Corridor8
Restlessness

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Restlessness

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Restlessness is inspired by the Andrew McDonald solo exhibition at Castlefield Gallery (28 April – 11 June 2017), and produced as part of a *Corridor8* writing residency programme. Co-commissioned by Castlefield Gallery and The International 3, and supported by Arts Council England, it showcases work by writer-in-residence Iris Priest alongside contributions from Ellen Mara De Wachter and Michael Birchall. The second in a series of collaborative residency publications, featuring limited edition artworks, *Restlessness* reflects the *Corridor8* team's continued commitment to supporting contemporary art and writing in the North of England.

Our existence is largely dependent upon routines. In addition to basic repetitive actions such as eating, digesting and expelling waste, humans have developed routines of increasing complexity that set us apart from other species. Facilitating the development, creation and production of new ways of thinking and associated technologies, routines allow us to extend our lifespans (through regular exercise and medical treatment), widen our social and economic networks (through sustained dialogue and patterns of trade), and enrich our lives through creative acts (through processes of production, performance, publication and exhibition). This is not to say that all creative processes are necessarily repetitive, but rather that through personalised acts of repetition creativity occurs and is ultimately shared with others. In much the same way that humans inform and construct their personalities, when viewing or experiencing a work of art we are engaged in a kind of feedback loop as our brains use the sensory data on offer to inform our feelings, opinions and responses.

Repetition, looping and cyclicality have become increasingly prominent artistic processes since the advent of early photographic and film technologies. Within recent practice and through the rise and development of digital technologies they have become established as central components of contemporary art. The collection of writing found within *Restlessness* is broadly concerned with the individual and cultural meanings behind such processes, and particularly how they are utilised by artist Andrew McDonald in his practice. The selected writers were asked to respond to McDonald's self-titled solo exhibition at Castlefield Gallery (28 April – 11 June 2017), developing ideas with the artist, other writers, gallery staff, designers and editors along the way.

McDonald creates hand-drawn digital animations that are reflexive embodiments of the time and labour-intensive process of their mediums. He uses these to question the role of the archetypal figure of the tortured artist and, by extension, the very nature of freedom in human existence. Writer-in-Residence Iris Priest explores these themes explicitly in her text 'From black screen to black screen (repeat)'. She signals the writing of Albert Camus and performances of Bas Jan Ader to contextualise McDonald's work within a wider history of ideas of freedom, fear and failure, pointing toward an altogether more limited understanding of the wider world.

Ellen Mara De Wachter provides a Classical take on McDonald's work, referencing repetition, paradox and motion as found in traditional Greek mythology and philosophy. Like Priest, she seeks to position the artist's work within a larger dialogue surrounding the very nature of perception. Wholly resonant with contemporary existence, De Wachter's text challenges us to question what we perceive to be given truths, disrupting the feedback loops we often take for granted. Approaching McDonald's work from a more sociohistorical perspective in 'Reconsidering the North', Dr Michael Birchall re-frames how ideas of Northern English identity impact upon its inhabitants, and, more specifically, its 'cultural workers'. Taking the post-industrial city of Manchester as a backdrop, he observes how post-Fordist production models have been adopted by the creative workforce, and have directly influenced McDonald's practice as a resident of the city.

The second in a series of writing residency publications, *Restlessness* captures the conversations and ideas developed over the course of the residency period. The programme ensures that resident writers have sufficient time and space to develop their practice, with support from gallery staff, mentors and editors. The events programme and final publication serve as further evidence of the need for art writing within the field of contemporary art, and the added value of collaboration and mutual support between galleries, artists, writers and editors. With the inclusion of an original limited edition drawing by McDonald, the publication acts as a legacy document for both the artist and the relationships fostered throughout the residency. In this way, *Restlessness* is a prismatic response to the themes and issues explored in McDonald's work, and more broadly, a commentary on how repetition can be subverted in ways that allow us to see and interact with our environments in new and unexpected ways.

Restlessness: An introduction
James Schofield, Residency Coordinator

A man sits in a derelict industrial building, hooded and bound to an office swivel chair perched on top of a wooden pallet. The whole animated scene bristles and judders with anxious biro lines as pieces of the walls and ceiling crumble and collapse into the space. He struggles against his bonds, swivelling slightly from left to right in his chair, its wheels so close to the palette's edge that he might topple at any moment. With his bound hands tugging at the air in one direction and his bound legs lashing out in the other, he starts to slowly pivot anticlockwise as more masonry crashes to the floor. The image trembles and flickers. There is something at once sad and darkly comic about this anonymous man's predicament. His kidnappers have left or forgotten him on a stage set of banality and ruin, tied to a generic office chair — with all its allusions to repetitive, soulless desk work — to fight haplessly against the inevitable laws of nature: gravity, entropy, force, counter-force and death. Having completed his laborious writhing rotation twice, the man, appearing confounded and exhausted, raises his cowled head up and towards the viewer. In the final moments of the film, any sense of comfortable detachment or suspended disbelief is undone by the man's unwavering violation of the fourth wall.

**From black screen
to black screen (repeat)**
Iris Aspinall Priest

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The screen turns black.

A black screen becomes a black mirror which both reflects and conceals.

The animation begins again.

The infinite repetition of actions or scenarios which never attain resolution, or which fail entirely, find their roots in the Greek myths of Sisyphus and Tantalus. King Sisyphus was punished by the gods for his crimes against them, doomed to spend eternity pushing a boulder up a mountain only to watch it roll back down again each time he reached the top. A similar fate befell Tantalus, guilty of filicide and cannibalism, whom the gods condemned to an eternity of unrequited desire. He was forced to stand in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree, and every time he reached for a fruit or knelt to take a drink the bounty would shrink from his grasp.

'Sisyphean' loops of hapless endeavour are understood to illustrate pointless effort and meaningless existence, connected to the order, rules and punishments of a system larger than the individual. With iterations in philosophy, literature and art over the last two centuries,[1] Sisyphean repetitions have come to embody a plurality of possible meanings and ends. In Bas Jan Ader's performances and actions in the 1970s (some of which are recorded in silent black-and-white films and photographs), he sets up situations which repeatedly, inevitably end in failure. In his series of 'falls', the artist balances himself on a chair on a slanting roof, hangs onto a tree branch or cycles alongside a canal until he inevitably topples off the roof, into a dirty stream or into the canal. Similarly, in Andrew McDonald's 'Comfort Falls' (2015) and 'Bucket' (2013), there is a kind of playful humour to these repeated, doomed acts. But to read them as merely slapstick, according to the artist, would be 'missing the point'. By imposing a system of repetition and failure both Ader and McDonald are performing (knowingly or not) a kind of resistance to teleology and success-orientated ideologies. They are also, in their own ways, platforming the fallibility of art, life and ambition.

