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"This is Roosevelt's World" - FDR as a Cultural Icon in American Memory
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Cover Page

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Chapter 7: Prosthetic Memory and the Dynamics of Disability

Introduction

“A house divided against itself cannot stand”, that other paradigmatic presidential icon, Abraham Lincoln said in 1858 at a moment when the United States was about to collapse. In this chapter I will argue that, now that again both the US’s role in the world, and its internal unity and international robustness are increasingly perceived as feeble,[1] the FDR icon acquires a peculiar new relevance as someone who literally could not stand and yet became an embodiment for all that is moral and victorious within the US and around the globe. In 1990s and later American Roosevelt representations, there is a recurrent insistence that his disability was “FDR’s greatest strength”, as the rallying cry of the National Organization on Disability had it in 1997 (Stein 51), and that FDR “Lifted himself from his wheelchair to lift this nation from its knees”, as Jean Edward Smith put it in the motto for his best-selling biography *FDR* (2008). I am not concerned with whether his disability was the historical FDR’s greatest strength or whether it was instrumental in helping lift America from its knees, but will argue that the disability is the greatest strength of the FDR icon in cultural memory, because remembrance practices can productively employ it to screen historical trauma and alleviate fears of impending American collapse. In doing so I will trace how the cultural remembrance and memorialization of his disability has been shaped over the last few decades, progressively more strongly and articulately as a means to shore up an increasing sense of domestic incapacity and international infirmity.

That I will not consider in great detail to what extent the historical FDR was helped, informed or toughened by his disease and having to cope with disability, does not mean that I doubt he was. Many others have written about this and most of these arguments are compelling, yet inevitably speculative in their reverse-engineering of how a long-dead and highly reticent historical person was psychologically affected by his disability. I do, however, trace the history of how FDR’s disability was remembered by various groups and agents within the US. Particularly, I want to consider the disappearance act of FDR’s ability and the appearance of the disability in American memory.

History of Remembering FDR’s Disability

When early in July 2013 an eight-second clip of President Roosevelt in his wheelchair surfaced, it became instant world news (Walsh). No such footage had been available previously, barring a single well-known photograph of FDR in his wheelchair taken in 1941 by Margaret Suckley (see front), and another one that has hardly been disseminated. Without actually revealing anything

1 See for instance Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*.

previously unknown, the discovery of the clip made an incredible impact as news. It has been well-known that Roosevelt had had adult-onset poliomyelitis ever since the news of his illness was spread in 1921.[2] That he was unable, as a result, to walk unassisted and was wheelchair bound has been stressed more and more since the 1960s and particularly the 1980s when academic and popular monographs focusing on FDR's disability started to appear and receive widespread attention. From the very beginning, the attention to Roosevelt's disability was shrouded in narratives of how it positively enhanced the development of his character, and later, when it became more central in popular awareness, narratives of how he tried to hide its extent.

There are broadly three phases to be distinguished in the public perception of Roosevelt's disability.[3] The first starts briefly after Roosevelt became ill with polio in February 1921 and lasts until his death in 1945. In this period Roosevelt's physical condition was an issue in the public discussion first in the late 1920s upon his reentry into politics, then in 1932 when he became a presidential nominee, and finally in 1944 during his campaign for the reelection when his health was visibly deteriorating. The second phase is from April 1945 until the appearance in 1985 of Hugh Gallagher's *FDR's Splendid Deception*. Since his death in April 1945 Roosevelt's ill health in the last part of his presidency and his affliction with polio grew strongly as a focus for the greater public, initially in the wake of his sudden decease, and later when he was championed as a hero by the disability rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s. In those contexts the narrative of Roosevelt's illness and particularly the process of his "conquering" the setbacks incurred became central – often on a psychologizing level, describing the disability as a positive character-building experience.

In the third phase, public perceptions and representations of Roosevelt's disability continue to be profoundly influenced by Gallagher's book. *FDR's Splendid Deception* was a departure from previous narratives, in its stress on Roosevelt's secrecy about his affliction, and the machinery he employed to play down the extent of his disability. Moreover, Gallagher argued, as opposed to previous authors, that the psychological influence of the condition on FDR had been very profound, not only positively. This book has had an extremely widespread and positive reception – it has, among other things, been crucial in determining the final design of the national Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial in Washington DC, and has more decisively than previous images and stories of Roosevelt's disability narrated FDR as president who was first and foremost a polio-survivor, both stressing the positive effects this had on his service to the nation and the toll it took from him personally.

I briefly discuss each of these phases to point out the central moments, sites and artefacts that have contributed to FDR's widespread iconification as a disabled president over time. Together

2 Although there is an alternative theory that suggests he had Guillain-Barre syndrome, see Goldman et al. 32-40.

3 Christopher Clausen, "FDR's Hidden Handicap", *The Wilson Quarterly*, summer 2005,and Barbara Floyd, "Hugh Gallagher's Splendid Reception", *The Disability Studies Quarterly* 2010. Both these articles make a similar division.

these describe the large arch – now nearly a century since the onset of his illness – of key points representing changes in the public perception of Roosevelt's condition. I contextualize these culturally, and try to pinpoint what cultural needs these representations have served. While the phases outlined above are helpful to distinguish because they are clearly separated by particular insights, narratives, genres and audiences, they can hardly be considered clean breaks from one paradigm to another. Even if it is logical to consider 12 April 1945 a watershed moment in popular awareness of FDR's physical issues, public speculation about his health was already rife before his death in late 1944 and early 1945. Equally, psychologizing FDR's recovery process in the way Gallagher did already start in the 1970s.[4] However, the point is to show how and when FDR's disability became visible to a wide audience and address what function that element of the FDR icon acquired in cultural memory.

Franklin Roosevelt became ill in February 1921 when vacationing at Campobello Island (New Brunswick, Canada), probably having been infected on a visit to a boy scout camp (Davis *Beckoning* 651). He was diagnosed with infantile paralysis. When it became clear that he would probably remain crippled, his mother Sara Delano wished him to withdraw from political and professional life and retire with his wife and children to the family estate in Hyde Park. This response must be read against the background of the then current perception of polio as affecting the mental as well as the physical capabilities of the afflicted. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "physical 'defects', both scientists and the casual observer increasingly assumed, went hand in hand with mental and moral 'defects'" (Nielsen 100-101). Most people who were physically disabled through polio ended up institutionalized in Spartan polio hospitals that increased their dependence on the help of professional caregivers. As an elite survivor FDR would in that paradigm be expected to become a wealthy invalid withdrawn from public life and taken care of by family servants. Eleanor Roosevelt and his personal advisor Louis Howe, however, supported FDR to reenter the public arena and resume his political career, despite his impairment which was a social drawback as much as a physical problem (Gallagher 53). FDR himself strongly and against all odds believed in the possibility of a full recovery and was committed to doing all in his power to improve, to the point of seeming ridiculously in denial. He pursued a large number of classical, new and alternative therapies to regain strength in his legs. He was treated several times at the supposedly salutary baths and revalidation clinic at Warm Springs, Georgia, and in 1927 turned them into a hospital and rehabilitation institute for polio victims.

Roosevelt returned to politics as leader of Al Smith's 1924 presidential campaign. This culminated in his historic "Happy Warrior" address nominating Smith as Democratic candidate and put him squarely back into political focus (Davis *Beckoning* 771). This is also the first time Roosevelt

4 Aside: *FDR's Splendid Deception* is employed here both as a paradigmatic representation of FDR's disability, and as a detailed source of information about its subject.

'walked' to the rostrum to deliver a speech, aided by a stick on one side and his son James's arm on the other. He was paralyzed from the waist down, so that he could only stand due to the steel braces on his legs, the fact that the rostrum was screwed to the floor, and thanks to his well-developed arm muscles (Gallagher 93).

When Roosevelt became governor of New York in 1928, his physical health became a topic of public interest, initially employed by the Republican campaign to prove Roosevelt's unfitness for the office. In a press inquiry about this Al Smith reacted famously: "But the answer to that is that a governor does not have to be an acrobat. We do not elect him for his ability to do a double back-flip or a handspring" (Ward, *Roosevelts* 267). Christopher Clausen indeed asserts that "Republicans soon stopped talking about Roosevelt's physical condition for fear of creating a sympathy vote for him" (26). During the campaign for his first presidential election the issue returned, and this time, Roosevelt invited Republican journalist and sympathizer Earle Looker to have him examined physically. Looker's article in *Liberty Magazine* (July 1931) "Is Franklin D. Roosevelt Physically Fit to Be President?" in its opening paragraph says:

> It is an amazing possibility that the next President of the United States may be a cripple. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Governor of the State of New York, was crippled by infantile paralysis in the epidemic of 1921 and still walks with the help of a crutch and a walking stick.

