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masters industrial design

applied human aesthetic
in artificial limb design
research design development study

development study

massey university college of creative arts

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2005



“form

follows
function

- that has been misunderstood”.

“form and function should be one, joined in a spiritual union.”

Frank Lloyd Wright.

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IV

declaration

This thesis titled Applied Human Aesthetic in Artificial Limb Design is presented in partial fulfilment for the degree Master in Industrial Design.

Daniel Buxton. 2005.



This abstract provides the reader with a brief overview of this Industrial Design Development study.

The term Industrial Design is one that will not be readily recognised within the prosthetic industry around the world. One branch of Industrial Design is the application of 'humanistic factors' to product research, development and design. The visual aesthetic form of current artificial limb design appears to deliver an inconsistent communion with the functional criteria. This engineer dominated industry is motivated by product function while seemingly lacking consideration for factors like human/machine interface, comfort factors and natural structural form.

The physiological expectations and user requirements of an amputee progressively dictate the functional advancements in research and development, and thus artificial limb research and development is at the forefront in robotic industries, material development and to a varied extent man machine interface systems.

'We've got to this international place in the world and I think that if we are going to do anything in New Zealand in the way of design, we have to first become jolly good designers.'

Coe, J. (1972). (Interview). Nees, G. Five characters in search of a style. *Designscape*.33:2.

'Why don't we make artificial limbs that are not stumps or broomsticks?'

Coe, J. (1972). (Interview). Nees, G. Five characters in search of a style. *Designscape*.33:2.

In today's commercial environment there appears to be a growing demand for lower extremity prosthetic extensions that replicate the function of of the limbs being replaced. The artificial limb is a complex piece of equipment. Modern research and development processes are orientated towards an engineered functional outcome. Do current research and development processes place less consideration on the missing *humanistic* form than the function?



What we are now seeing in research and development is micro-processor technology being integrated into the limb to control preset dynamic movements. This technology has greatly contributed to the mobility of thousands of amputees who otherwise would have been wheelchair bound.

What is missing?

The answer is the humanistic touch. We are now witnessing an overload of technological advances without any real consideration of the human aesthetic. Form has taken a back seat to the functional attribute. While functional values are of great importance, form should by no means be neglected.

'Possibly we should produce international artificial limbs and Maori artificial limbs?'

Athield, I. (1972). (Interview). Nees, G. Five characters in search of a style. *Designscape*.33:2.

The process of artificial limb attachment (suspension) requires the prosthesis to be attached to the existing 'residual limb'. The favoured and most accessible avenue for a transtibial (below knee) amputee is to use either a Urethane sleeve or a Vacuum Socket. These methods though successful, do not provide the residual limb with a habitable environment.

Herein lies the dilemma. While an amputee is able to re-establish certain lost movements, both the humanistic and physical/physiological barriers remain. Aesthetic form is relegated to a distant second place. For some the absence of the aesthetic may be as devastating as the inability to function normally.

table of contents

I	cover page	page	001
II	title page		002
III	acknowledgements		003
IV	declaration		004
V	abstract		005
VI	table of contents		007
VII	list of figures		011
VIII	list of tables		019
1.0	introduction and background to study	page	022
2.0	central proposition	page	024
2.1	project aims		025
2.2	industrial design research objectives		026
2.3	industrial design development objectives		027
2.4	ethical standards		028
2.5	research design development timeline		030
3.0	research design and development methodology	page	031
3.1	qualitative research development & design feeder system		032
4.0	New Zealand Artificial Limb Board	page	033
4.1	NZALB structure		034
4.2	NZALB national statistical overview		035
4.3	transtibial artificial limb industry fitting and production process		036
4.4	the artificial limb product concept overview		037
4.5	initial conclusions the artificial limb		039
4.6	2004 ISPO Conference		040
4.7	artificial limb product identification: pre-post trauma		042
4.8	amputee/artificial limb event learning sequence		043