> "…I think art should be very serious… and that's what I like about art, I like the seriousness of it… but then I think it's part of my nature to want to take the piss out of it at the same time…"[2]
>
> **Andrew McDonald, 2017**

A lush, overgrown tropical garden of palm fronds, tree ferns and bird of paradise flowers teems, ripples and drips with humidity. Suspended between two neo-Greco pillars a hammock cradles a corpulent, sleeping man with a fedora-esque hat resting over his face. The marks of the artist's biro, a flickering index of lived time, shimmer and dance through the scene like dappled sunlight. The man wriggles slightly and with a sleepy, half-conscious effort raises his hand, groping at the air before it slackens and falls back. Once more — straining with a great, sleep-laden effort — he stretches out his hand from the verge of wakefulness. The sweeping, grasping hand steadies for a moment in the air and forms a faint pointing gesture. Succumbing to gravity, the hand slides drowsily downwards. For a hovering moment, the man seems to point out towards the viewer before his hand falls back into unconscious repose.

Sisyphus, 1549
Ticiano Vecellio
commons.wikimedia.org

1. Soren Kierkegaard, Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Paul Auster, Arthur Adamov, Bas Jan Ader, John Baldessari, Tacita Dean, etc.

2. Andrew McDonald in conversation with Iris Priest, Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, 18 May 2017.

Cut to black.

The animation begins again.

Repetition is the beating heart of McDonald's animations. Over the course of weeks, months and even years in the studio, the artist performs seemingly endless repetitions to create each animation: in staging, filming, reviewing and restaging actions; and in drawing and redrawing tens of thousands of frames, each made of tens of thousands of individual marks. The outcomes, which emerge from McDonald's gestures, are not predictable or homogenous (unlike those of mechanical repetition) but, due to the accumulation of slight inconsistencies and disparities, are vacillating, unpredictable and impossible to grasp. These Deleuzean repetitions are 'productive of difference',[3] generating all sorts of unexpected qualities and results, from the vibratory feel of the animations to the landscapes in which they unfold. Beginning a new piece of work, McDonald sets out with an action in mind and gradually crafts it through the animating process. The context or stages in which these actions take place emerge out of his processes of making, looking, thinking, reflecting and remaking.

A desolate, barren scene of what appears to be a crumbling penal institution or enclosure peppered incongruously with discarded water bottles. An impossibly Stygian sky hangs down to a low horizon, partially barred from the viewer by a tall fence; its weathered grid of wire (the conceptual and ideological skeleton of Modernism) is topped by a comically gestural, almost calligraphic, razor wire. From behind a block of scarred concrete a gaunt man, his face concealed by a chequered scarf, painfully hauls himself to his feet. The man looks around furtively at his surroundings, the scene twitches. He glances up at the break in the wire, his anxious, unstill lines standing out against the seeming solidity of the fence. Still feverishly surveying his surroundings, as though to assure himself that this isn't a trick and half anticipating an ambush, he reaches out and grasps the fence, hooking his foot into the grid. Slowly, painstakingly, the man begins to climb up, over and through the breach in the wire. Once he has finally made it to the other side, after taking several nervous, wary glances, he vaults away into the blackness which enfolds him like a heavy stage curtain… the fence, concrete, scattered bottles and razor wire continue to twitch and flicker…

3. Gilles Deleuze in Adrian Parr, ed., *Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.59.

Cut to black.

The animation begins again.

Many of McDonald's animations deal with diverse forms of entrapment. In 'Fence/Hammock' (2017) we witness two parallel yet asynchronous escape attempts: the ambiguous character in the fenced compound and the dreaming figure in the hammock who appears ensnared inside his own sleeping stupor. Both characters are trapped in their own individual situations and, in the endless loop of the films, condemned to forever return to their imprisonment. Themes of entrapment and imprisonment inevitably conjure the ghost of their opposite: freedom. But freedom is a contested state, an impossible destination for the characters in these two scenarios (reinforced through their constantly thwarted attempts to attain it). A 'free' person may be held prisoner by their own thoughts, fears or habits whilst an 'imprisoned' person may be free to dream, think or aspire. Albert Camus asserts that an individual's freedom, and ability to create meaning in life, only comes about through recognising and embracing the essential absurdity of our situation.

> "Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death, and I refuse suicide".[4]
> **Albert Camus, 1942**

We are always, as humans, in a state of becoming. In our limited grasp of the phenomenal world we exist only through repetition: the repeated envelope of the present tense; that moment of *now, now* and *now*; the ticking of the second hand on the clock; the heartbeat; the renewing of cells. As in McDonald's animations, all reality is a reality of repetitions, productive of differences and impossible to grasp.

4. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin Books, 2015; originally published 1942), p.62.

Follow the white line
into the shining void *jolt*
Faithless leap of faith

Everyone wants revenge no.2, Iris Priest

Can we be certain of what we are seeing when we watch an animation? In Andrew McDonald's videos, things move in more ways than one. The action onscreen proceeds in a linear or circular fashion, with events unfolding towards a final act, or looping into endlessly recurring dramas. At the same time, McDonald's images, always black and white, seem to vibrate with life, dancing to an unheard tune. They shimmer — an effect of the appearance and disappearance of tiny lines and marks in successive drawings. In 'Hammock' (2017), a looped animation in which a man luxuriates in a swinging hammock ad infinitum, a scattering of dots that features amid the surrounding foliage in one frame is gone in the next, suggesting the sudden manifestation of raindrops, or an infestation of parasites in the world within the picture frame. Now you see them, now you don't. Is there a technical term for this 'shimmer' effect? McDonald prefers a friend's description of the phenomenon: it is 'the nervous energy' in the work.

To attribute this visual effect to nervous energy implies the presence of a spirit in the work, a kind of animus in the animation, which might be subject to nerves and energetic flux, and could also be a participant in a wider, more universal feeling of unrest. This may lead us to the supposition that the digital files have a life of their own, although it may not be a form of life we readily recognise. For McDonald, the energy is an indication that 'everything is not quite comfortable with itself, not calm'. Drawing becomes a way to process that flow of nervous energy, to somehow absorb it.

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who was born in Ephesus around 535 BC, perhaps most famously celebrated the idea of a universal flux. The notion was enshrined in his phrase panta rhei, or 'everything flows'. Today, we have only fragments of Heraclitus' philosophy to go by, but his ideas about flux are concisely encapsulated in the following statement: 'Everything changes and nothing remains still … and … you cannot step into the same river twice'. Water flows, bodies age, moods change; the person we once were no longer exists; the river has always already moved on.

McDonald's animations, too, exceed our ability to step into the same flow twice. Thousands of individual drawings flicker before our eyes. There are too many signs for our eyes and brains to apprehend. Even when we repetitively watch the same animation over and over, we never quite see the same thing twice. Throughout his practice, McDonald has made a habit out of returning to existing works, responding to their call as ever-changing creations in need of an interlocutor, reworking animations and remaking sculptures in order to 'find out more about them'. This dedication to developing pieces goes hand in hand with the knowledge that the works themselves will never be fully knowable.

'Restlessness' (2017), in which droplets of water fall and pool against a densely drawn background that resembles an animal pelt or tightly packed geological strata, is a reworking of an early animation McDonald drew on tracing paper. In 2000, he began working with a graphics tablet, drawing straight into digital files, creating fifteen frames per second — that's 900 drawings for each minute of animation we are invited to gaze at. As he draws, McDonald's labour gains an automatic quality, which he refers to as a kind of 'mindlessness' that enables him to perform the repetitive action of drawing.