Although Looker cast himself as a Republican, he worked closely with Roosevelt's advisor Louis Howe, and Howe bought 50,000 reprints of this issue of *Liberty Magazine* for the Roosevelt campaign (Rollins 313). It is typical for the framing of Roosevelt's disability in the 1930s: on the one hand it was entirely clear and explicit that Roosevelt was "a cripple", and on the other hand no mention is made of a wheelchair. Saying that FDR "still walks with help", suggests both that he continues to walk and that he may soon stop needing help, and guides attention away from the fact that it is debatable whether Roosevelt's way of moving himself while upright constituted walking at all. Although the "amazing" in the "an amazing possibility" clearly primarily denotes surprise, it also carries a positive connotation. The assertion that FDR is "Governor of the State of New York" already implies that he is fit for high office, and the reference to "the epidemic of 1921" frames him as an innocent victim among many other citizens of a malevolent virus.

Clearly, both before and during Roosevelt's presidency Americans knew that the President had had poliomyelitis and was an 'invalid' as a result. Roosevelt did not so much hide as play down his disability in public – it was not widely known that he was unable to walk or stand unaided. He was publicly active in setting up charitable institutions, such as the rehabilitation hospital in Warm Springs, which he felt had benefitted him in his recovery and, famously, The March of Dimes, still one of the US's largest charities, which supported polio victims and financed research in order to develop a vaccine. This drew attention to his

own polio history, but also framed it as *history*, suggesting that FDR had had polio, but that now that he was recovered, he put his powers to helping others overcome the disease – as he had, was the implicit suggestion.

In his public functions Roosevelt was careful not to be seen, photographed or filmed in his wheelchair or while being lifted, for instance from his car. This was successful at the time – press photographers did not shoot, much less publish, pictures or film footage which showed Roosevelt in such helpless conditions (Winfield 114). This has changed dramatically: Roosevelt representations now deal very explicitly with the fact that he could not walk. Roosevelt presented himself mainly to the public through radio speeches, which obviously does not include a visual representation. He dealt with the disability as a factor in his public perception mainly through silence, accommodating the disability without drawing attention to doing so. The famous photos from Yalta, showing Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin – seated – exemplify this. One exception occurred weeks before his death: in one of his last public speeches, he explicitly apologized for addressing Congress from his chair:[5]

> I hope that you will pardon me for this unusual posture of sitting down during the presentation of what I want to say, but I know that you will realize that it makes it a lot easier for me not to have to carry about ten pounds of steel around on the bottom of my legs; and also because of the fact that I have just completed a fourteen-thousand-mile trip. (Address to Congress on Yalta, March 1, 1945)

However inconsistent this is compared to his previous silence on the issue of his own bodily condition – especially during the 1944 campaign, when he was visibly unwell and made intense efforts to appear as energetic as ever – this opening is also consistent with his previous treatment of his disability. Although he does not stand at this particular moment, he talks about standing, and about the physical energy he usually brings to public speaking, as he does even now, having just traveled 14,000 miles.

Roosevelt died of a cerebral haemorrhage on April 12, 1945 at the "Little White House" in Warm Springs, Georgia, his cottage at the site of the polio rehabilitation institute he had founded, where he went to recover physically. The occasion of his death drew a great deal of attention to his physical body, perhaps because of the surprising location and the unexpected moment, but also because Roosevelt's body, previously invested with political power and thought of primarily as representing the nation, suddenly became provokingly natural. In the wake of the news of how and where he died, obituaries gave attention to his general health and physical condition, far more than they had done during his presidency, and White House journalists started to become more open about witnessing Roosevelt's physical appearance (Lomazow 187).

5 Franklin Roosevelt, Address to Congress on Yalta, March 1, 1945.

Figure 13. Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin at Yalta, February 1945 (US Government photographer, Wikimedia Commons)

In a probing study of "Reactions to the Death of President Roosevelt" Harold Orlansky in 1947 already established that:

> Republican Party propagandists had publicized reports of Roosevelt's poor health during the November 1944 election campaign. But after Roosevelt's re-election, the press was silent on the subject, although ill-health of the President is a major news story. This silence is significant in itself, since it can be ascribed to compelling social motives rather than ignorance. Apparently the myth of a vigorous, energetic leader is not restricted to dictatorships. The cult of physical strength reaches deep into the body politic. (237-238)

While Orlansky obviously takes Roosevelt's ill health and subsequent death as his starting point, his remark about "the myth of a vigorous, energetic leader" also bears on Roosevelt's disabled body. He suggests that Roosevelt's weak body was not referred to out of a kind of embarrassment or fear to harm the status of Roosevelt as a mythic leader and perhaps even by implication weaken the nation in the midst of its struggle with the dictatorships in Europe. In any case, he points out that the occlusion of the extent of FDR's disability was not simply Roosevelt's strategy, but also a societal response to worrying information. Moreover, he thus explains that following FDR's death both the illness and the disability became less precarious issues to address.

In the fifteen years or so following Roosevelt's death it became increasingly universal knowledge that FDR had had polio and that this incapacitated him to a larger extent than was visible during his presidency. May and Hill suggest that this new awareness was mainly interpreted within the

frame that "disability conferred extraordinary prowess on other senses" (May and Hill 604).[6] Thus, it was regarded as a misfortune that strengthened other parts of his body and mind. In the late 1940s and early 1950s the most common reading of Roosevelt's disability was that – as Eleanor had once said in an interview – "perhaps a blessing in disguise."[7] If the episode had affected Roosevelt's character development, it was only to make him stronger, more resilient and more capable of empathy with those in trouble. FDR's daughter Anna Roosevelt elaborated on the same idea writing a piece in 1949 for *Woman Magazine* titled "How Polio Helped Father."

Practically all narratives of Roosevelt's illness and disability shared this gist, on the one hand understating the extent to which it affected him, and on the other suggesting that it was something that had been successfully conquered. Its effects were interpreted as primarily positive on the level of character development, strengthening his determination and teaching him empathy. This was, certainly initially, a clear departure from former attitudes towards disability and polio, away from earlier forms of ostracizing the disabled. Roosevelt contributed to that change through his example and by creating, funding and developing in Warm Springs, Georgia, a polio rehabilitation center he had 'discovered' in his own rehabilitation process. The announcement to the world of the discovery of Jonas Salk's polio vaccine on April 12, 1955 – on the tenth anniversary of FDR's death – completed the narrative that the challenges and suffering of an individual man had led, through the March of Dimes – itself a reference to the radio news show "March of Time" – to a victory over epidemic disease for the entire world.

An important moment in the coloring-in of the narrative of FDR as a character strengthened through polio was when, in 1960, the biographical film *Sunrise at Campobello* (dir. Vincent Donehue) came out, based on a 1958 play by Dore Schary. Beginning at the family's vacation home on Campobello Island, New Brunswick, on the border between Maine and Canada, in the summer of 1921, *Sunrise at Campobello* depicts FDR in early scenes as vigorously athletic, enjoying games with his children and sailing his boat. He is suddenly stricken with fever and then paralysis, and subsequent scenes focus on the ensuing conflict in the following weeks between the bedridden FDR, Eleanor Roosevelt, his mother and Louis Howe over FDR's political future. A later scene portrays FDR literally dragging himself up the stairs as, through grit and determination, he painfully strives to overcome his physical limitations and not remain an invalid. In the final triumphant scene, FDR is shown re-entering public life as he walks to the speaker's rostrum at the 1924 Democratic National Convention, aided by heavy leg braces and on the arm of his eldest son, a "Happy Warrior" as much as Al Smith, whom FDR nominated in his address with that title. Although this narrative continued the older suggestion that Roosevelt had gained mental strength because of his illness and disability, the reticence about the topic

6 This theme is articulated in their 1984 article about popular views on disability and regarded as a "historical image", suggesting that by 1984 it was outdated. (That the emancipation of people with disabilities was not completed in 1984 is given away by the glaring objectification in the article's title "How Shall We See Them?")

