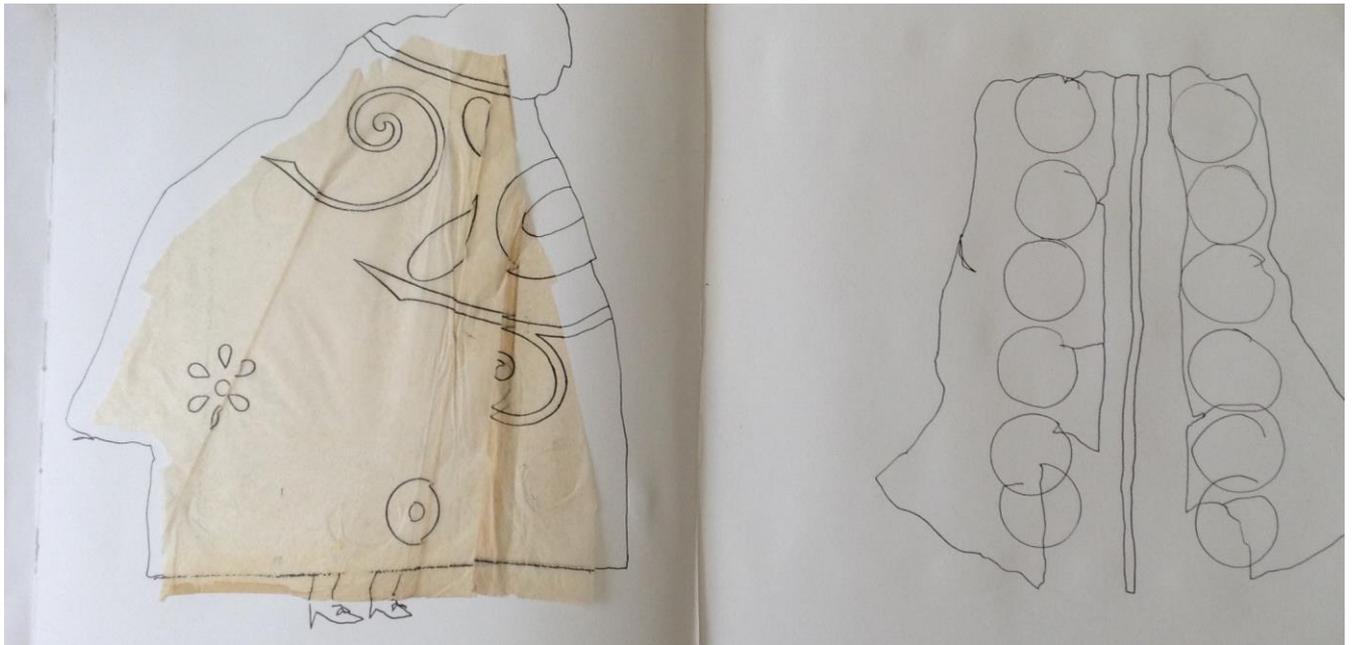


# VAR

## DRAWING CONVERSATIONS 2: BODY SPACE PLACE

**Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2017, at The Institute for Creative Enterprise (ICE), Coventry University Technology Park, Puma Way CV1 2NE, UK.**



*Jill Journeaux - image from drawing book 2016*

**A one-day symposium to consider interrelationships of drawing, body, space and place. The keynote speaker is Marsha Meskimmon, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art History and Theory at Loughborough University, and there are 22 papers from practitioners, art historians and theoreticians. Conveners: Professor Jill Journeaux, Dr. Helen Gorrill, Dr. Imogen Racz, Dr. Sara Reed.**

Fence/Hammock; Escape attempts  
Andrew McDonald

When I began making animations in the late 1990's, an important part of my practice moved from a private activity, something I undertook in endless note books, to a public one. Up until then drawing had been a means to 'work things out' - this was pragmatic but these note books were also a place to drift, to start drawing with no idea of what I was drawing. The impetus for this action was not coming from pen or paper or even from 'imagination', it was more an irritation with my body, and a way of relieving it was to make a mark.