To make animations that involve a figure moving through space, McDonald uses a rotoscoping technique, transforming live action film into a series of stills that he uses as a reference for his drawings. In the process, he becomes acutely aware of the awkward poses his figures sometimes adopt. In 'Fence' (2017), a man appears from behind a stone block, glances around and then climbs over a fence, leaping onto the ground when he reaches the other side, and running off into the distance. Among McDonald's drawings for the piece are several in which the figure's body is contorted into comical or ungainly positions. Freezing a figure's movement into still moments reveals something that the eye could not register when watching uninterrupted action.

True Illusion
Ellen Mara De Wachter

So what, in fact, are we watching when we watch an animation? Is it a sequence of still images parading before our eyes, or is there something more to it, something, perhaps, of a more magical nature? To consider this question, we might once again turn to the paradoxes of the ancient Greek philosophers, which never cease to arrest the mind, contradict our assumptions and disrupt our limited conception of the world. Born some 45 years after Heraclitus, the philosopher Zeno of Elea is famous for his paradoxes of stillness and motion, which aim to disprove Heraclitus's principle that everything is always in flux. Through a series of sketches involving characters from ancient Greek literature including Achilles and Homer, Zeno sets up paradoxes in which he refutes the doctrine of change and the very possibility of motion itself. Apart from being entertaining puzzles, these paradoxes are useful in helping us to grapple with the nature of time and space, and with our own powers of perception. Zeno's paradox of the Arrow, in particular, seems to shed some light on the magic at work in animation.

The effect of this paradox will be more powerful if you take a moment to prepare your mind for it. First: imagine an arrow in flight. Watch the arrow fly from here to there; perhaps, if you're lucky, see it hit its target. Hear the archer's cheer, the prey's final gasp. Then imagine that you can divide time up in to tiny moments, individual flashes, the kind of instant in which you might cry "Now!", but which is over before you even recognise it. These instants are so small that you cannot even quantify them, and although you can still see the world – as you might see an animation in freeze-frame mode – you cannot perceive movement or change.
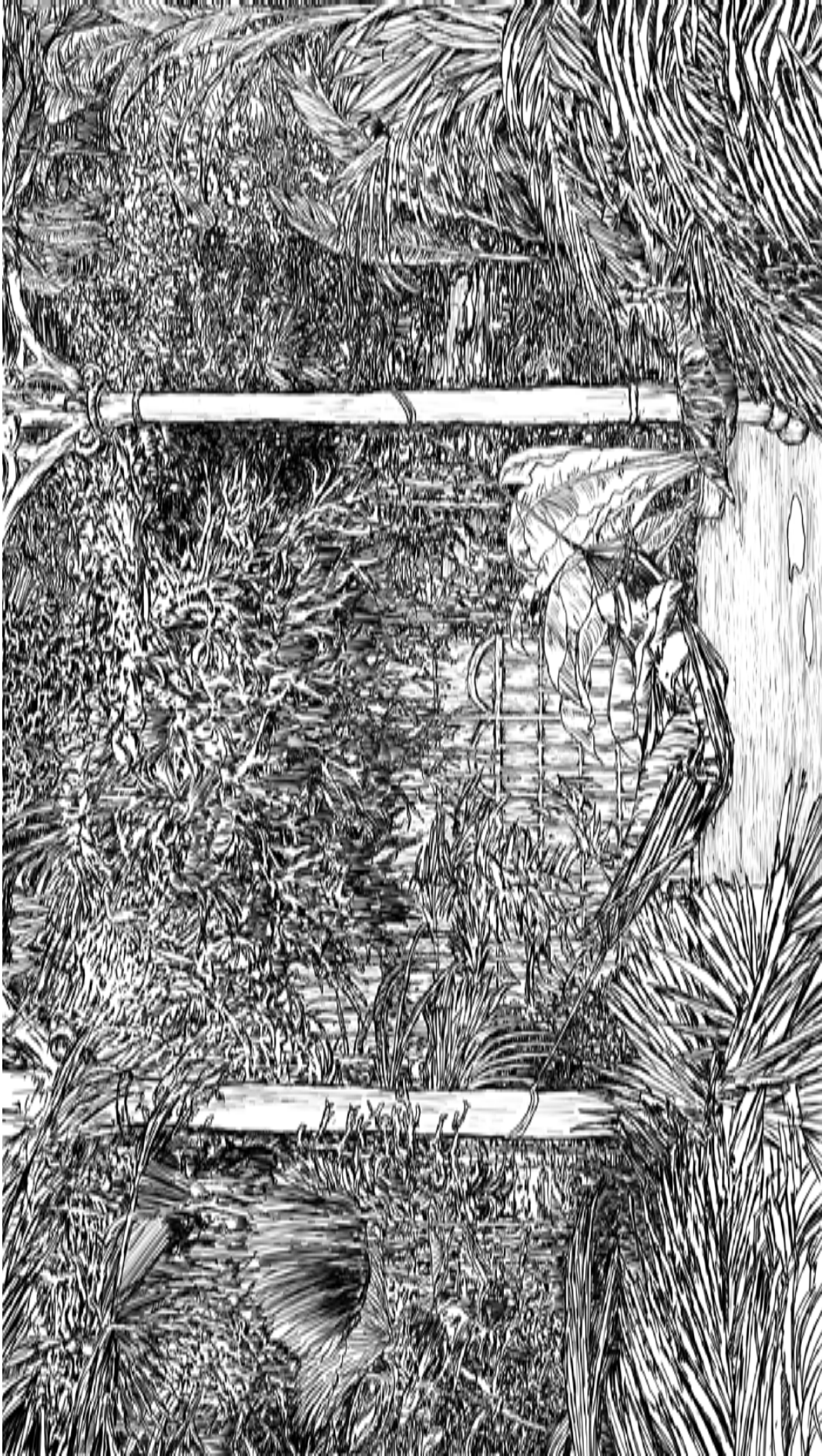
Now, Zeno says, for an object – the arrow you imagined – to be in motion, that object must change the place it occupies. But in any given instant, that arrow is already in a position exactly equal to itself. At that precise moment, it cannot move to another position, because, as we know, an instant is not long enough for that change of place to happen. It's also true that the arrow cannot move to the place where it already is, because it is already there. Given these facts, Zeno concludes that motion is impossible. According to Zeno, things don't change, and motion is nothing but an illusion.

Aristotle, who gathered together nine of Zeno's paradoxes of motion in his 'Physics', objected to the Arrow paradox on the grounds that time is not composed of indivisible 'nows' any more than any other magnitude is composed of indivisible elements. But we know that animation, for example, is composed of individual drawings, each of which flashes up on the screen in a fraction of a second. We are left with a conundrum: is the motion we observe in animations real or is it impossible – just an illusory series of links between static 'nows'?