7 Quoted in Theodore Lippman, Jr, *The Squire of Warm Springs,* 1977, 81.

gave way to popular visibility and celebration of FDR's handicap, and, to some extent, to the emancipation of disabled people through Roosevelt's success.

Also in 1960, one of the first monographs about Roosevelt's manner of handling his disability appeared: Jean Gould's *A Good Fight, The Story of F.D.R.'s Conquest of Polio.* As the title suggests, the book stressed the victory narrative, in which Roosevelt had overcome polio as a prelude to overcoming the nation's major crises of the twentieth century. Both of these narratives follow a basic pattern Mitchell and Snyder outline in their book *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*: the disability is the reason for telling the story in the first place, and narrative closure is provided by the suggestion that the disability is "conquered."

Mitchell and Snyder argue that this pattern is near-universal: narratives in almost any culture are, they argue, more than readers tend to notice at first sight, rife with disabled characters, who deviate from the norm and are regarded as aberrant and less than complete. These characters have two main roles:

> Our thesis centers not simply upon the fact that people with disabilities have been the object of representational treatments, but rather that their function in literary discourse is primarily twofold: disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization, and second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device. We term this perpetual discursive dependency upon disability *narrative prosthesis*. (47)

As has become customary in the field of disability studies, Mitchell and Snyder regard the dominant perception of disability as imperfection or the ominous and meaningful absence of ability as a cultural construction communicating a significant point about the mainstream, able, culture. First, they argue that the disabled individual, unlike the run-of-the-mill able-bodied, requires a narrative justification, and therefore inspires storytelling. Such stories often end with the punishment or restoration to able-bodiedness of the protagonist. Second, disabled bodies function as metaphors: "physical and cognitive anomalies promise to lend a 'tangible' body to textual abstractions; we term this metaphorical use of disability the *materiality of metaphor*, and analyze its workings as narrative prosthesis" (47-48). The implication of this theory is that FDR characters and their "conquest" of polio as portrayed in these films are materialized metaphors for something else – I will argue: for the United States, as a from the 1960s on, increasingly wounded nation.

To explain these processes, Mitchell and Snyder analyze Sophocles' *Oedipus*. Presumably because of his own experience with having a limp, incurred as a result of his father's abandonment in his infancy, Oedipus can solve the Sphinx's riddle by answering "the man who walks with a cane" (61), and later his self-blinding coincides with the moment he becomes a seer, both literally – he understands what has happened – and in the sense that he becomes an interpreter of what

the able-bodied do not normally perceive. Mitchell and Snyder also draw attention to other treatments, and non-treatments, of Oedipus's disabilities in the plays, for instance the fact that his limp is mostly disregarded, but this particular element of the physically disabled as extra able in a metaphorical sense seems especially relevant to Roosevelt narratives. In the same way as Oedipus could foresee because he could not literally see, the narrative perception of FDR's inability to walk has become that of a strength or an element uniquely enabling him to "lift the nation from its knees."

One other element that Oedipus and FDR share, other than their hardly visible yet important disabilities, is their position as supreme leader. Ernst Kantorowicz theorized the now classic double act of embodiment medieval kings performed, as on the one hand a "body natural", a tangible and vulnerable physique, and on the other a "body politic", which in the middle ages meant that political power was located absolutely and by divine order in the King (21-24). This distinction of "the King's two bodies" has been expanded by later critics to include political leaders who were neither royalty nor medieval absolute leaders, because it is a fruitful way of thinking about a leader as both an individual body and the embodiment of a larger institution. This terminology has also been applied to FDR, particularly to the issue of dealing with his disability, for instance by Houck and Kiewe in *FDR's Body Politics: The Rhetoric of Disability*, by Frank Castigliola in "Roosevelt's Body and National Power" and by Sally Stein in "The President's Two Bodies." Such texts tend to suggest that either the public perception, or the autofabrication of FDR's body politic was informed by his disabled body natural, but they hardly touch on the role of cultural memory in this process, which is what this chapter sets out to understand. I adopt Mitchell and Snyder's approach to representation of disability in literature as *narrative prosthesis*, with the nuance that I apply that notion to cultural texts and the narrative texture of historical events rather than to literary texts. I will also use their concept of the "materiality of metaphor" to argue that the FDR icon, because of his disability, is unusually fit to engender *prosthetic memories*, a term I will explain through a study of the movie *Hyde Park on Hudson* (2012).

A handicap that could not have been remembered from Roosevelt's actual presidency, because it then simply was not visible to the public, entered cultural memory through such films as *Sunrise at Campobello*. However, there remains a contrast between the implicit and indirect awareness of his invalidity during Roosevelt's presidency and its portrayal in the decades that followed it as a conquered misfortune, and the public image of FDR in a wheelchair that has evolved in the last few decades. In recent representations of Roosevelt, memorial, cinematic or documentary, his wheelchair has practically become FDR's most defining and recognizable feature. In movies about World War II made over the last decades, when viewers see a man in a wheelchair enter the scene, they understand immediately that this must be FDR. So whereas many knew about Roosevelt's invalidity during his presidency, his wheelchair has come to occupy center-stage only relatively recently. An early example is the 1982 musical film *Annie* (discussed at length in

chapter 5), in which the protagonist is received by Roosevelt who is in a wheelchair, and offers in passing to teach her to ride one too. This image recalls the famous 1941 photo of FDR in his wheelchair with Ruthie Bie (front).

Part of the reason for the increasing omnipresence of wheelchair imagery whenever Roosevelt is represented is no doubt the evolving focus on the visual and the cinematic quality of most recent representations. However, a more political explanation for the rise to fame of Roosevelt's wheelchair is that following the success of the Civil Rights movement, disabled Americans too started to demand more equal opportunities, culminating in 1990 in the Americans with Disabilities Act (Pletcher and Pletcher). As part of that process, Roosevelt was roped into a rigorous campaign of identity politics, but in a broader sense too, interest in the "human-angle" perspective on his invalidity increased throughout US society. A scholarly classic from the early era of disability activism is Theodore Lippmann's book *The Squire of Warm Springs* (1977) which cast FDR as an early disability rights activist, and a visionary therapy designer who hailed the radical belief that for polio survivors, the physical rehabilitation was an element in the social and emotional adjustment process rather than vice versa.

But the real turning point in terms of remembering Roosevelt's disability came with Hugh Gallagher's paradigmatic *FDR's Splendid Deception: The Moving Story of Roosevelt's Massive Disability – And the Intense Efforts to Conceal It from the Public* (1985). This book created and reinforced popular narratives about FDR's experience of polio and the resultant disability. Hugh Gallagher, himself disabled as a result of a bout of polio, suggests that Roosevelt very actively, indeed obsessively, tried to hide his disability. Gallagher particularly argues that the polio episode and FDR's failure to recover fully were extremely traumatic, and had a highly formative effect on his character. According to Gallagher Roosevelt went through periods of intense depression as a result (22-23). Various authors have argued that this may have been Gallagher's projection of his own post-polio depression, suggesting in itself the FDR icon's openness to operating as a screen.[8] Nonetheless, Gallagher's book has been immensely important in shaping the cultural memory of FDR's disability, because it foregrounded the extent of his handicap, particularly the wheelchair, and emphasized the presumable suffering involved in dealing with it, physically, emotionally and socially. Moreover, it turned the strategy of downplaying Roosevelt's invalidity, which kept it vague in cultural perception during his presidency, into an additional burden in cultural memory. *FDR's Splendid Deception* has also had an enormous impact on the long process surrounding the development of the FDR Memorial in Washington DC.

Gallagher perhaps recognized himself in FDR, and the comparison with FDR is indeed easily made. Philip Roth does so too, in *The Plot Against America* which features young Philip's cousin

8 E.g. Barbara Floyd in "Hugh Gregory Gallagher's Splendid Reception", *Disability Studies Quarterly* 30: 3-4 (2010).

Alvin, who goes to war in Europe in 1940, fighting with the Canadian army, and is crippled. Through Alvin, Roth shows what situation disabled men found themselves in, with heavy uncomfortable braces and ill-fitting prostheses, and Alvin's ensuing passivity stresses the contrast between what most crippled young men were reduced to and FDR's resilience and opportunity to continue to be publicly active, due to his wealth and supportive environment. Roth's 2010 novel *Nemesis* does something similar. Its protagonist Bucky Cantor is a vigorous young games teacher who contracts polio and is severely disabled by it. Rather than trying to overcome its effects Bucky withdraws from his community, breaks off his engagement and leads an isolated and depressed life. Alvin and Bucky can be seen as foils for Roosevelt – the polio victim who, in contrast to others, did come back a stronger and more engaged person. Like *The Plot Against America*, *Nemesis* suggests that Roosevelt was an individual outlier, not because of his disability, but because he could continue his career in spite of his disability. Through such foils as Alvin and Bucky, Roth effectively shows how Roosevelt's disabled body was turned into a materialized metaphor of American grit in the face of adversity in cultural memory.