I also began making animation out of desperation, it felt at the time that my practice was in the shadow of others, that doors were closing around me and the only one left open was animation. I say this because it is important to me to acknowledge the negative as a driver in the process of making art.

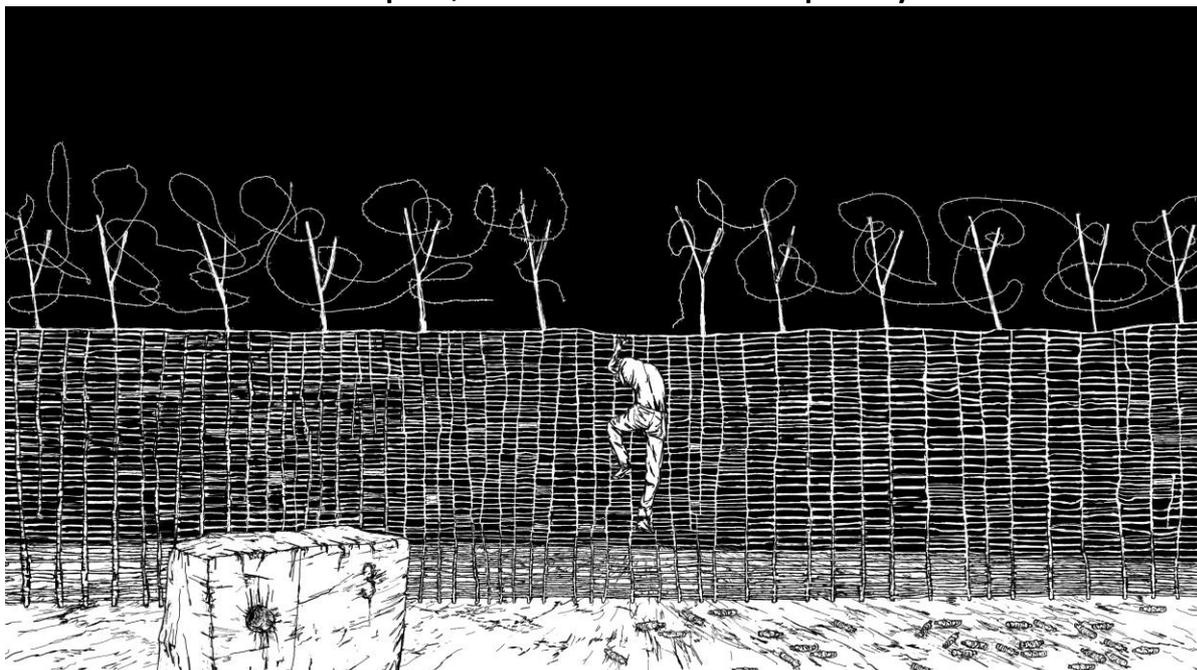
The starting point for my animations are the films I have made. This performative stage of my work is where I am repeating a scenario over and over, reviewing and reacting to my actions. There is a real physicality to this part of my work which contrasts greatly with the animation process, except for one commonality; repetition. As Iris Aspinall Priest writes in her essay 'Black screen to black screen (repeat)', Bas Jan Ader's performances and actions of the 1970's, he sets up situations which repeatedly, inevitably end in failure.' She then goes on to write, 'Similarly in Andrew McDonald's 'Comfort Falls' (2015) and 'Bucket' (2013) there is a playful humour to these repeated, doomed acts.' Aspinall Priest finishes by saying '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-originated ideologies.'

The use of film in animation is called rotoscoping, you can see this process in Disney, Snow White for example, is rotoscoped. As Ellen Mara De Wachter says about this process in her essay 'True Illusion' (2017), 'Among McDonald's drawings for the piece (Fence. (2017) are several in which the figure body is contorted into comical ungainly positions. Freezing a figure's movement into still moments reveals something that the eye could not register when watching uninterrupted action'.

