



Drawing and Visualisation Research

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tracey@lboro.ac.uk

THE BODY RE-DRAWN

Jill Journeaux and John Burns

Coventry School of Art & Design, Coventry University

j.journeaux@coventry.ac.uk; j.burns@coventry.ac.uk

Journeaux and Burns offer a consideration, in the form of a case study, of the issues raised by their collaboration in the production of a short animation 'Red Line Glowing' in 2010. The digital animation was the conclusion to a series of drawings, which explored Journeaux's response to her experience of treatment for cancer and her attempts to visualise health through drawn images whilst undergoing that treatment. The drawings and subsequent animation are placed in the context of Journeaux's previous drawing practice, and the range of visual references used within her images. The collaboration and the resultant animation, is considered in relation to Burns' previous experience as a medical illustrator.

Jill Journeaux is an artist and educator who has made and exhibited drawings since 1980. John Burns is an illustrator and educator who has made illustrations intended for a range of different contexts including medical and scientific illustration. In 2010 they worked together to produce a short digital animation. The idea for, and format of the animation emerged out of a series of discussions about a set of drawings and collages made by Journeaux in response to her experience of treatment for breast cancer in 2009.

Following the diagnosis Journeaux observed the range of drawings that were made by various professionals to establish a treatment plan. There were the drawings of what had been found, which were duly recorded in her notes and the drawings on and of her body made by the radiographer and then the surgeon, plus the various diagnostic-imaging processes. Drawing in the form of an x-ray exposed a problem and then other drawings charted the journey of treatment and the path back to health. All the drawings represented the same thing, but all differently, and each was only capable of representing a tiny fraction of the reality of the matter. They made apparent something that could neither be seen, nor felt. These were drawings on, and of, and for the body. They charted the landscape of the body's own faulty behaviour and plotted the journey of medical treatment and recovery.

Since 1980 Journeaux's drawing practice has been concerned with the representation of physical, emotional and psychological realities through autobiographical narratives. Her response to the diagnosis of cancer was to use drawing as a way of voicing and documenting the experience. In the Spiders Web series of drawings made from 2007-9, she had explored the capacity of the image of a spider's web to carry meaning and to interlink disparate images within a drawing. In addition she used web structures to unite a range of elements in her drawings, which were often depicted in variable and incongruent scales. One of these drawings, [see figure 1], 'A Harsh Spring Foretold', made in 2009 introduced the image of stunted trees alongside areas of webbed structures, to produce an image of foreboding which contained the essence of future work.

The image of stunted and pollarded trees cut back and restrained in order to encourage new growth, resurfaced in the set of drawings from which the animation was made. The drawings of trees provided the artist with a metaphor for her body and a set of images through which she could express the feeling that she had been subjected to a form of brutalisation through surgery and chemotherapy. The images of trees also linked into ideas about the therapeutic and healing powers of nature, whether through plant based medicines, or through the benefits of being close to nature in terms of mental health.

The use of images of constrained and stunted trees as a means of expressing the experience of surgery was re-inforced by a visit to the Palace of Versailles in 2010. As well as observing the formal planting in the palace gardens, Journeaux spent time in the King's Vegetable Garden [the '*Potayer du Roi*'], where she saw tiered rows of fruit trees, some nearly two hundred years old, which were cut and trained into a series of formats which

acted to reduce the three dimensional space that each tree occupied. She discovered that rather than stunting the growth and vitality of the trees this severe form of intervention served to enhance the vigour of the trees and to significantly increase the yield per acre.



Figure 1, Journeaux, J. 2009 *A Harsh Spring Foretold*, marker pen on paper

Journeaux's previous drawings, made over the last thirty years, featured depictions of the female body, and incorporated references to traditional women's domestic activities, such as sewing, lacemaking and embroidery. The use of imagery derived from pattern and fabric, was informed by a study of samples of handmade Belgian lace held in the Nottingham Lace Archive, which the artist undertook in 2000. This visual source material was supplemented by the use of a set of Portuguese women's magazines from the 1930's bought by the artist from an antiques dealer whilst in Portugal in 2003. These magazines featured patterns for clothing, embroidery and lace making and paper patterns were added as enclosures. Initially Journeaux used these patterns as a prompt, copying and drawing from them to create decorative components in her work. Patterns derived from these materials were used to harmonise and enmesh images of parts of the body, small animals, insects, flowers and plants, and patterning was used to form a ground which could hold a range of figures together in a compressed space, whilst carrying meaning through decorative form.