Later documentary films like *Warm Springs* (2005), and *FDR: A Presidency Revealed* (2005), and experiential guided tours like that of the Roosevelt Home in Hyde Park (NY) have echoed the interpretation of Roosevelt as unusually resilient, often with the connotation that this form of being exceptionally buoyant and irrepressible is also profoundly American. *Warm Springs* essentially starts where *Sunrise at Campobello* leaves off. It focuses on Roosevelt's discovery of the hot baths at Warm Springs and his development of the pools into a polio rehabilitation center. The film stresses how Roosevelt successfully turned the setback of his individual disease into something positive and constructive for polio victims throughout the nation, suggesting simultaneously that he single-handedly pulled the extremely poor, backward and segregated village of Warm Springs from a state of dilapidation into the twentieth century. This narrative functions as a bridge in cultural memory, between Roosevelt's conquest over his disability to a pilot project for the New Deal.

In modern representations, Roosevelt's disability is practically always portrayed as a nearly insurmountable personal trauma, which he nonetheless overcame, adding to his massive accomplishment, ability to empathize, and charm. This aspect is now overemphasized, initially mainly by the American disabled lobby, to the point of suggesting that it was Roosevelt's most important characteristic. This is far removed from Roosevelt's own attitude toward his disability. FDR and his team autofabricated the disability, and especially the wheelchair out of view, and the memory of it has appeared after his death, based on later representations. While FDR restrained the presence of his disability in his public image, its intensive use is now usually part of directly celebratory remembrance practices. I argue that Roosevelt's disability and the presumed trauma surrounding it in his private life have become a central aspect of the FDR icon, because they can easily function allegorically for other American traumas in cultural memory. The historic FDR's silence surrounding his disability is an important enabling factor in this metaphor.

Memorializing FDR's Disability: from Hiding to Highlighting

While the FDR icon, through the disability as one of its key attributes, lends itself well to narratives of inclusive consensus, on a more concrete level the historical Roosevelt did not want to be portrayed in an iconic fashion, in a Peircean sense. The now famous quotation often cited in discussions of this topic comes from Roosevelt's personal friend Chief Justice Felix Frankfurter's diary.[9] According to Frankfurter, Roosevelt wanted a small and simple monument, about which he said:

> [It should be] placed in the center of that green plot [in front of the National Archives in Washington D.C., and should be] a block about the size of this (putting his hand on his desk). I don't care what it is made of, whether limestone or granite or what not, but I want it to be plain, without any ornamentation, with the simple carving "In memory of…."

It is typical for Roosevelt to have formulated such a modest wish, while at the same time he was engaged in building the first presidential library for the public on the grounds of his private estate. As a museum and archive dedicated to the study of and education about Franklin D. Roosevelt, it has often been read as a massive memorial in its own right. However, the one time he explicitly expressed himself on the question of a monument with no other function than to remember, Roosevelt was clear. He did not want to be remembered through a statue of his body natural, but made a point of being memorialized in connection with the body of his work, near the National Archives, where most of his executive impact is laid down on paper, as the FDR Presidential Library does too.

Nonetheless, there are some statues of Roosevelt in the US. While other nations have built iconic Roosevelt statues without much trouble,[10] the conspicuous circumspection of American memorial artists signals how sensitive this issue became in the US. The memorial that Roosevelt himself wanted, according to Frankfurter, was built only in 1965, and the eventual, large Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial on Washington's Cherry Walk was dedicated on May 2, 1997. Stein writes about the first official memorial representation of Roosevelt in her article, the Roosevelt dime, struck in 1946:

> [T]he numismatic portrait exceptionalizes Roosevelt by withholding any indications of a body below the head. Coins admittedly offer cramped spaces for portraiture, the small size of the dime being most restrictive. Even so, the physiognomy on the Roosevelt dime stops unnecessarily short with the chin, especially compared with the way necks and sometimes shoulders figure as prominent supports in the case of the Lincoln penny, the Jefferson nickel, and the Washington quarter. (42)

9 Cited by Frankfurter himself in a 1961 article in *The Atlantic Monthly*.
10 The Statue of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt on Grosvenor Square in London, for instance, was erected in 1948. It portrays Roosevelt standing, using a cane. A Roosevelt statue in Oslo (also erected in 1948), shows him seated.

While this particular argument appears far-fetched, Stein's argument that Roosevelt is unnecessarily disembodied is true for most early American Roosevelt monument designs. The FDR Presidential Library now features a statue of Roosevelt, and some busts, which obviously circumvent the difficulty of portraying his disability. The statue is of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt in the Library's Kerr Memorial Garden, and does portray them in full, but this was only made in 2003.[11]

Figure 14. Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, Sculpture by StudioEIS, Senator Robert S. Kerr Memorial Garden, Hyde Park (my photo)

The original, privately funded, memorial in Washington, which followed FDR's wish to the letter, was dedicated exactly twenty years after Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1965. Preparations for a larger national memorial started in August 1955 with a joint resolution of Congress, Public Law 84-572, establishing the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Commission, to select a design, acquire funding and oversee the construction of a public FDR memorial in Washington DC.[12]

The initial design, by William Pedersen and Bradford Tilney was chosen by the memorial commission in 1962, selected by an expert jury from 574 entries in a national competition. The design consisted of eight giant "steles" – the highest of which was to be 167 feet, higher than the Jefferson Memorial – each inscribed with parts of Roosevelt's speeches. The presence

11 http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/library/wallace.html, There are other examples of this from recent dates, e.g. Edward Hlavka's sculpture of FDR standing at a lectern in Rapid City, South Dakota (2006): http://www.vanderkrogt.net/statues/object.php?record=ussd40&webpage=ST
12 "The Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial", Report to the President and Congress, 30 May 1978.

of the texts as the only supplement to abstract form underscored the absence of Roosevelt's body from the monument, or as a favorable critic noted the design "quite literally made FDR's words his monument" (Stein 44). While this is essentially what Roosevelt himself did too, through his attempts to associate his memory primarily with his library and radio speeches, the design was criticized for being impersonal and remote from FDR's character and personality. Clearly, this memorial did not offer the needed space to embed issues of the present in Roosevelt remembrance (Rainey 381).

The second major attempt at an appropriate design for a large Roosevelt Memorial, had the same problem and was even more abstract and eerily disembodied. After Pedersen and Tilney had resigned their commission in 1965, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial Commission selected Marcel Breuer in 1966 to propose a new design. This consisted of a pinwheel of seven long triangular darts, centered around a granite cube showing Roosevelt's face in an incised halftone photojournalistic portrait. Breuer's reason for choosing the cubic centerpiece is strangely telling:

> I chose the cube because it is the very center, the very base of form – practically perfect… The globe is comparable, but it isn't static; it moves too much. I preferred the great stability, the "standing power," of the cube. FDR had "standing power" too. (Lippard 51)

Although FDR's twelve-year presidency did provide stability in a tumultuous era, "Standing power" is of course exactly what FDR did not have – the correct expression is *staying* power – but the slip suggests how present the memory of a standing FDR still was in 1967. The cube is an attempt at making the memorial "static", although Roosevelt, despite his disability, was emphatically not, nor is the FDR icon. To make the proposed memorial more of a Roosevelt Memorial – but inadvertently also more of a hiding game – audio recordings of Roosevelt's speeches were to be played continuously as part of the memorial. The new design was thus as abstract as its predecessor. Both designs did contain a visual image of Roosevelt, but both halfheartedly so, portraying him either unwillingly in response to criticism, or only vaguely. Both used Roosevelt's speeches, and in both cases this accidentally but undeniably worked to draw attention to the absence of his body (Rainey 382).