5.0	applied human aesthetic in artificial limb design literature review	page	044
5.1	Salvador Dali. Homage to Newton		055
5.2	a gothic style. product culture and architecture		056
5.3	state of art: structural expressionism		059
5.4	the machine aesthetic engineered culture or functional criteria?		061
6.0	state of art: Mark Inglis's custom designed artificial limbs	page	065
6.1	transtibial prosthesis artificial limb product review		067
6.2	state of art: C-Sprint		069
6.3	state of art: ToeOFF		071
6.4	state of art: C Leg		072
6.5	state of art: Kuka robotic arms		074
7.0	state of art: myoelectronic ergonomics	page	077
7.1	transtibial ergonomics endo-architecture		078
7.2	myographic ergonomics muscle architecture		080
7.3	ergonomics antropometrics of walking		084
7.4	ergonomics eight stage sub cycle swing phase		085
8.0	qualitative research transtibial amputee questionnaire overview	page	087
8.1	transtibial amputee questionnaire results		096
8.2	questionnaire discussion		105
8.3	questionnaire summary		107
9.0	exo-product architecture	page	108
9.1	industrial design: artificial limb product design methodology		110
9.2	industrial design: artificial limb product optimisation		111
9.3	product trend map: artificial limb product arousal		112
9.4	industrial design: artificial limb product forecasting timeline		118
9.5	exo-tibius design criteria		119

10.0	TRANSTIBIAL ARTIFICIAL LIMB DESIGN DEVELOPMENT: exotibius concept	page	121
10.1	modular concept design development		122
10.2	myotibius concept design development		123
10.3	myographic ergonomic concept design development		125
10.4	exotibius concept design		128
10.5	mould prototyping, transtibial plaster moulding		134
10.6	composite materials		137
10.7	composite material SWOT analysis		138
10.8	composite materials product and application		140
10.9	composite material classifications		142
10.10	composite material applications		143
10.11	composite material properties		145
10.12	composite lamination processes		146
10.13	exo-shell application		149
10.14	lamination problem identification		151
11.0	exotibius prototyping: initial analysis and results	page	153
11.1	exotibius prototyping: summary		154
11.2	exotibius summary		155
11.3	conclusion		156
11.4	evaluation		157
11.5	reflection		165
12.0	reference list	page	166
13.0	bibliography	page	174
14.0	glossary	page	187
15.0	appendix a	page	189
16.0	appendix b		

list of figures

- fig 1 Salvador Dali. Homage to Newton (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 2 traditional Maori tattoo design, Taepa,W. (Buxton, D. 2003).
- fig 3 CAD/CAM three dimensional scanner (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 4 CAD/CAM three dimensional scanner (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 5 CAD/CAM software (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 6 CAD/CAM 3D router (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 7 transtibial foam mould (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 8 transfemoral artificial limb concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 9 transfemoral artificial limb concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 10 knee joint design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 11 knee joint/socket attachment design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 12 foot/ankle/tibial design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 13 ISPO Hong Kong presentation (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 14 ISPO Hong Kong presentation (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 15 ISPO Attendance certificate (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 16 modular transtibial artificial limb (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 17 Salvador Dali. Homage to Newton (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 18 Salvador Dali. Homage to Newton (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 19 Salvador Dali. Homage to Newton (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 20 Salvador Dali. Homage to Newton (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 21 Gene Simmons, bass/vocals, Kiss. Retrieved 16 May, 2004 from
<http://home.swipnet.se/~w-32137/Gene2.jpg>
- fig 22 Geonosis, Star Wars, The attack of the clones, (2001). Retrieved 16 May, 2004
from www.starwars.com/databank/location/geonosisarena/index.htm
- fig 23 Borg solder cyborg, Star Trek, (1996). Retrieved 14 May, 2004 from
www.startrek.com/startrek/view/series/MOV/008/synopsis/88.html