In 'Fence', a young man climbs over a barrier that spans the width of the screen. Judging by the man's height, the fence seems to be about ten feet tall, and made of sticks or thin pieces of metal arranged into a grid of shallow horizontal rectangles. Atop the fence, Y-shaped spikes joined by looping barbed wire project into an inky sky. The fence lacks any visible crossbeams or supports; it is so fantastically designed that if it were ever used as a blueprint for a physical fence, the resulting construction would hardly stand up. The fence's ability to carry the young man's weight and to facilitate his escape is a figment of our imagination. Are we to believe our eyes or our minds?
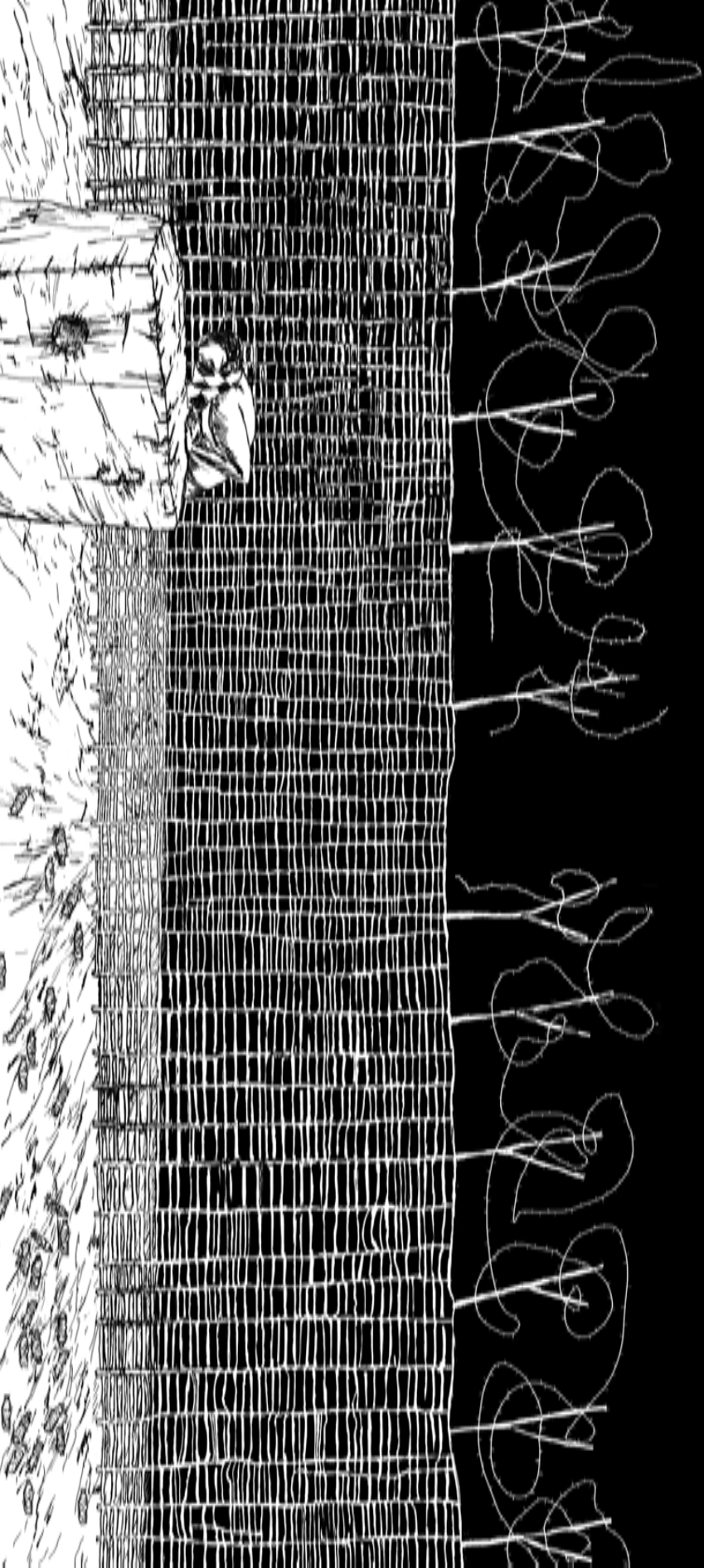
Our belief in the fence and in its convincing role in the drama is fundamental. To interrogate its physical integrity detracts from the story, halts us in our aesthetic and imaginary enjoyment of the experience. In a similar way, our belief in motion is essential to the experience of the animation: it is an indispensable illusion that paradoxically makes the action onscreen both real and magical.
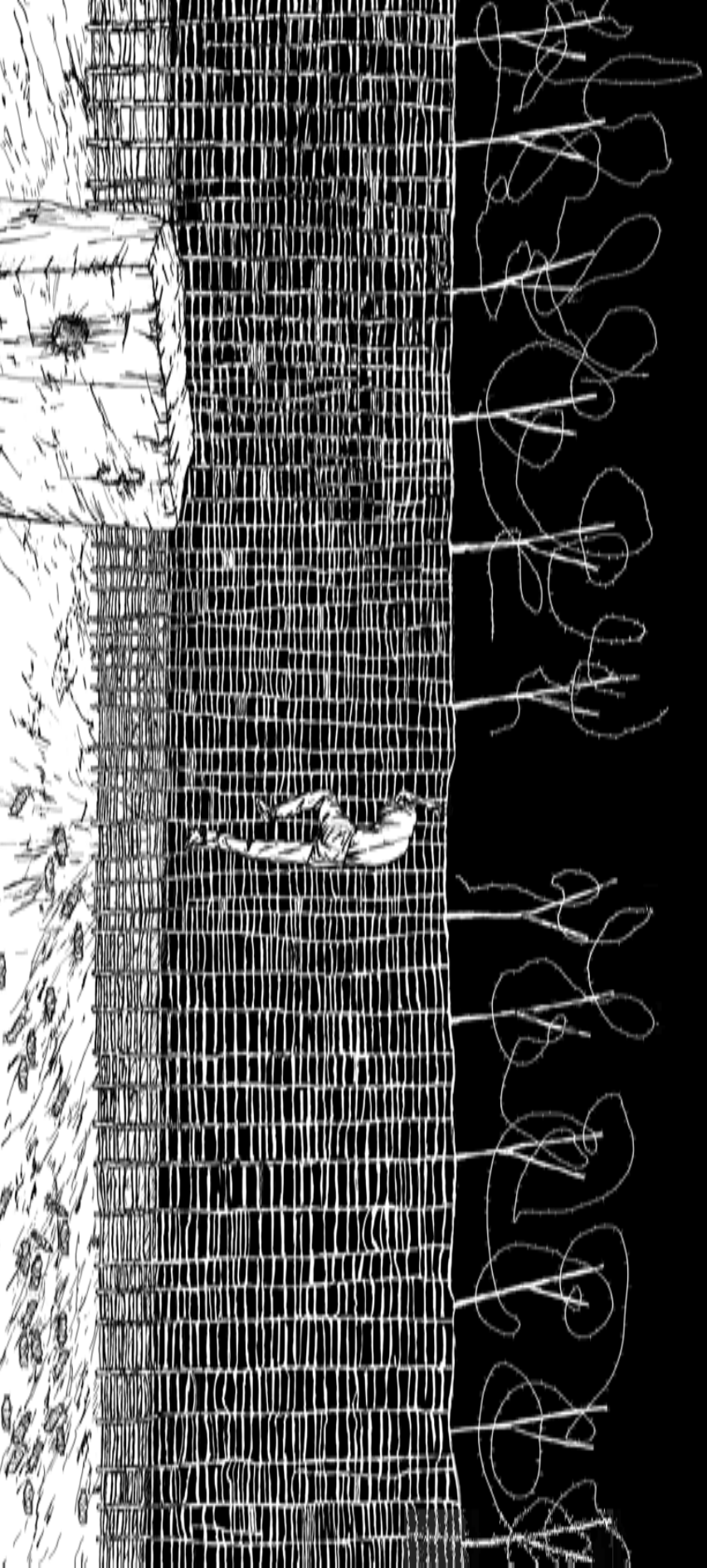
Fence, 2017
Andrew McDonald