In 1972 Congress decided to add the assistant director of development from the National Park Service, Raymond L. Freeman, to the Memorial Committee (Rainey 383). Educated by the previous failures Freeman articulated the requirements for the design more precisely than before: it was to be "a 'landscape solution' that would harmonize with the beauty of the existing park-like setting; that water be a significant element of the memorial environment; that no major structure dominate the site; that an image or images of Roosevelt were appropriate; and the recreational area be retained."[13] Landscape architect Lawrence Halprin made the first version of

13 The Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial, Report to the President and Congress, 30 May 1978, 6.

his eventually successful design in 1974. It consisted of a series of four 'outdoor rooms', each one dedicated to each of Roosevelt's four terms as president, as well as to the Four Freedoms. Halprin was torn about the position in which he wanted to show Roosevelt:

> In his notes from 12 March 1974 [Halprin] indicated that he would like something "bigger than life, standing with cape and cane and braces – because that's how most of us remember [FDR]." Four days later, Halprin changed his mind … [and] also admitted to himself, "The statue issue is a tough one in terms of scale. Also should [FDR] be seated as he normally was when we saw him or standing… I think sitting is better – but how?" (Tuchman 98)

It is striking that Halprin remembers Roosevelt in the first instance in a standing position, echoing in a sense Breuer's Freudian reference to "standing power." Insofar as Halprin has seen Roosevelt standing at all, only the upper half of his body would have been visible and the cane and braces would have been out of sight. The difference in formulation between "[standing], as most of us remember" and "seated as he normally was when we saw him" suggests that Halprin became aware of the fact that memory, even a presumably collective memory, as the use of the plural pronoun suggests, may have differed from the actual position Roosevelt was usually seen in. However, even Halprin still remembered FDR as able to stand, and clearly does not in the first place envisage a wheelchair.

While the Roosevelt figure that Halprin eventually chose for the monument was still "bigger than life" it did not have the huge proportions he initially envisaged (Rainey 385-386). Moreover, Halprin eventually chose to include a number of statues by various sculptors in the Memorial, not only of Roosevelt himself, but also depicting scenes, such as men in a breadline (Figure 16), and a man listening to a radio. Such scenes are both vividly visual and invite the visitor to participate. The walls of the Memorial have inscriptions of passages from famous speeches and Fireside chats, but that is practically the only element of the former designs that remained. In contrast to the earlier abstract designs, Halprin's is extremely accessible, almost more like an interactive outdoor museum than a memorial.

The memorial shows Roosevelt seated and clad in a giant cape, which obscures the object he is sitting in or on, leaving open whether it is a wheelchair. In the version that was officially dedicated in 1997, the memorial remains ambiguous: Roosevelt's disability is not denied, but it neither is it openly visible. In that sense it is strikingly similar to Roosevelt's own manner of dealing with it. While both Roosevelt and Halprin kept to the strategy of not lying about the disability, but choosing to obscure it fairly actively – a strategy the Roosevelt family approved of – in the 1990s it had become debated. Lobby groups such as the National Organization on Disability, headed by Alan Reich, strongly opposed the way in which the Memorial persisted in what they perceived as treating Roosevelt's disability as something that needed hiding. Michael Deland, a board member of the National Organization on Disability argued that FDR "lived in

Figure 15. Franklin Roosevelt, National Memorial, Washington DC (my photo)

Figure 16. Sculpture of a breadline at the FDR Memorial (my photo)

a wheelchair and history should record it."[14], thereby raising the question who should decide what "history" must record. Reuben Rainey argues that "it is clearly the prerogative and the responsibility of those who benefit from the deeds of an individual to decide how that individual will be appropriately commemorated" (Rainey 378), to counter the arguments of those who have wanted to limit Roosevelt's memorialization to the preference he himself expressed to Felix Frankfurter. However, the idea that disabled Americans should take particular responsibility for the Roosevelt memorial, since they benefited from his presidency more than others, is by no means obvious. It rather seems that movements like the National Organization on Disability wanted Roosevelt to represent them retrospectively more than he actually did – claiming the icon thereby, as a prosthetic figure. Hoping to defuse the threatening escalation, Halprin added tiny wheels to the legs of the chair in which Roosevelt is seated in the Roosevelt Memorial's main sculpture (Figure 17).

Figure 17. The "Wheelchair" part of the sculpture of Franklin Roosevelt at the National Memorial (my photo)

Protesters against the plans to portraying Roosevelt in the Memorial without visible signs of his disability, using the slogan "Don't hide FDR's source of strength", threatened to disturb the dedication ceremony of the Memorial, until President Clinton asked Congress to mandate an addition to the planned monument showing FDR in his wheelchair. So the first dedication on 2 May 1997 went on undisturbed, after the appendage to the Memorial – itself a prosthesis to sustain an already debilitated monument – had been ordered. At this dedication Clinton said:

14 Meghan Mutchler. "Roosevelt's Disability an Issue at Memorial." *New York Times*, April 10, 1995, A8.

> It was that faith in his own extraordinary potential that enabled him to guide his country from a wheelchair. And from that wheelchair, and a few halting steps, leaning on his son's arms or those of trusted aides, he lifted a great people back to their feet and set America to march again toward its destiny. (quoted in Houck and Kiewe 3)

With the juxtaposition of the wheelchair and the march of America toward its destiny Clinton suggests that the wheelchair was instrumental in lifting the great people. Portraying America as having fallen on the march toward its destiny and needing to be lifted works particularly well because the wheelchair of the man doing the lifting is all too real, if invisible in the memorial at that moment. The suggestion is that America metaphorically went through what Roosevelt had experienced in the body, and that the election of a disabled man as its savior was a natural part of America's Manifest Destiny.

After the dedication Halprin went back to work with the added assignment and asked sculptor Robert Graham, who had already made some of the other sculptures for the monument, to design one of Roosevelt in his wheelchair. In 2001 a "Prologue" was added to the memorial – an anteroom to the four other outdoor rooms, empty except for a sculpture of Roosevelt in his wheelchair – and wearing his glasses – in the middle. The sculpture is life-size, but looks smaller in the large space, and out of style with the rest of the memorial. Artistically its addition is certainly no improvement, but it does show how awkwardly political Roosevelt's disability still is. The controversy is resolved to some extent, but the compromise remains uneasy: it is still visible that there has been one. In the sequel to his previous speech, held at the dedication of the Prologue to the Memorial on 10 January 2001, Clinton continued:

> By showing President Roosevelt as he was, we show the world that we have faith that in America you are measured for what you are and what you have achieved, not for what you have lost. (Houck and Kiewe 4)

Here Roosevelt's wheelchair is not cited as a mark of strength for himself, but it does inspire the faith Clinton refers to. Clinton stages it as an expression of the grand narrative of American exceptionalism: the fact that Roosevelt could be the hero he was, shows America sees people's personally acquired merits and does not judge them by their misfortunes. In a sense Clinton here completes the argument he began in 1997, suggesting that the heroism that was first Roosevelt's own great strength was transferred to the nation. This resolution to a long and painful process of creating a national Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial essentially ropes FDR into a long tradition of disabled figures in literature and memory as narrative prosthesis.