- fig 24 Boarg queen cyborg, Star Trek. (1996). Retrieved 14 May, 2004 from www.sherylfranklin.com/trekwomen_borg_queen1.html
- fig 25 Alien queen, Aliens. (Giger, H.R. 1986). Retrieved 5 April, 2004, from <http://www.hrgiger.com/frame.htm>
- fig 26 Amiee Mullins, Cremaster 3, (2001). Retrieved 16 March, 2006, from www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/exhibitionInfo/exhibition/12524
- fig 27 Nexis class replicant, Bladerunner, (1982). Retrieved 14 May, 2004, from www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Boulevard/7920/bladerun.jpg
- fig 28 Hong Kong Shanghai bank (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 29 Hong Kong Shanghai bank (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 30 Hong Kong Shanghai bank (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 31 Hong Kong Shanghai bank (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 32 Loader, Aliens. (1986). Retrieved 12 May, 2004, from http://aliens.g4sa.net/Pictures/power_przod.gif
- fig 33 Cyborg, Terminator. (1988). Retrieved 10 April, 2004, from http://perso.orange.fr/mdi/images/bckgrd/bckgrd_biq/terminator_004.jpg
- fig 34 endo-modular artificial limb (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 35 endo-modular artificial limb (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 36 Hardiman 1. (1960). Retrieved 5 May, 2003, from <http://www.trooperpx.com/SF3D/PowerPics/SA1b.gif>
- fig 37 endo-modular artificial limb (Inglis, M. 2005).
- fig 38 Mark Inglis, transtibial amputee (Inglis, M. 2005).
- fig 39 endo-modular artificial limb, crampons (Inglis, M. 2005).
- fig 40 endo-modular artificial limb, cycling (Inglis, M. 2005).
- fig 41 endo-modular artificial limb, components (Inglis, M. 2005).
- fig 42 exo-skeletal transtibial artificial limb (Buxton, D. 2004).

- fig 43 endo-modular transtibial artificial limb (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 44 endo-modular transtibial artificial limb and foot (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 45 range of transtibial artificial limbs (Inglis, M. 2005).
- fig 46 range of transtibial artificial limbs (Inglis, M. 2005).
- fig 47 C-Sprint, socket, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 48 C-Sprint, limb, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 49 leopard rear leg, Retrieved 18 August, 2004, from
http://www.leopard-tours.com/wildlife_gallery_leopards.htm
- fig 50 Kate Horan, transtibial amputee athlete. TV3 Network Services Limited. (Producer).
(March 9, 2003).
- fig 51 Marlon Shirley, transtibial amputee athlete. (2002). Retrieved 10 August, 2004,
from http://www.oandp.com/edge/issues/articles/2003-12_11.asp
- fig 52 leopard, Retrieved 18 August, 2004, from
http://www.leopard-tours.com/wildlife_gallery_leopards.htm
- fig 53 ToeOFF orthotic support (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 54 C Leg, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 55 C Leg, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 56 outer shell, C Leg, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 57 outer shell, C Leg, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 58 C Leg in outer shell, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 59 Kuka robotic arm. Retrieved May 25, 2004, from
<http://www.kuka.com/en/company>
- fig 60 Kuka robotic arm. Retrieved May 25, 2004, from
<http://www.kuka.com/en/company>
- fig 61 Kuka robotic arm. Retrieved May 25, 2004, from
<http://www.kuka.com/en/company>

- fig 62 Kuka robotic arm playing chess. Retrieved May 25, 2004, from <http://www.kuka.com/en/company>
- fig 63 Kuka robotic arm stainless steel. Retrieved May 25, 2004, from <http://www.kuka.com/en/company/group/print/start.htm>
- fig 64 Haile Berry, Die Another Day. (2002). Retrieved May 25, 2004, from <http://www.kuka.com/en/company/group/print/start.htm>
- fig 65 James Bond, Die Another Day. (2002). Retrieved May 25, 2004, from <http://www.kuka.com/en/company/group/print/start.htm>
- fig 66 Myoelectric artificial arm, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 67 Myoelectric artificial arm, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 68 Myoelectric artificial arm, Otto Bock (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 69 fibula/tibial lower leg x-ray, Wellington Medical Library (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 70 transtibial leg x-ray, Wellington Medical Library (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 71 myographic muscle architecture (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 72 infra-red heat build up below knee, (Blohmke, F. 2002, p.37).
- fig 73 fibular/tibial lower leg x-ray, Wellington Medical Library (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 74 anthropometrics of walking (Buxton, D. 2003).
- fig 75 myographic muscle architecture (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 76 anthropometrics of walking (Buxton, D. 2003).
- fig 77 anthropometrics of walking (Buxton, D. 2003).
- fig 78 anthropometrics of walking (Buxton, D. 2003).
- fig 79 ET cycle helmet (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 80 bio-ro recyclable pen (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 81 bio-metamorphic chainsaw design (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 82 exo-architectural designed chair (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 83 transfemoral artificial limb concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).