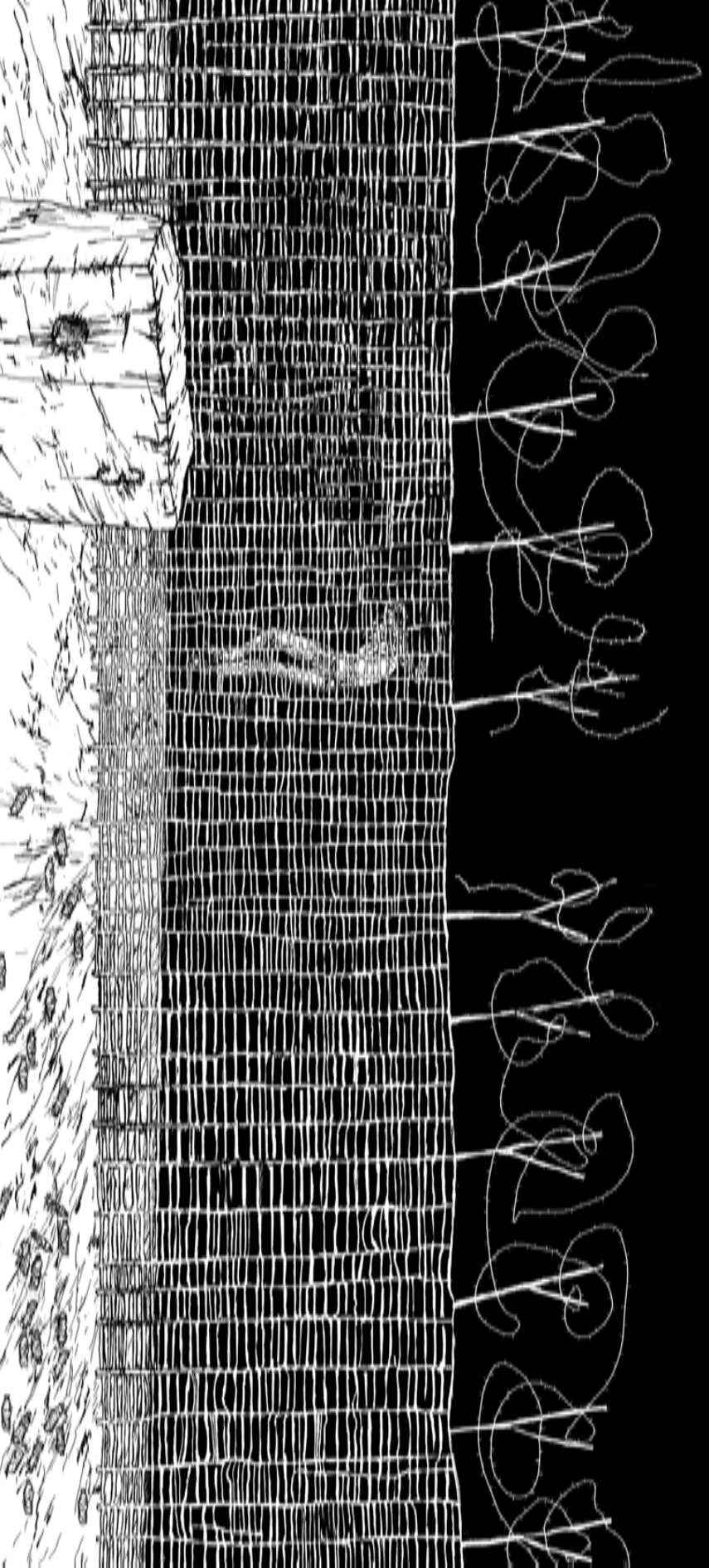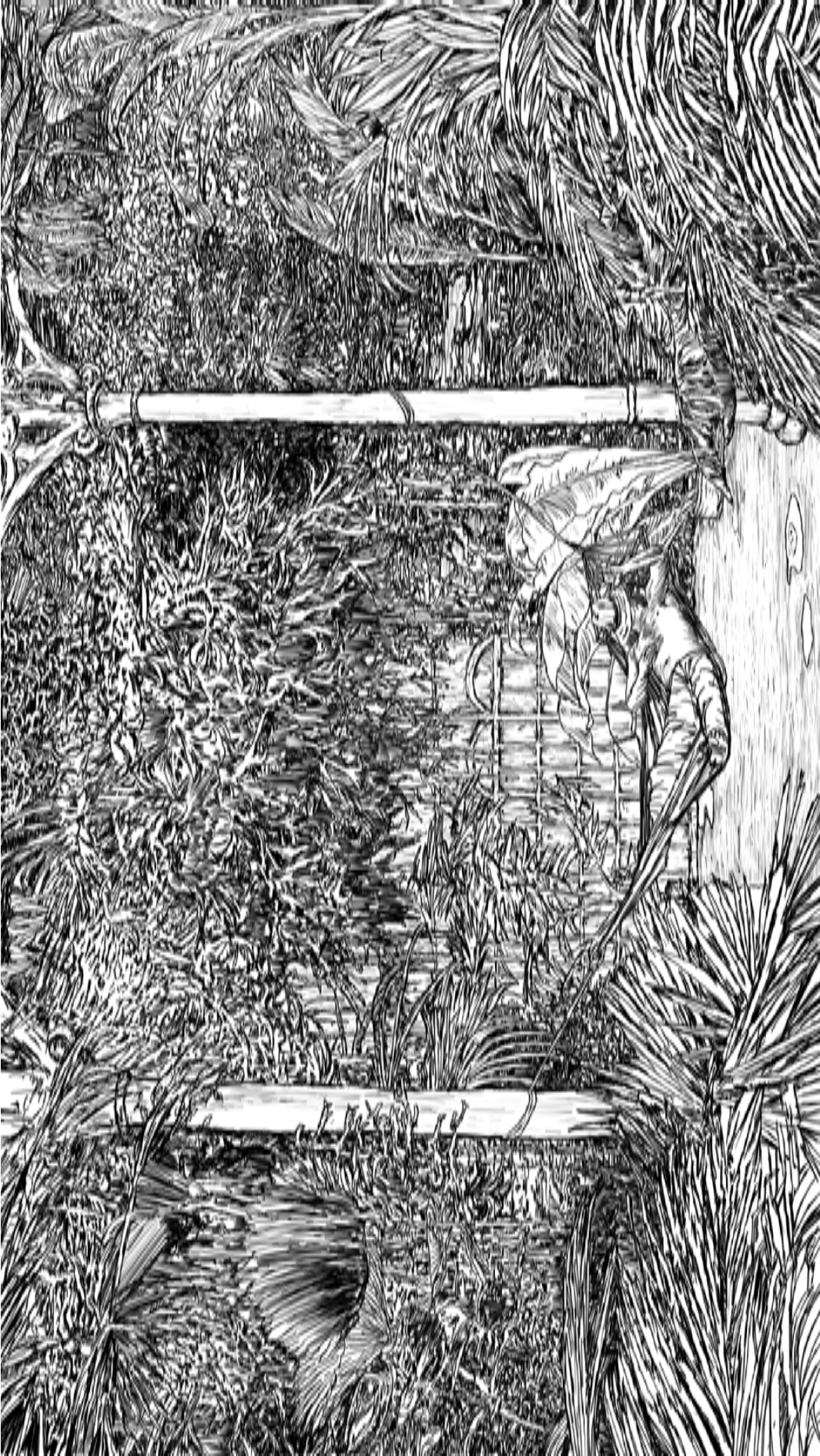Hammock, 2017
Andrew McDonald