The Fence animation is of a masked figure climbing over a fence, descending on the other side and then running off. The work uses a language we are familiar with, someone overcoming an obstacle and escaping from one space to another. The figure is masked so alluding to the action being clandestine, going against an authority. In 2015 it seemed to me every time I watched the news someone was climbing over a fence and what struck me was the unending endeavour. As a student I was fascinated by the work of Chris Burden. In 1979

he was invited to be a visiting artist by the Emily Carter College of Art and Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. In typical fashion instead of giving a lecture or studio visits he dug a trench in the college grounds (Honest Labour 1979) inviting students to come and help with the pointless task, to join his endeavour. Burden's performances are famous for their extreme nature, a reaction to war. From my practice 40 years later there is a resonance to this idea of the artist putting themselves through physically demanding actions to make work.

The Hammock animation is of a figure in a hammock with a hat over their face. The figure tries to get out of the hammock but keeps giving up as he has no energy, and it is easier to stay in his comfortable stupor, overcome with apathy.



Both of these pieces focus upon notions of escape, be it physical or mental. A major part of producing my work is to lose myself in the process of drawing and the repetition of animation, to escape. But there is also a contradiction as the end result, the finished piece, is a confrontation with me and the world. So, the two parallel yet unsynchronised escape attempts are just that; 'attempts' never really achieving

escape. When I am drawing I experience escape but it is fleeting so I keep drawing to repeat the experience.

Notions of escape are evident in the work of the American artist Robert Gober, his piece 'Prison window' (1992), a false wall with a window with iron bars set in to it with a blue background is one example, but this motif reoccurs in his installations and drawings. For Gober this image relates to his well-documented diagnosis for HIV/AIDS and his inability to escape from the condition. The bars are real iron but the blue sky beyond is idyllic, transcendent, but ultimately a fictional space. I find this piece very obvious almost 'corny' for want of a better word, but it is brilliant too. Gober then uses the same idea but bends two of the bars in a classic symbol of escape. The Gober piece then, in a comic way, makes me reflect upon when I taught art in prison, something I did for over ten years. We taught to a curriculum and were set targets for qualifications by the college management, but I was only too aware that some of the students I was teaching were people who simply wanted to lose themselves in the projects they were given to 'get through their time'. My animation therefore, is a reinterpretation of a period of time, a record is too simple a term. In prison, time was referred to as 'as doing my time' and it is this use of the word 'my' that interests me. Drawing allows me control, not in some overall vision for the work, but to 'try out' and improvise as I work. To allow me to have blanks in my ideas and to keep my options open right until the end. Indecision in my practice is important. Whereas the figures are made using film, the spaces are purely fictional. The animation process gives me time to think about what space is needed, to experiment with different ideas and to build them into the drawing. The spaces in Fence\Hammock evolved exactly like this. Within each background there were

formal aspects that had to be there, but as I worked on them I was stripping back and erasing for the Fence and adding and complicating with the Hammock.

Both figures show a contrast in the idea of escape. I have become aware over the years that this is something that viewers find attractive in my work. A perceived idea of 'hard work' and commitment, endeavour. Like the figure climbing the fence, I draw over and over again, losing myself, but also like the figure in the hammock I am struck with apathy and have to force myself to work, making my marks inconsistent. So in a subtle way this is recorded in the drawings so that each animation is a catalogue of moods, or an expression of mood. I am not an obsessive, which is a term sometimes levelled at people who make animations; however, the marks I make do demonstrate a 'nervous energy'. This energy is absorbed by drawing but is also manifested in the animations - a continuous moving line both in the figure and the spaces they inhabit.

Andrew McDonald

### Bibliography

Robert Gober - *Sculpture and Drawing*, Walker Art Centre Minneapolis, 1999.

Iris Aspinall Priest - *From black screen to black screen(repeat)'. Restlessness. Corridor 8. 2017*

Ellen Mara De Wachter - *True Illusion. Restlessness. Corridor 8. 2017*

Chris Burden - *Chris Burden* Gagosian Gallery, Thames and Hudson, Locus +, 2009.