- fig 84 transtibial artificial limb mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 85 transtibial artificial limb mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 86 transtibial artificial limb mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 87 transtibial artificial limb mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 88 transtibial artificial limb mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 89 carbon/Kevlar transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 90 carbon/Kevlar transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 91 carbon/Kevlar transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 92 carbon/Kevlar transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 93 transtibial artificial limb fin design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 94 transtibial artificial limb fin design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 95 transtibial artificial limb fin design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 96 transtibial artificial limb fin design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 97 prototyping workshop (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 98 modular concept design development (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 99 myotibius myographic concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 100 myographic ergonomic concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 101 myographic ergonomic concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 102 myographic ergonomic concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 103 exotibius concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 104 exotibius concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 105 exotibius concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 106 exotibius concept design (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 107 transtibial prototype mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 108 transtibial negative moulds (Buxton, D. 2004).
- fig 109 transtibial possitive mould halves (Buxton, D. 2004).

fig 110 transtibial positive mould halves (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 111 transtibial positive moulds (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 112 transtibial positive mould pieces (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 113 transtibial positive ankle block (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 114 transtibial positive mould pieces (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 115 transtibial positive mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 116 transtibial positive mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 117 transtibial positive mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 118 bamboo scaffolding, Hong Kong (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 119 bamboo scaffolding, Hong Kong (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 120 bamboo scaffolding, Hong Kong (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 121 carbon fabric (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 122 range of composite fabrics (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 123 memory alloy mesh (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 124 carbon stocking (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 125 cuban fibre (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 126 carbon/Kevlar fabric (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 127 memory foam (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 128 vacuum resin injection (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 129 hand lay laminating method (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 130 hand lay laminating process (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 131 hand lay laminating process (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 132 hand lay laminating process (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 133 hand lay laminating process (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 134 hand lay laminating process (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 135 hand lay laminating process (Buxton, D. 2004).

fig 136 hand lay laminating process (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 137 resinated transtibial exo-shell, mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 138 resinated transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 139 resinated transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 140 resinated transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 141 resinated transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 142 transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 143 transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 143 transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 144 transtibial exo-shell, resinated/fabric (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 145 transtibial exo-shell, Kevlar (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 146 transtibial exo-shell, carbon/kevlar (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 147 exo-shell and transtibial mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 148 transtibial mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 149 transtibial mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 150 exo-shell/mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 151 exo-shell/mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 152 transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 153 transtibial exo-shell (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 154 transtibial exo-shell on mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 155 transtibial mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 156 transtibial mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 157 transtibial mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 158 transtibial mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 159 transtibial mould ankle disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 160 transtibial exo-shell on mould (Buxton, D. 2004).

fig 161 transtibial exo-shell on mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 162 transtibial exo-shell on mould (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 163 transtibial exo-shell cut line (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 164 transtibial exo-shell cut line (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 165 transtibial glue line (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 166 transtibial mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 167 socket mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 168 ankle block mould disintergration (Buxton, D. 2004).
fig 169 97 percentile transtibial mould (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 170 97 percentile transtibial mould (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 171 97 percentile transtibial mould (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 172 97 percentile transtibial mould (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 173 laminated exo-shell transtibial artificial limb, (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 174 laminated exo-shell transtibial artificial limb, (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 175 laminated exo-shell transtibial artificial limb, (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 176 exotibius transtibial artificial limb, shell/socket/ankle block. (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 177 exotibius transtibial artificial limb, shell design. (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 178 exotibius transtibial artificial limb, shell design. (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 179 exotibius transtibial artificial limb, shell design. (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 180 exotibius transtibial artificial limb, shell design. (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 181 exotibius transtibial artificial limb.s (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 182 exotibius transtibial artificial limb. (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 183 exotibius transtibial artificial limb. (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 184 exotibius transtibial artificial limb. (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 185 exotibius transtibial artificial limb. (Buxton, D. 2005).
fig 186 NZALB 2006 ProstHOtics logo. (Buxton, D. 2005).