In 2010, whilst convalescing, Journeaux embarked upon a series of drawings and collages entitled 'Between Angels & Insects'. In these drawings made following her diagnosis, Journeaux manipulated the actual paper patterns that had been enclosed in the magazines. Cutting, folding, tearing and pinning the patterns she rearranged and altered

them to act as metaphors for the redrawing of her body by surgery now reshaped by illness into a new and unfamiliar form.



Figure 2, Journeaux, J. 2010 *Between Angels & Insects*, collage

Whilst these drawings enabled Journeaux to articulate her experience of surgery, they did not provide a means of talking about the invasive experience of undergoing chemotherapy. She wanted to find a way to express the conflicting demands inherent in this medical process, whilst at the same time countering the prevailing popular media imagery associated with individuals undergoing treatment.

Journeaux was particularly concerned with finding a way to visually portray the difficulties of accepting invasive chemical treatment. It is hard, as a patient, to accept the fact that toxic and alien substances must be put into the body, in order to achieve health. Frustrated by the limits of her previous drawing style and the distance between her lived experience and the re-ordering of that experience through drawing into something palatable and beautiful, she began to make drawings using a large red marker pen. The red pen was used as a literal equivalent to the red chemical administered intravenously as part of her treatment. Initially the red lines sat above and behind cut and reformed patterns for bodices, and interacted with suggestions of external body forms.

