Her repeated demands to work as soon as she recovered proved she could be just as functional and durable as the leg itself: "As soon as I have recovered completely I shall resume my classes at the conservatory and then move heaven and earth to realize my dream—create Rostand's Princess Lointaine" (*Princeton* [NJ] *Union*, 4 March 1915, 2). Her "body-made-whole by machine intervention" (Dodman 2006, 56) epitomized her devotion to the theatre, where perseverance was a key factor to professional success. As a report in the *Gulfport Daily Herald* (MS) stated, the name of Bernhardt brilliantly shone "in the dramatic firmament" because it "teaches a lesson: that fame, achievement, success, are inseparably entwined with that plain, commonplace function—work!" (15 March 1915, 4).

To conclude, Bernhardt could not dissociate herself from her identity as an active, independent woman, and her approach to her new situation exemplifies the theoretical distinction that disability scholars (Oliver 1996) and civil rights activists would make decades later between impaired and disabled individuals—that is, between the subject that suffers a defect or the absence of a body part and the social and cultural consequences of such affliction. Moreover, the environment where she worked, the stage, was anything but a space of marginal visibility, and therefore minimized the idea of the disabled self as "unsightly and unemployable" (Slavishak 2003, 372). To the contrary, Bernhardt's physicality showed that the amputation did not turn her into a "helpless member of society"—as many amputees would traditionally regard themselves—but, on the contrary, into a "useful one" (Marks 1914, 378; quoted by Slavishak 2003, 378). She was an example to the hordes of mutilated soldiers who struggled to reincorporate themselves back into the system. Beth Linker notes that in America the ethics of rehabilitation consisted in reinterpreting "war's waste" (2011, 2), in recycling the torn, damaged victims that the conflict had left behind and integrating them back into the standards of normalcy. Similarly, Koven argues that for the First World War veteran, work "was the

means by which the dismembered could become full citizens again" and evade the image of "mere derelicts" (1994, 1188). Thus, a disabled soldier's recovered body represented a "repository of the nation's identity, its past, present, and future" (1188).

The American press's interpretation of the amputee actress's place within geopolitical and social contexts challenges theoretical trends established by disability scholars that connect corporeal deformity to social marginalization, or what Mae M. Ngai terms "alien citizenship," that is, "citizens by virtue of their birth [...] but who are presumed to be foreign" due to anatomic variation (2004, 2). Ever the artistic impersonator, Bernhardt embraced, thanks to her unorthodox physicality, divergent national and political communities regardless of her actual birthplace. Through a revision of her later years and the impact that her amputation had in the United States, this study has attempted to illustrate a historical instance of how non-normative bodies have functioned as symbolic extensions of national identities. Ironically enough, rather than a healthy, vibrant young body, what best absorbed the American ideals of capitalism, democracy and work ethics was the fragmented and aging anatomy of the French tragedienne.

Works Cited

Broussky, Salomé. 2001. *La Comédie-Française*. Paris: Le Cavalier Bleu.

Bud, Robert, Bernard Finn and Helmuth Trischler, eds. 1999. "Series Preface." *Manifesting Medicine. Bodies and Machines*, xi-xii. Amsterdam: Harwood.

Collins, Patricia Hills 1999. "Moving Beyond Gender: Intersectionality and Scientific Knowledge." In *Revisioning Gender*, edited by Myra Marx Ferree, Jusith Lorber and Beth H. Hess, 261-284. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

de la Pena, Carolyn. 2006. "'Slow and Progress,' or Why American Studies Should do Technology." *American Quarterly* 58 (3): 915-941.

Dinerstein, Joel. 2006. "Technology and Its Discontents: On the Verge of the Posthuman." *American Quarterly* 58 (3): 569-595.

Dodman, Trevor. 2006. "'Going All to Pieces': *A Farewell to Arms* as Trauma Narrative." *Twentieth-Century Literature* 52 (3): 249-274.

Elliott, Carl. 2003. *Better than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Gottlieb, Robert. 2010. *Sarah. The Life of Sarah Bernhardt*. New Haven and London: Yale UP.

Hahn, H. Hazel 2009. *Scenes of Parisian Modernity. Culture and Consumption in the Nineteenth Century*. Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hathorn, Ramon. 1996. *Our Lady of the Snows: Sarah Bernhardt in Canada*. New York: Peter Lang.

Koven, Seth. 1994. "Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Great Britain." *The American Historical Review* 99 (4): 1167-1202.

LINKER, Beth. 2011. *War's Waste. Rehabilitation in World War America*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P.

MARKS, A.A. 1914. *Manual of Artificial Limbs—Copiously Illustrated—An Exhaustive Exposition of Prosthesis*. New York: n.p.

MARKS, Patricia. 2003. *Sarah Bernhardt's First American Tour (1880-1881)*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

MARX, Leo. (1964) 2000. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford UP.