'Northernness', while absent in most dictionaries, first appears in the memoirs of Elisha Kane, a nineteenth-century American physician and arctic explorer,[1] who used the term to describe the landscapes he encountered on his polar expeditions. Northern England, with its harsh bleak landscapes, grey skies and damp weather, has its own brand of Northernness. I believe this is the result of a unique combination of climatic conditions and a sense of pride linked to its industrialised past and subsequent growth of urban communities. This has been represented in the visual arts, perhaps most famously by the Salford-based artist, L. S. Lowry (1887–1976), well known for his depictions of small industrial towns in the North of England, with their large chimneys billowing smoke into their surroundings. Lowry's paintings are both a commentary on and a homage to Northern industry and working class life. Other interpretations are less picturesque and nostalgic in tone. Sir Hubert Parry's 'Jerusalem', a 1916 setting of William Blake's poem 'And did those feet in ancient time' (1808), musically recasts what Blake called the 'dark Satanic mills' of the Industrial Revolution. A similarly horrified response was that of Friedrich Engels, who during his 1842–44 research stay in Manchester, observed:

> "In a rather deep hole, in a curve of the Medlock and surrounded on all four sides by tall factories and high embankments, covered with buildings, stand two groups of about 200 cottages, built chiefly back to back, in which live about 4,000 human beings, most of them Irish. (…) The race that lives in these ruinous cottages, behind broken windows, mended with oilskin, sprung doors, and rotten door-posts, or in dark, wet cellars, in measureless filth and stench must surely have reached the lowest stage of humanity".[2]

The grittiness and suffering described by Engels is startling, and was a reality for most of the English working class in the nineteenth century. Certainly, Parry's musical adaptation of Blake's poem echoes this view of a dystopian North, the only hope an escape to an imagined English garden of Jerusalem.

The North has undergone significant economic shifts since the 1970s, marking the end of the Fordist era of production, at least in terms of how goods are manufactured in the region. Industrial products, cars and textiles, formerly produced using Henry Ford's factory model, shifted to a service-based post-Fordist model which favoured smaller batch production to supply customer demand. Post-Fordism created a new life of 'open networks', replacing a linear or structured view of the world connected to industrial production.[3] Today, many products are still churned out in factories, yet the notion of 'workerism' and the rights of the labourer have changed in the wake of this service based economy. Post-Fordism acknowledges changes to the factory system, in France and Italy especially, making it difficult to maintain extant hierarchies of management and production. Changes in the global economy and an increase of immaterial labour generate new divisions that continue to 'recompose and devalue' the existing skills of the worker.[4] In the context of the cultural industries, post-Fordism and immaterial labour are terms used interchangeably to point to shifts in the wider economy and their impact on artistic practice.

Reconsidering the North
Michael Birchall

The historic notions of labour, worker and workforce, which were once defined by manual and intellectual class positions, are rendered obsolete in a society weighed toward cultural production — especially through fashion, software production, and advertising.[5] In this reformulated workforce, creative workers produce knowledge and surplus value, products that are difficult or impossible to quantify in number-crunching terms. Despite the present-day regeneration of Northern cities with loft-style apartments and cultural hubs, there remains an innate sense of a more tangible, material industrial history, which, regardless of the economic transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, lingers on in literature, music and the visual arts.[6]

The idea of the North of England as culturally rich, known to have specific histories and economic conditions that are considered to be remote and unique, as well as it being related to the Romantic and the Sublime, has been widely discussed.[7] In addition, the North is associated with traditional imagery and values that have coalesced around industrial production, and the working classes, which by and large has been adopted in cultural terms through various forms such as soap operas, pop songs and fashion. The recent exhibition at Open Eye Gallery in Liverpool, *North: Identity, Photography, Fashion* (2017), explored ways in which the North is depicted through photography, artworks and fashion collections. Curators Lou Stoppard and Adam Murray were particularly concerned with the influence of Northern English outputs on a global scale, particularly in the world of fashion, and how designers have been inspired by the cultural landscapes of the region and its people.

In the work of Andrew McDonald there is a clear sense of the artist having lived in Manchester and trained as an artist in Liverpool and Newcastle. These cities have been drastically transformed through the winding down of heavy industry and the forging of new identities through the cultural industries. The residual angst and unsettledness is played out in McDonald's tumultuous animations, represented through the internal struggle of a single male protagonist who can be interpreted as the artist himself. In his solo exhibition at Castlefield Gallery, visitors were confronted with five animated drawings made through a process of augmented animation, in which McDonald uses his own body to capture movement.

1. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/northernness (Accessed 19 June 2017)

2. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 72.

3. Aufheben, 'Keep on Smiling — Questions on Immaterial Labour', no. 14, 2006. https://libcom.org/library/aufheben/aufheben-14-2006/keep-on-smiling-questions-on-immaterial-labour (Accessed 28 June 2017).

4. John Roberts, 'Art and the Problem of Immaterial Labour: Reflections on Its Recent History', in Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd (eds.), *Economy: Art, Production and the Subject of the 21st Century*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 2014).

5. Mary Lou Lobsinger, 'Immaterial Labour', in Michael Corris, Jasper Joseph-Lester and Sharon Kivland (eds.), *Labour Work Action*, (London: Artwords Press [S.l.], 2014), p. 139.