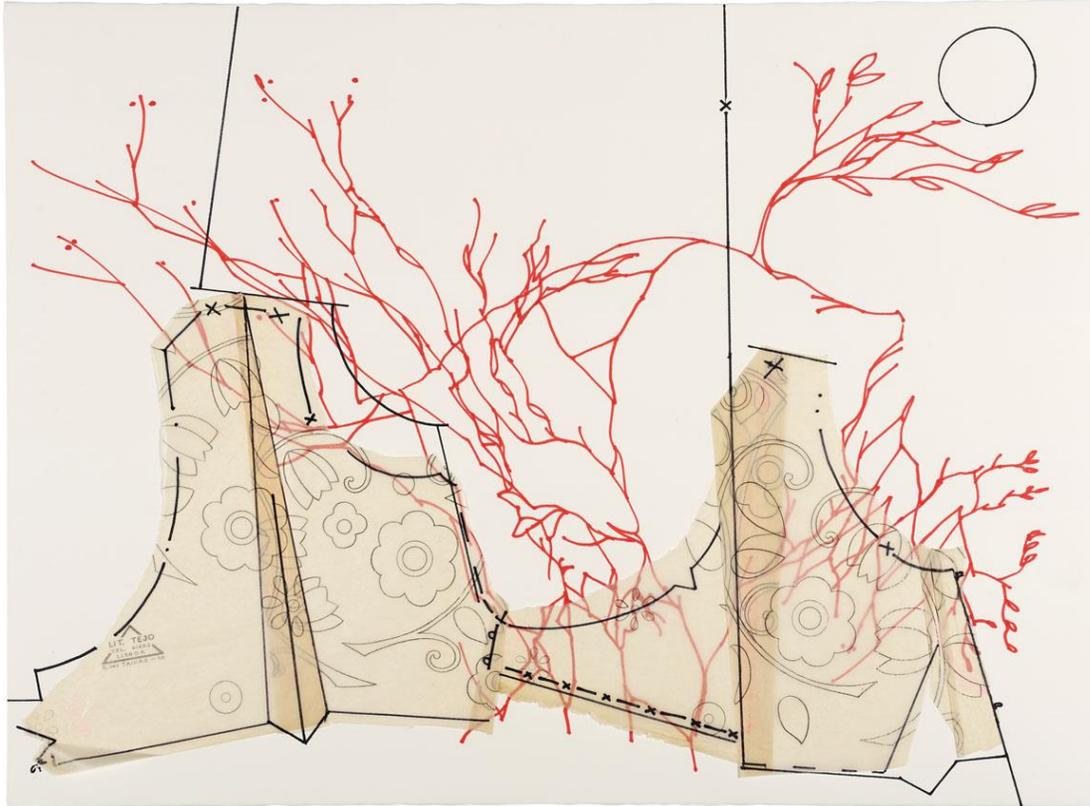


Figure 3, Journeaux, J. 2010 *Between Angels & Insects*, collage

However, as the work progressed the red lines became all-engrossing and began to depict an inner reality of both body and mind. The red line drawings sought to combine the crude realities of chemical treatment with images of recovery derived from the natural world. Elements of landscape; images of pollarded trees, the sun, the moon, the roots of trees, subterranean shadows, webs and disrupted and disturbed patterns are combined and threaded together through the red lines. Despite the power of these images Journeaux remained dissatisfied with them as expressions of her experience as she felt that they were too remote and distanced, and lacked a sufficiently visceral feel.

Journeaux approached Burns, a colleague at Coventry School of Art & Design, knowing that he had worked in the field of medical and scientific illustration and they discussed the drawings that Journeaux had made since her diagnosis. In conversation with Burns about her experience of chemotherapy, Journeaux described herself as feeling bound into her physicality in a way that she had never known, and 'locked down into her body'. She also described the need to find a way to share her doctors' belief in the value of this treatment in order to be able to accept the red line of chemical, and find a way to welcome it into her

body. Burns and Journeaux discussed the need to find visual equivalents for bodily functions such as breath and pulse, and to evoke feelings of fear and optimism simultaneously. They spoke of interlacing the familiar and alien to evoke discomfort and uncertainty, alongside reassurance and familiarity. They agreed that time was an integral component of the experience they were trying to express and therefore of any collaborative output, and that the links with the natural world made in the drawings should be extended and activated as images of hope and recovery. This included the references to mistletoe in the drawings as it has been used as a medicine since the time of the Druids and is still in use as a complementary cancer treatment in Europe today.



Figure 4, Journeaux, J. 2010 *Red Line*, marker pen on paper

In order to retain the authenticity of the experience of illness and treatment, Burns was emphatic that the drawings made by Journeaux must remain intact, and that he would not redraw or translate them. This recognition of the patient's voice as uniquely informed was an extension of his experience as a medical illustrator. Medical illustrations tend to provide visual descriptions of organic materials and structures together with indications of physical and/or chemical processes for health professionals. Whilst there are many examples of illustrative artefacts, whether in still or moving-image form, that are used in broader

educational or patient information publications, this collaborative exercise looped into the circuit of expression that included the patient's point of view as an integral element within the informative process. Such an exercise dovetails with Burns' interest in using visual, picture-based material to allow for the description of symptoms, sensations and impressions that, whilst often known to be present in times of ill-health, are so subtle but profound that they defy any description that can be provided by the patient's words alone.



Burns, J. and Journeaux, J. 2010 *Red Line Glowing*, still from digital animation

Medical and scientific communications often use terminology and vernaculars that draw on the field of conflict to describe the processes of dealing with illness. 'Battling' against disease, 'fighting' back against illness, 'attacking' certain types of cells, organisms, conditions etc., are all well-known phrases that are used within and without the medical environment to describe the aggression that is deemed to be required in dealing with health problems. A body may be assisted to heal itself but the pre-healing process is defined by attacks on invading organisms or processes. Earlier in this paper Journeaux uses the term 'invasive' in relation to the treatment applied and also to the particular medical condition that the drawings refer to and depict; so in order to treat invasive conditions invasive chemicals and processes are required. In his role within medical and

scientific illustration Burns had heard of drugs and other treatments being referred to as components of an armamentarium, and part of the war against illness.