- fig 187 exotibius artificial limb, environmental evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 188 exotibius artificial limb, environmental evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 189 exotibius artificial limb, load testing evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 190 exotibius artificial limb, load testing evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 191 exotibius artificial limb, load testing evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 192 exotibius artificial limb, structural ergonomic evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 193 exotibius artificial limb, structural ergonomic evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 194 exotibius artificial limb, structural ergonomic evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 195 exotibius artificial limb, structural ergonomic evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 196 exotibius artificial limb, structural ergonomic evaluation (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 197 exotibius artificial limb, ergonomic evaluation fitted (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 198 exotibius artificial limb, ergonomic evaluation fitted (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 199 exotibius artificial limb, ergonomic evaluation fitted (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 200 exotibius artificial limb, ergonomic evaluation fitted (Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 201 transtibial amputee/exotibius artificial limb structural architecture
(Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 202 transtibial amputee/exotibius artificial limb structural architecture
(Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 203 transfemoral amputee/exotibius artificial limb exo-architecture
(Buxton, D. 2005).
- fig 204 exotibius artificial limb, fitted to transtibial amputee (Buxton, D. 2005).
-
- plate 1 myotibius artificial limb (Buxton, D. 2003).
- plate 2 exotibius artificial limb (Buxton, D. 2005).
- plate 3 exotibius artificial limb (Buxton, D. 2005).

list of tables

table 1.	research design and development timeline
table 2.	research design and development methodology
table 3.	qualitative research design and development feeder system network
table 4.	NZALB national statistical overview. sex
table 5.	NZALB national statistical overview. age
table 6.	NZALB national statistical overview. ethnicity
table 7.	NZALB national statistical overview. range
table 8.	NZALB national statistical overview. amputations
table 9.	artificial limb product identification: pre-post trauma
table 10.	amputee/artificial limb: product event learning sequence
table 11.	three branches of philosophy
table 12.	theological semantic
table 13.	traditional aesthetic. product design development arousal
table 14.	ergonomic aesthetic ethic. product design development arousal
table 15.	applied human aesthetic. product design development arousal
table 16.	participant gender
table 17.	participant age group
table 18.	amputee duration
table 19.	amputee identification
table 20.	artificial limb usage
table 21.	physically active
table 22.	amputee distance
table 23.	individual sporting activity
table 24.	individual sporting activity duration
table 25.	team sporting activity
table 26.	team sporting activity duration

table 27.	extreme sporting activit
table 28.	extreme sporting activity artificial limb usage
table 29.	artificial limb breakage
table 30.	artificial limb durability
table 31.	lifestyle
table 32.	overall appearance
table 33.	artificial limb visual embarrassment
table 34.	natural shape
table 35.	human machine visual quality
table 36.	visual capacity
table 37.	rehabilitation capacity
table 38.	rehabilitation recovery time
table 39.	functional requirments
table 40.	function form
table 41.	visual replication
table 42.	natural skin colour
table 43.	skin colour range
table 44.	graphic options
table 45.	relationship with clothing
table 46.	artificial limb sound during activity
table 47.	sound obtrusiveness
table 48.	amputee design access
table 49.	visual appearance preference
table 50.	individual comments
table 51.	industrial design: artificial limb product design methodology
table 52.	industrial design: artificial limb product optimisation

table 53.	wow factor. gothic influences : visual appreciation
table 54.	wow factor. technological influences : self fulfillment
table 55.	behavioural factor. balance : ergonomics
table 56.	behavioural factor. performance : physical
table 57.	reflective factor. look feel : sociology
table 58.	reflective factor. cultural : sociometry
table 59.	industrial design: artificial limb product forecasting timeline
table 60.	composite materials SWOT analysis. strengths/weaknesses
table 61.	composite materials SWOT analysis. opportunitites/threats
table 62.	composite materials properties
table 63.	load testing evaluation