6. Michael Tucker, 'Passage(s) North', *Visual Culture in Britain*, Vol. 11, no. 3, November 2010, pp. 373–390.

7. See Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North*, (London: Reaktion, 2005).

L. S. Lowry, 'Going to Work', 1959

In 'Fence/Hammock' (2017), a man is seen climbing a high fence in a deserted area typical of post-industrial Manchester, where the artist lives and works. This struggle to clamber upwards is contrasted with a serene image of a man relaxing in a hammock, in a complete dream-like state, appearing to imagine himself elsewhere. This is one of two pairings where an intense physical effort is juxtaposed with a slow moving, almost meditative action. In 'Comfort Falls' (2015), the man is tied to a desk chair and blindfolded. As he struggles to swivel the chair 360 degrees, he continuously shifts his weight in a precarious counter-balancing act. An ambiguous tension is present: is the figure trying to escape? It is unclear whether this is a punitive, or perhaps fetishistic act. The captors are not present, yet as viewers we continue to watch his struggle. The chair, an all too familiar symbol of alienating office spaces, hints at the insidious systems of control often at play in the workplace but in a very different context, that of an industrial wasteland where a single man flounders and circles, endlessly. The entropic swivel motion is a reminder of how many of us feel in our working environments, far removed from an industrial past yet still bound by the constraints of capitalism. In place of factory production lines and hard labour, our work time is now spent stationary at desks, staring blankly at computers.
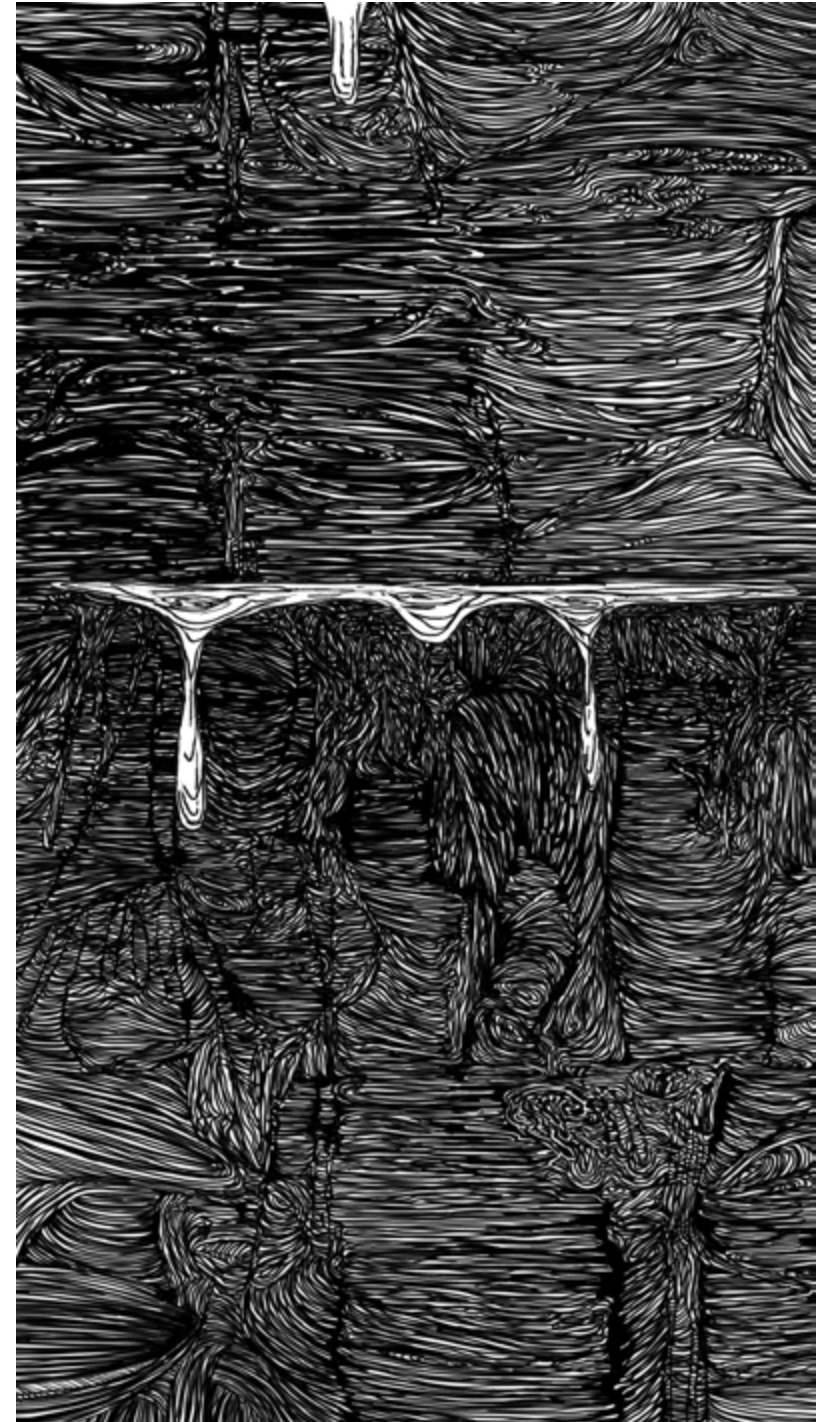
McDonald's tentatively drawn images are monochromatic and situated in the grey-sky metropolis of Manchester, the first industrialised city in the world. The North is strongly present in his articulations of site and place, as are the internal struggles of everyday life in the wider Western world. Through the use of scratchy, anguished lines, repeated many times over, McDonald is able to construct a menacing world in which outcomes and fates are unclear. In 'Restlessness' (2017), a rock-like formation fills the screen, drawn hastily and almost clumsily. Big droplets of water collect and drip, splashing onto the surface below and disappearing into a void. Although the duration of the animation is only one minute, the looping is seamless. It is uncertain whether the liquid will cease to accumulate and drip, or continue to flow, uncontained and unstoppable. This is perhaps symbolic of McDonald's continued struggle as an artist, and, still further, a reflection on the contemporary North. As the idea of a Northern Powerhouse comes closer into view, wherein former factories are transformed into offices and creative spaces are adopted by the service economy, the future of the North of England remains precarious and undefined in the current economic climate. McDonald demonstrates this uncertainty in his practice by presenting a set of unresolved works that may or may not continue to alter and evolve over time, and a view of the North of England as a place in constant flux.

Restlessness (Still), 2017
Andrew McDonald

An endless dripping
and coalescing of life
as the writer writes

Restlessness, Iris Priest

Iris Aspinall Priest is an artist and writer concerned with promoting and nurturing synergies between different disciplines: visual art, writing, philosophy, science, and education. Since graduating in 2008 from Cumbria Institute of the Arts she has worked as a freelance artist, writer and editor in Newcastle-upon-Tyne where she co-founded *CANNED Magazine*, ran the inter-studio crit group *I like it, what is it?* and helped to establish the online radio station *basic. fm*. Her writing has been published in a number of journals including *a-n*, *garageland*, *thisistomorrow* and *Corridor8*. Priest has also held the position of artist in residence at a number of organisations including Northumbria University, Solvik, Sweden and Stanwix School, Carlisle.