Figure 18. FDR in his wheelchair, Prologue to the National Memorial (my photo)

Historical Interpretation and Prosthetic Memory: Freeman Tilden and Alison Landsberg

In the 1950s journalist Freeman Tilden was employed by the National Park Service to research and write about America's National Parks and National Historic Sites, and to create guidelines for NPS guides to interpret the sites in order to educate visitors about their national heritage (Tilden ix-xvi). Tilden wrote several books, the most important of which are *The National Parks and What They Mean to You and Me* (1954) and *Interpreting Our Heritage* (1957). The latter was commissioned by the NPS and continues to be used as a handbook for public historians who want to teach history to audiences outside the context of formal schooling, usually at an historic site that needs a narrative interpretation to make it accessible to the general public. The short book is centered around six principles that Tilden lays out, which he calls *Interpretation* by guides:

> I. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

II. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
III. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
IV. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
V. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
VI. Interpretation addressed to children (…) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. (9)

The first principle particularly expresses what I regard as a central tenet of American historical tourism: practically any historical site offers a sensuous experience to the visitor; history must be presented as experiential. Tilden's paradigmatic claim is that national heritage can only take on meaning for the individual visitor when the interpretation offered somehow connects it to his or her own experience. Interpretation is an act of translation from the enigmatic heritage site or object to the personally relatable experience of the visitor. An example he gives comes from the Franklin D. Roosevelt Home at Hyde Park:

> It is the room where the President was born. You could put up a label and say, "President Roosevelt was born in this room." That is accurate information. Or in personal contact with his group the interpreter would be at liberty to state the fact in any elaborated way he might please. But someone had an inspiration here. What you see is a reproduction of the telegram sent by the happy father, James Roosevelt, to a friend announcing the arrival in Hyde Park "of a bouncing boy, weight 9½ pounds, this morning." It is just what you or I would have done, and you instantly feel kinship not merely with the Roosevelts, but with the whole mansion and area. (14)

The personal and relatable telegram inspires, Tilden suggests, a feeling of kinship in the visitor. The Roosevelts, and the whole mansion and area become familiar, not just in the figurative sense, but in the sense that one is invited to identify both with the proud father himself, and with the addressee – a close family friend. Thus, interpreting for Tilden means to offer a pedagogical bridge from the individual to the larger narrative, through the personal or the experiential, so that the visitor can relate to it on a sensuous and emotional level. Such interpretation must involve "the whole man" and aim to "provoke." Likewise the wheelchair in the FDR Home and other adjustments became objects that allowed visitors to experience who FDR "really" was, creating a sense of him that American citizens who experienced his presidency could not have had. Thus, Tilden's Interpretation offers experiences to visitors that are intended to be or seem similar to the experience of a site's history, to be like a close friend of the Roosevelts receiving their telegram or wandering around their house. Tilden is interested in interpreting scientifically

or historically proven truth, but also in provoking "the whole man" to undergo an encounter with history. He provides strategies of experiential learning to teach history. The experience, however, also offers visitors an artificial image of FDR in a wheelchair, which is strangely at odds with the lived memories of people who experienced his presidency.

The FDR Home is still managed by the NPS, and the guides interpreting the site in group tours still work essentially with Tilden's principles. This means that each tour is different, because Interpreters are different (Principle III), but particularly also that most tours include the invitation to "imagine what it was like to be FDR" through imagining what it was like to be in a wheelchair. There is a wheelchair exhibited in the home, and on most tours attention is drawn to the hand-pulled lift by which FDR could move himself upstairs, including the fact that he did not want the lift to be electrified, because he was afraid that in case of fire he would be unable to leave the house. Through such emotive and vividly imaginable fears, visitors are encouraged to sympathize with FDR, almost literally by being put in his seat. Thus, the goal is to create the impression, mostly through the concrete use of the actual site, that visitors can experience history from the front rows. The assurance that "this is where it happened" allows for the insertion of props like FDR's wheelchair, turning it into a public attribute, which it had not been during FDR's presidency.

Tilden's concept of Interpretation, designed for National Park Service educators to help visitors connect their personal lives to the national heritage presented, is a forerunner of Alison Landsberg's term *prosthetic memory*. Tilden's approach is a crucial marker of American strategies of dealing with the past – a strategy that Michael Kammen also noted in *Mystic Chords of Memory*. Largely because of Tilden's influential manual, museums and heritage sites have come to think of an experiential approach as the single best way to present and make accessible their material, so the prosthetic memory that Landsberg analyzes, is a cultural phenomenon produced in America since the middle decades of the twentieth century.

Landsberg's *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (2004) theorizes memories that operate in mass culture and are created primarily through cinema and other experiential mass media, such as interactive museum exhibitions. Her widely adopted term "prosthetic memory" refers to memories generated not through direct "lived" experience or "organic" family memory but through experiential representations. Such representations, she argues, create prosthetic memories; prosthetic because they are non-organic and interchangeable, but also useful and capable of influencing the body they are appended to. Prosthetic memory is a mediated form of memory, alongside memories a person has lived through, or "organically" inherited from parents or other ethnic or cultural forbears. Landsberg argues that while people realize that prosthetic memories are not real, they can still, to some extent function as such. Prosthetic memory "emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum" (2).

While I see Landsberg's point – memory is by nature constructed in the present, and always a flawed representation of the past – I find it important to distinguish degrees in the extent to which historical narratives can come to function as memories. For instance, seeing a documentary about historical events one has experienced from a distance, produces memories of watching a documentary, but additionally, those memories can seem like real memories of the event, especially if one's lived experience of the event was also mediated by television. Watching historical films about slavery or mass migration to the US may also produce memory-like images, but there is no confusion about the artificial nature of those "memories." This is fundamentally different for, in my personal case, footage of the fall of the Berlin wall, or a documentary about 9/11 – these are events that occurred during my life, so that later representations are easily integrated in always already mediated original traces of the event in organic memory.[15] Prosthetic memory, then, can be placed in between Assmann's cultural memory, which is more fixed and functions as a cultural point of reference for a particular group, on the one hand, and communicative memory, which is negotiated in the social realm of lived experience on the other. Remembering through the experience of film, interactive museums, or heritage sites is more intensely specific and experiential than imbibing the topoi of cultural memory, but less so than direct experience.

Landsberg calls this kind of memory acquired through mass cultural commodities 'prosthetic' for four reasons. Firstly, it is not organically inherited or the product of lived experience. The memory is like a prosthesis in the sense that it is fake, even if it seems like and serves as a memory of lived experience. For example, when people "remember" FDR's wheelchair, this cannot be a memory of something they saw in reality, even if they were alive at the time, because the wheelchair was invisible then – as Lawrence Halprin's memory of FDR as standing suggests. The wheelchair is a prosthetic element: both a helpmeet for FDR and a device appended in cultural memory.

Secondly, prosthetic memories are products of sensuous experiences that require integration into one's sense of self: "like an artificial limb, [they] are actually worn on the body (…) Also, prosthetic memories, like an artificial limb, often mark trauma" (20). To give an example, the breadline in the national FDR memorial invites visitors to join the line, as if to experience bodily what the Great Depression what like, in an act of immersion in the past of the sort that Tilden advocated. Thirdly, like prostheses, they are interchangeable and commodified to fit a mass audience, even if the same movie, exhibition or documentary can produce different prosthetic memories in different people. Finally Landsberg regards prosthetic memories, like

15 Aleida Assmann, in *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit* in fact notes the same issue, though without noting the distinction between coincidence with lived memory and the absence thereof: "Wer, wie bei den Protestanten Nordirlands üblich, an vielen Feiertagen im Jahr an rituellen Märschen durch Belfast teilnimmt oder sich mit der Schulklasse nach Auschwitz begibt, um dort die Geschichte körperlich in sich aufzunehmen, ist darum bemüht, in sich selbst die rigiden Schranken zwischen Erfahrungsgedächtnis und Wissensgedächtnis aufzuheben. Eine nicht vorhandene Primärerfahrung wird dabei durch eine Sekundärerfahrung ersetzt." (59-60)

other prostheses, as useful, because "they help condition how a person thinks about the world and [they] might be instrumental in articulating an ethical relation to the other" (21). Thus, prosthetic memories can bridge differences between members of different ethnic or cultural groups. Landsberg argues, for instance, that prosthetic memories of slavery history can be assumed not only by African Americans, and Holocaust memories are appropriated by non-Jews as well.

Roger Michell's movie *Hyde Park on Hudson* (2012) exemplifies how and why the FDR icon, who as the film stresses, himself depended on many physical and metaphorical prostheses, is so successful at producing prosthetic memories. The film's focalizer is Daisy – a nickname FDR gave to his removed cousin, friend and perhaps lover Margaret Suckley – who in the film becomes his mistress, one of his various lovers after his marriage with Eleanor has, at least sexually, failed. Like his wheelchair, leg braces and other means of support, FDR treats Daisy and other mistresses as perfectly ordinary and natural extensions of his body and entourage. They are present, also in the public view, without being given specific attention or being somehow justified or defended. Like the wheelchair, Daisy is unapologetically visible for FDR's visitors, but their presence is passed off as so natural that to inquire further would be illogical and impolite. As such, FDR in *Hyde Park on Hudson* has physical and affective appendices that are inconspicuous to the point of not being noticed, a fact he is acutely aware of, as he makes explicit in a private discussion with King George. The film promotes this discreet manner of handling deficits and their solutions, and it practices what it preaches: its own glaring omissions and wild assumptions, by projecting an endearingly imperfect yet ultimately unspoiled America, fulfill cultural needs that are there without drawing attention to themselves or their fulfillment.