MINICH, Julie Avril. 2014. *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico*. Philadelphia: Temple UP.

MOBLEY, Jennifer-Scott. 2014. "The Body as a Cultural Text." In *Female Bodies on the American Stage*, edited by J. S. Mobley, 9-27. Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

MUSSER, Charles. 2013. "Conversions and Convergences: Sarah Bernhardt in the Era of Technological Reproductibility, 1910-1913." *Film History* 25 (1-2): 154-175.

NGAI, Mae M. 2004. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP.

NYE, David E. 1994. *American Technological Sublime*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

O'CONNOR, Erin. 1997. "'Fractions of Men': Engendering Amputation in Victorian Culture." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39 (4): 742-777.

OLIVER, Michael. 1996. *Understanding Disability. From Theory to Practice*. Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

ONG, Aihwa. 1999. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.

SERLIN, David H. 2004. *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America*. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P.

SLAVISHAK, Edward. 2003. "Artificial Limbs and Industrial Workers' Bodies in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh." *Journal of Social History* 37 (2): 365-388.

TOCQUEVILLE, Alexis de. (1835) 2004. *Democracy in America*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. New York: The Library of America / Literary Classics of the United States.

WILLS, David. 1995. *Prosthesis*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES CITED

Akron Beacon Journal (OH). 1915. "Leg Caterer to Bernhardt." April 3, 4.

Baltimore Sun (MD). 1915. "In Race to See Bernhardt. Baltimore Artificial Leg Salesman Has a Rival." March 30, 16.

Boston Daily Globe (MA). 1915. "Trouble for Bernhardt." March 30, 16.

—. 1915. "Editorial Points." November 15, 6.

Cincinnati Enquirer (OH). 1915. "The Divine Sarah." December 23, 4.

Evening Ledger (Philadelphia, PA). 1915. "Sarah Bernhardt's Leg Amputated." February 22, 2.
—. 1915. "The Annapolis Verdict." August 17, 8.
Evening World-Herald (Omaha, NE). 1917. "Quand Meme [sic]!" January 6, 6.
Grand Rapids Press (MI). 1915. "Divine Sarah Ends Career as Actress." September 12, 4.
Gulfport Daily Herald (MS). 1915. Untitled. March 15, 4.
Kansas City Star (KS). 1915. "Bernhardt's Wonderful Wooden Leg." May 31, n.p.
Los Angeles Times. 1891. "Notes of the Day." August 12, 4.
Morning Oregonian (Portland, OR). 1915. Untitled. February 23, 6.
New York Times. 1915. "Bernhardt Asked Amputation of Leg." February 21, 3.
—. 1915. "Surgeons to Operate on Bernhardt Today." February 22, 1.
—. 1915. "Bernhardt Rages Against War." May 23, 19.
—. 1915. "Bernhardt is Now Partly American." November 14, 19.
—. 1916. "Mme. Bernhardt at the Knickerbocker." September 10, 6.
New York Tribune. 1915. "Pasted Jewels." March 14, 10.
Omaha Daily Bee (NE). 1915. "The Poet Rostand's Sonnet to Bernhardt's Severed Leg." May 16, n.p.
Pittsburgh Press (PA). 1915. "Sarah Bernhardt Eulogizes Her Wooden Leg." September 12, 38.
Princeton Union (NJ). 1915. "Bernhardt not Downcast." March 4, 2.
Republic (Waterbury, CT). 1915. "Sarah Bernhardt Able to Leave Hospital." March 13, 1.
Richmond Times-Dispatch (VA). 1915. "Busy Baltimore." April 1, 6.
Salt Lake Telegram (UT). 1915. "The Woman Who Would Rather Be Mutilated than Powerless." February 20, 4.
—. 1915. "Sarah Bernhardt Eulogizes Her Wooden Leg." 12 September, 38.
Sunday Herald (Boston, MA). 1915. "Artificial Leg Makes Bernhardt Partly American." November 14, 2.
Topeka State Journal (KS). 1915. "Make Sarah a Leg." March 29, 6.
—. 1915. Untitled. 1 April, 4.
Washington Herald. 1915. "Maybe Sarah's Leg Will Make this City Famous." March 30, 2.
Watauga Democrat (Boone, NC). 1915. "Bernhardt's Wish." September 2, 1.

Received 28 July 2017 Revised version accepted 19 February 2018

Ignacio Ramos-Gay is Associate Professor in French at the University of Valencia, in Spain. His research focuses on contemporary European drama and popular culture. A Fulbright visiting scholar at the Martin E. Seagal Theatre Centre at the City University of New York, he has co-edited a number of volumes on the cultural cross-currents between Britain, the United States and France.

Address: Facultad de Filología, Traducción y Comunicación. Universidad de Valencia. Avenida Blasco Ibáñez, 32. 46010, Valencia, Spain. Tel.: +34 963864100.