Ellen Mara De Wachter is a writer and curator based in London. She is a frequent contributor to *Frieze* magazine, and her writing has featured in numerous publications and exhibition catalogues. She currently holds the position of Visiting Lecturer in Sculpture at the Royal College of Art, and has taught at other institutions including the Royal Academy Schools, Goldsmiths College, Brighton University and Newcastle University. Her book *Co-Art: Artists on Creative Collaboration* was published by Phaidon in Spring 2017.
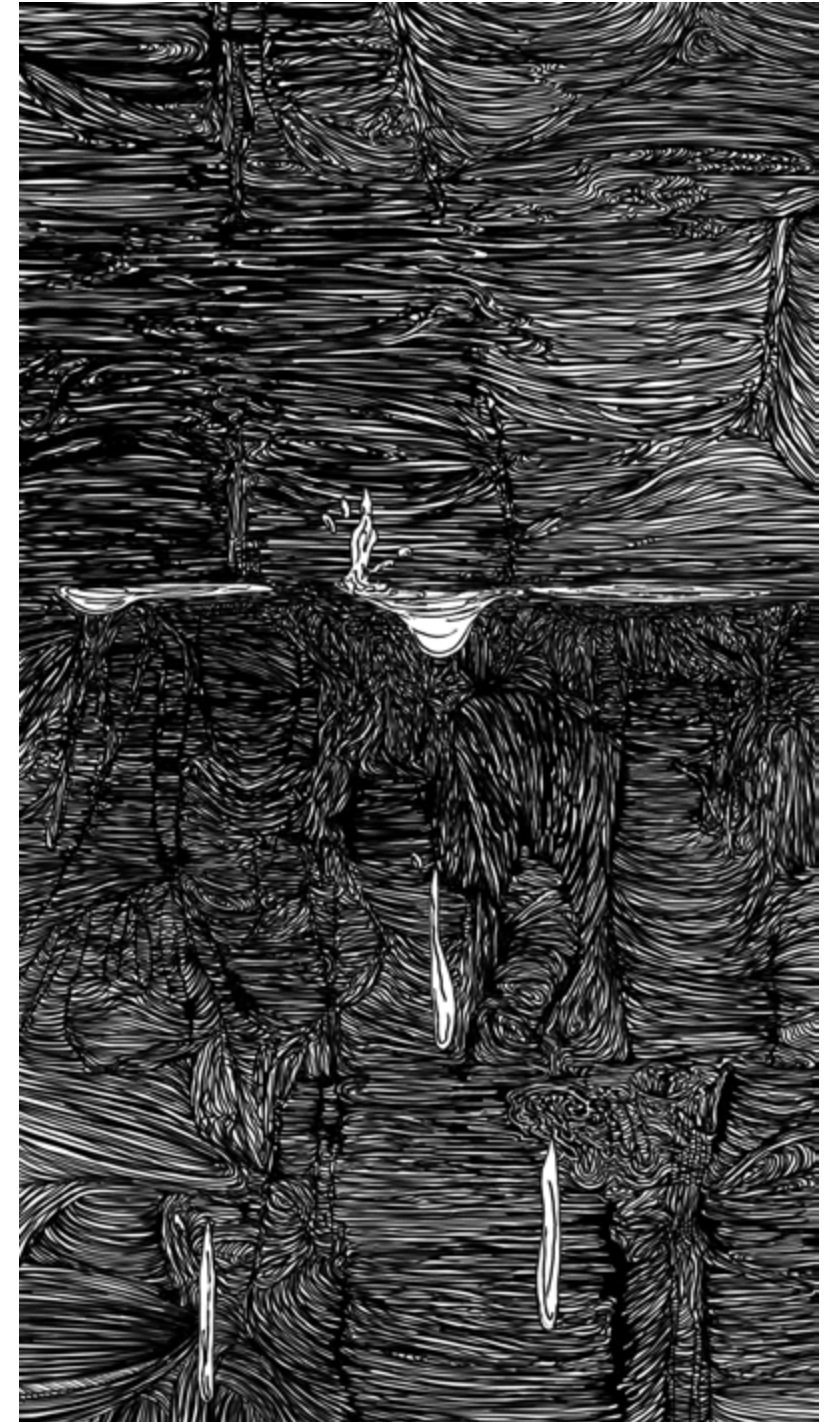
Michael Birchall is Curator of Public Practice at Tate Liverpool and Senior Lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University in Exhibition Studies. Previously he has held curatorial appointments at The Western Front (Vancouver, Canada), The Walter Phillips Gallery at The Banff Centre (Canada), Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (Germany); and has lectured at Zurich University of the Arts. His writing has appeared in *Frieze*, *Frieze d/e, ARKEN Bulletin*, *On Curating*, *Modern Painters*, *C-Magazine*, *Art & the Public Sphere*, and various catalogues and monologues.

Castlefield Gallery is a Manchester based gallery, agency and charity. The gallery has an established track record for developing artistic talent, and leading agendas to further contemporary visual arts practice in the North of England and beyond.
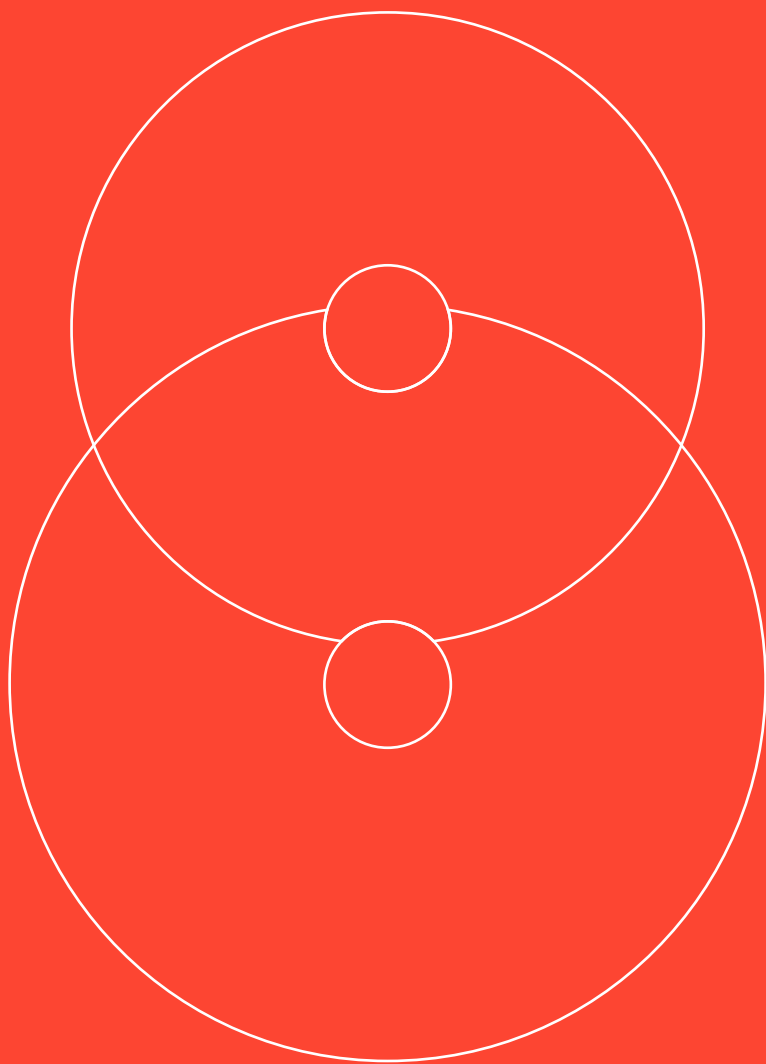
castlefieldgallery.co.uk

The International 3 is an exhibition and project space in Salford, Greater Manchester, U.K. With emerging and established artists, independent curators, galleries and organisations they produce a year round programme of new commissions, solo shows, group exhibitions and events both on and off-site. The International 3 also acts as curatorial coordinator for The Manchester Contemporary.

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Contributors

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