The film, starring Bill Murray as FDR, tells the story of the British royal visit to Roosevelt's Hyde Park estate in the Hudson Valley in June 1939, to ask the United States for support in resisting the Nazi attacks on Great Britain. This plea for help from America's former colonizer is projected as a symbolic moment in the countries' history, at which the US takes over the role of young, laid back but idealistic superpower from the elderly and ridiculously formal Great Britain. That element is thickly underscored in the film: the King and Queen constantly fear that they are being made fun of, when actually their own stiff behavior is what sets them apart in the relaxed world they have entered. Their extremely informal reception at Hyde Park is necessitated and enabled by Roosevelt's disability: he shakes their hands while remaining seated in his driveway. This is ostensibly not an affront, but an irrelevant necessity, yet it explicitly projects Roosevelt as a naturally enthroned leader, both in America and vis-à-vis the world as represented by its former colonizer. The chair operates as the literal supporting device for FDR and in terms of prosthetic memory as the metaphorical seat of American global dominance.

Roosevelt's private life is projected as instrumental: its informality, the amateurism of his mother's cookery, and the King's bedroom decorated with cartoons of British Redcoats losing

the Independence War all signal that America as FDR represents it is casually indifferent to the British King and the respectful reception his position once commanded. Roosevelt's wheelchair is instrumental time and again in the show of blithe informality: his requisite "Please forgive me for not getting up" excuses but also stresses the potential disrespect that the informality could be construed to represent. Later, Roosevelt asks the King to push his wheelchair, with a similar effect: the King's etiquette demands that he interpret it as meaningless, indeed pleasant familiarity, but it does put him into an unusually, perhaps even impertinently, subservient position, especially given Britain's dependence on US intervention in the war at that moment, which is already a painful subversion of former power relations. This ambiguity about a gesture that can be seen as pleasantly casual, but also as exposing unequal power relations, creates and reinforces a prosthetic memory of FDR's wheelchair. It suggests that the wheelchair contributed not only to Roosevelt's physical and rhetorical mobility, but is also a vehicle transporting America to its post-war position of world leadership, and its viewers to the experience of America in 1939.

Although Landsberg, in theorizing the creation of such artificial memories, clearly takes the prosthesis metaphor seriously, arguing that adopted prosthetic memories can attain the function of a supporting limb for one's own lost history, she uses it as a starting point. She does not pursue the idea that characters with disabilities who are using actual prostheses – also in the films she focuses on – often are the ones to provide occasion for the narrative that generates prosthetic memories in the first place. Although the metaphor does prompt her theorization of prosthetic memory, she hardly attends to the idea that people or characters with disabilities themselves can function as narrative prostheses, as Mitchell and Snyder argue. Landsberg does not really engage with the disability studies debate that her term invokes, and therefore remains focused on audience's creation of prosthetic memories, and not on agents like FDR who are able to inspire them. Thus she overlooks one of the most central ideas of disability studies: that disabled people are especially practiced at wielding prosthetic devices, and therefore, at functioning as prostheses to their cultural context themselves. Landsberg's argument remains ableist in the sense that it focuses on how prosthetic memories function for "normal" mass audiences, but disregards both that disabled people have an unusual ability to negotiate prosthetics, and that they often are the narrative justification for storytelling, also when this constitutes the raw material for prosthetic memories in able audiences.

The role of disability is, however, very important in making both *The King's Speech* and *Hyde Park on Hudson* memorable. Both after all take the disability of their protagonist as a starting point, *The King's Speech* even as its title. In *Hyde Park on Hudson*, the key meeting between FDR and King George follows just after King George has pushed Roosevelt's wheelchair; the president with paralyzed legs and the stuttering King have a highly intimate personal conversation supposedly decisive for the bilateral relationship of the US and the UK. Roosevelt is in this situation clearly the one on top, geopolitically, but primarily on a personal level. King George tries to express himself, but is caught up by his stutter, and exasperatedly cries out "this goddamn

stutter!", to which Roosevelt coolly responds: "this goddamn polio." Roosevelt goes on to explain his personal theory that as long as he ignores his disability others will not even notice it, saying:

> Let me confess something to you now, as you've been so honest with me. No one ever mentions the fact that I can't use my legs. It's never referred to. Not by anyone. And I used to think it was because they were embarrassed about it. [*gets up out of wheelchair, starts "walking"*] But now I think it's because it's not what they want to see. Of course, you and I, we think that they see everything that we are. All our flaws. Our transgressions our failures. [*laboriously moves over to desk*] But that's not what they're looking to find when they look to us. And God help us if that ever changes. Can you imagine the disappointment when they find out what we really are? [51:30]

Roosevelt's words here are interestingly juxtaposed with his movements: during this explicit speech about how he keeps his disability implicit, by not drawing attention to it, he draws particular attention to it by trying to walk which the paralysis makes impossible. *Hyde Park on Hudson*'s general take on Roosevelt's genius seems to be that he was a brilliant manipulator of people and appearances. While perhaps in the film, Roosevelt's contemporaries do not see his handicap, the movie audience do so all the more except that to them it is not a handicap but another attribute that helps to show the brilliance of his manipulation. Thus, the "walking" that Roosevelt does has a different meaning for the cinematic King George than for us: for King George it is a demonstration of how desperately trying to be physically capable may actually draw more attention to one's invalidity than its acceptance; to a modern audience, it rather suggests Roosevelt's utter ease with consciously projecting whatever image he needs at a particular moment.

In the discussion of screen memories in the previous chapter, I argued that Roosevelt often functions as a screen for particularly uncomfortable aspects of past events, which do not find their way into cultural memory, because they are painful, awkward, or humiliating. Essentially these are traumas that are not absorbed into narrative memories, because later generations do not want or are unable to bear witness to them. This leaves gaps in cultural memory, and therefore in the movies and other cultural artefacts that provoke prosthetic memories in their spectators. These gaps may be filled with screen memories, a process in which the trauma, in the past or present, is overlaid or otherwise tangled up with much more gratifying memories of Roosevelt's disability. The memory of Roosevelt's disability is then the innocuous screen: not a fantasy but a real memory of which the historical relevance seems hard to understand with hindsight, except as a prosthetic device to address something else. The fact that it is Roosevelt's *disability* that enables the icon to function so well to inspire prosthetic memories is crucial. The FDR icon is itself a narrative prosthesis in Mitchell and Snyder's sense: a narrative device to justify storytelling that is culturally needed, because it fills a gap, as well as a material metaphor for the brokenness and healing that is desired on a national level. As such representations of

Roosevelt's disability are in a sense prosthetic in two ways: firstly by Landsberg's definition because they supply inauthentic memories that shape subjectivities in the present, and secondly because they use the literal disability and prosthesis as a placeholder for memories that remain distressing to narrate directly.

Landsberg's lack of attention to the second point, that commodified and mass-mediated prosthetic memories of FDR's prosthesis function to screen off repressed but wide-ranging anxiety about American unity and health, is similar to Roosevelt's own treatment of his disability. As Davis Houck argued in *FDR and Fear Itself* (2002), and later in *FDR's Body Politics* (Houck and Kiewe, 2003) FDR did not directly refer to the fact he was disabled, but the language of, amongst others, the First Inaugural Address is full of sickness and body metaphors referring to the nation – "stricken Nation", "conditions in our country", "our great Nation will endure" – implicitly shaping his own relationship with it. Most famous among these is "let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance", which casts the nation as paralyzed, and himself as the firm and assertive healer. The following sentence speaks of "a leadership of frankness and vigor", both a pun on his own name and a reference to his vigorous upper body, which is what people saw. Through this strategy FDR, consciously or not, stressed the strength and unique insight his paralysis is culturally perceived to carry, tapping into the trope of the blind seer, without making explicit his own disability.