Burns noted that many aspects of the drawings considered the flowing of material along paths as a substantive content element. The root and branch systems of plants and trees echoed the interconnected pathways of blood vessels within the body. Sun and moon follow their own perceived pathways and one very necessary function of the spider's web is that it serves as a dense but fragile series of route-ways for the spider itself. In consideration of the conflict-based intimations of the medical language used, together with the path and flow oriented themes within the drawings, the animation began to draw analogies between the navigation via natural landmarks in certain methods of munitions delivery within the geographical world, and the web of pathways along which fluids, nutrients and armaments flow within the body

One aspect of armaments that remains constant, whatever their size and theatre is the need for them to be delivered to the point of conflict; to the 'front' so to speak. Looking at the nose camera footage of aircraft engaged in bombing raids in a number of wars, one could imagine the recording of similar images of navigational travel along prescribed rivers, canals, lakes and pools, but now at the level of the very small dimensions within the internal body environment. The animation employs very small digital cameras to record the visual mission details of chemical armament as it travels along its predetermined navigation to a target. Lines within the drawings depicting veins and arteries provide the channels along which the weaponry travels. In the distance can be seen the flickering glows of already delivered munitions deploying at the battlefield. In medical terms the glows and bursts of light and colour from reactions between chemicals and certain conditions and organisms can be seen as pathfinder markers that identify target areas. Whilst it is true that the initial drawings, as has been mentioned in previous pages, derive from a more natural and harmonious view of the health of persons and landscapes, certain of those drawings contained a sense of foreboding encoded within their mark-making that hints of encroachment and threat and suggests that the apparent harmony within the structure may soon be drained away to be replaced by conflict. The animation moves forward into that time to locate the narrative within the same environment that has now been transformed into a theatre of conflict. The drawings remain the same but the viewpoint has moved in location and time to engage the viewer in an enactment of that most profound conflict - physiological war in inner space.

The experience of collaborating to produce the animation enabled Journeaux to find an appropriate visual equivalent for her experience of chemotherapy, and a way of voicing the difficulty and inherent tensions of this type of treatment from a patient's perspective. In working with Burns, Journeaux was able to lay aside some of the determining characteristics of her previous drawing practice, and to reconsider the scaffolding of style which had hitherto served her well, but which prevented her from speaking the truth about

her experience of illness. Through working collaboratively Journeaux found a format for articulating the inhabitation of her body during a period of time when it was the site of a struggle occurring at a cellular level. She was also able to find a way to point to the holistic needs of a patient and their capacity to visualise recovery.

The collaboration enabled Burns to further explore approaches to visualising and drawing medical treatment from a patient's perspective, and to work with the depiction of a visceral and psychological experience, which is rarely discussed but commonly experienced. In doing so he was able to ask questions about the processes and purposes of drawing for medical illustration. He was able to review thirty years of experience as an illustrator alongside his own experiences of medical interventions as a patient himself, and Journeaux's experience of treatment for serious illness.

In maintaining an emphasis on visualising recovery alongside the depiction of the experience of invasive treatment, Journeaux and Burns ask questions about the current limitations of medical illustration and its ownership by pharmaceutical companies and medical practitioners, but not by patients. They also raise questions about the capacity of visual imaging to enable people who are seriously ill to visualise recovery and health whilst undergoing debilitating treatments.

Where the *'Red Line Glowing'* animation has been screened and seen by medical practitioners the response has been positive and those practitioners have voiced the need for more work to be done on ways of enabling the visualisation of health and recovery for and by, people undergoing treatments for cancer. Journeaux is actively pursuing opportunities to explore these issues beyond the form of an individual artistic intervention and is aware of the work being undertaken by Dr Jac Saorsa through the Drawing Women's Cancer project at Cardiff School of Art & Design, which is attempting to engender 'a deeper consciousness of the cancer experience as it pertains to psychological and emotional health through a creative interpretation of scientific intervention and human experience,' in order to address awareness of women's cancers.

The SKINship project, which is a research program and professional network led by Rhian Solomon, promotes cross disciplinary collaborations between visual arts and science based practitioners, and is currently engaged in a series of experimental collaborations between plastic surgeons and tailors with the intention of informing new practices in the design and planning of both surgical procedures and garment making.

In each of these initiatives drawing is being used as a key method of enquiry and realisation, and the need exists for further work to be undertaken by artists, illustrators and designers in conjunction with colleagues in the medical professions to challenge the boundaries between disciplines, and between patients and medical practitioners.

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