On the face of it, *Hyde Park on Hudson* suggests that Roosevelt's silence about his disability was an intentional media strategy, but even more glaringly absent, also from the summary of outcomes following the narrated events in voiceover at the end of the film, are the unpleasant aspects of American history in the war years. The film's own pointed absence of any reference to Pearl Harbor, for instance, performs a movement similar to FDR's silence about his disability. Of course, the narrated royal visit took place in 1939, well before Pearl Harbor or any concrete threat from the Pacific on American soil, but the fact that it is not referred to in any way nonetheless stresses only America's role in the war as primarily a matter of disinterested moral superiority, diverting attention away from its beleaguered state in 1941. The final voiceover is, however, very explicit about Roosevelt's own wish to repress the presence of bad news in his private life. Describing the illness and death of his secretary and former mistress Marguerite LeHand, the narrator says:

> When she fell terribly ill, he paid for everything. He even changed his will, giving her half should she outlive him. But to the surprise of nearly everyone, he did not visit her once in the hospital. I asked him why. "It's a terrible fault of mine," he said. "I find it too painful to be around illness."

Thus in the midst of the film's ominous silence about the debilitating attack on America two years after the British royal visit, it does focus on Roosevelt's attempt to negate the existence of

disease in his life. On the one hand he does what he can, materially, to exorcise it, and on the other he refuses to engage with it on an emotional level. Roosevelt's feeling that being "around illness" is "too painful", mirrors the sense that addressing Pearl Harbor is too painful for the film to engage in. In what follows, the audience see FDR being carried and lifted into his car by assistants. After having installed himself he says "Ok boys, take it away!" to press photographers who then start taking pictures of him. Thus the same indirect denial of imperfection is repeated. The narrator ends:

> A year passed. And then another. And another. I watched him grow tired and frail and ill. He tried to hide this from everyone. He knew how to do that. From everyone but me. Everyone still looking to him. Still seeing whatever it was they wanted to see. In a time, not so very long ago, when the world still allowed itself secrets, Franklin Roosevelt was mine.

The narrator through her presumed understanding of Roosevelt can feel that she owns him, and his full story, because she can fill in the void that he leaves in his silence about his physical and psychological inadequacy. She assumes the role of addressee of an implicitly told story. This movement, as well as the sense of privilege involved, mimics that of the American tendency Robert Burgoyne notes in *Film Nation*, to fill in a prosthetic narrative – in this case about Roosevelt's disability – rather than to create more detailed narratives addressing one's own painful past, such as Pearl Harbor, or present, such as the realization that the country is no longer the relaxed yet vibrant world leader. Thus *Hyde Park on Hudson* creates prosthetic memories, both screening off past traumas and present discomfort. Like Roosevelt, despite its claim that the world no longer allows itself secrets, *Hyde Park on Hudson*, gives viewers "whatever it [i]s they want to see."

Landsberg's understanding of prosthetic memory as useful to overcome antagonism between groups in society, because they can share prosthetic memories regardless of background, thus parallels FDR's treatment of his own narrative in its lack of acknowledgement that there is a difference between the disabled and others in culturally perceived and real ability to use prosthetics. The disability and wheelchair narratives are apt because they provide room for prosthetic memories to diverge in their interpretation of how FDR embodies the US without seeming to do so. They stress America's technical prowess, but simultaneously also already include the disintegration of the body natural. FDR's successful attempt to technologically and medially conquer the fragmentation of his body natural screens the fragmentation of the American body politic off from memory.

The concrete narratives of Roosevelt's disease and disability, which involve actual prostheses (wheelchair, crutches, leg braces), are then exemplary of what happens on a conceptual level: mass-mediated narratives about him take on the function of prosthetic memories to their audiences, in which FDR becomes a narrative prosthesis for the audience, and a material metaphor for another trauma. The silences kept by Roosevelt and his staff provide room for film

makers and their audiences to fit metaphorical prostheses, narratives interpreting traumas that are overtly attributed to Roosevelt, but actually stand in for more collective ones. Roosevelt's silence about his wheelchair means that it has come to lend itself well as a prosthetic site for the adaptation of other trauma narratives. This essentially Freudian process is indeed useful, but not in the laudatory way Landsberg suggests: it is useful as a band-aid or a cover, as a means to create a sense of wholeness, without actually addressing the heart of the matter, be it a trauma or a potentially explosive opposition of interests. As such, Roosevelt would probably have been happy with the current emplotment of his disability, however secretive he may have been about it at the time.

Conclusion: Prosthetically Enhanced Memory

Robert Burgoyne in *Film Nation* discusses this opportunistic use of prosthetic memory, which Landsberg somewhat naively terms "useful", calling it "prosthetically enhanced memory":

> It is my argument that, rather than viewing prosthetic memory in the positive sense of creating an interface with 'past lives, past experiences, past bodies' so as to ground individual subjectivities 'in a world of experiences larger than one's own modal subjectivity', *Forrest Gump* revises existing cultural memory in such a way that it becomes prosthetically enhanced. (108)

His argument that *Forrest Gump* prosthetically enhances American cultural memory, is somewhat like mine about *Hyde Park on Hudson*: it shows how the movie turns the American past Gump lives through into a nostalgic celebration of the 1960s and 1970s by removing or glossing over the traumatic events of those decades – effectively, that is, by literally running past, but not addressing gender issues, racial struggle and other 'problematic' elements. This use of prosthetic memory as beatifying enhancement of a troubled past is far removed from the interpretive enhancement Tilden called for. Although nostalgically healing, and narratively improving the past no doubt happens at national heritage sites, Tilden and the NPS aim for academically founded and even-handed interpretation, whereas *Forrest Gump* lays no claim to historical correctness, even if its success relies on a sense that it does represent a shared past. However, Burgoyne, like Landsberg, seems to overlook the role of disability in the prosthetic enhancement he calls attention to. Forrest Gump, the movie's focalizer and protagonist, is severely disabled as a child: his legs are in braces, because of a back problem that magically dissolves into an ability to run unusually fast, and mentally challenged throughout – he has an IQ of 75. His commander and later friend and colleague Lieutenant Dan loses both his legs in Vietnam. Although these disabilities, the prosthetics they require, and the characters' special abilities obtained through them are crucial to the film's plot, as well as to the manner in which it works to generate a prosthetically enhanced view of the American past, Burgoyne's chapter on prosthetic memory in *Forrest Gump* does not address these.

However, despite the seeming blindness to the fact that Gump's leg braces start off the narrative, and his learning disability provides the guileless innocence that carries it forth, Burgoyne is right that "the film evokes the cultural encyclopedia of the sixties and seventies chiefly in order to construct a virtual nation whose historical debts have all been forgiven and whose disabilities have been corrected." One film that elucidates well how useful a disabled main character is in achieving such an effect is *FDR American Badass!* (Garrett Brawith, 2012). Its trailer cuts intriguingly between various scenes in the movie. Starting with footage of the film's representation of World War Two – Roosevelt going to war in Europe, personally and singlehandedly – one then hears him declare in front of his airplane "The only thing we have to fear is…". But before this famous maxim is finished with "…fear itself", the trailer cuts across to a shot of FDR (Barry Bostwick) addressing a crowd from his wheelchair and jokingly referring to his paralysis as "Marco … Polio." Thus we hear "The only thing we have to fear is … (Marco) Polio …" and then "…fear itself!" There is a doubling here that is central to the movie: Roosevelt's polio is effectively connected to World War Two through his body; his disability is treated as if it were the war projected onto FDR's physique. Roosevelt in the movie contracts the polio in an encounter with what turns out to be a Nazi werewolf in the 1930s, rather than in 1920, which is historically the case, and the disease acts on his body as the war on the US as a nation: paralyzing but simultaneously inspiring courage and needed impetus to move forward in destroying the Nazi threat. Roosevelt's by now celebrated adage about "fear itself" historically spoke to the fear which led to the economic and financial paralysis of the country in 1933, but in the movie it refers on one level to the need for national bravery in the face of Axis attack, and on another to Roosevelt's personal angst and laconic pluck in the face of debilitating disease. Thus, Roosevelt's personal mishaps work as an allegory for an America at war: FDR in the film embodies America both in its suffering from and conquest of the Axis powers. Of course, *FDR American Badass!* does not make an outright claim to historical accuracy. Rather it stands in the tradition of *The Naked Gun* movies: intentionally silly, visibly low-budget, yet clearly made with love. Nevertheless, it does negotiate with the past, aestheticizing it and making it harmless through the use of Roosevelt's disability. It is important in that respect that its producer Ross Patterson made it for a highschool audience, with the explicit aim to "make FDR seem cool" (interview, September 3, 2014). Patterson did aim to some extent to interpret FDR in Tilden's sense, but the product is prosthetically enhanced through the use of FDR as a narrative prosthesis.