

Testing and Experimenting¹

a synthesis of the papers given in Chicago, Indiana, London and Northumbria

slide 3 Kirkaldy's Testing and Experimenting Works.²

'To test experimentally the hypothesis that urban living and upbringing modulate neural processing of acute social evaluative stress, we studied the neural responses of healthy ... volunteers undergoing such stress during functional magnetic resonance imaging ... Current city living was associated with increased amygdala activity, whereas urban upbringing affected the perigenual anterior cingulate cortex, a key region for regulation of amygdala activity, negative affect and stress.' Florian Lederbogen, Peter Kirsch, Leila Haddad &c.³

'I have done certain experiments and explorations that have stimulated discussion. They were, in fact, only successful once they provoked discussion... What ever I do, I try out something and observe the experiment. Now too I am experimenting, attempting to express myself about this question. Today the attempt might fail... Answering questions about something in front of you, without something that someone has attempted, can never be convincing. There too you can see how important it is to make mistakes; in other words this whole discussion is inconceivable without mistakes. And such discussion is always interesting if you discover a mistake in yourself and try to improve it...' Joseph Beuys (2004).⁴

1. Preamble.
2. Review of the Complexity Manifold.
3. [Examples from English poems published after 2006.⁵]
4. coda.

1. Preamble.

slide 4 FlexBlue undersea nuclear reactor.⁶

The first draft of this talk was given in Chicago and then at Notre Dame in Indiana in the fall of 2011.⁷ A second draft was given in Birkbeck, London in February 2013 and a third, omitting part four, in Northumbria in March 2013. This online draft starts with a preamble, an overview of the main strands of my work in the 1970s up until 2005 and ends with a coda.

¹ The original draft delivered in the USA and the London follow-up, was in four parts; this draft is in three. This version prints parts one, two and four.

² Paige Mitchell, photograph, 2011.

³ Florian Lederbogen, Peter Kirsch, Leila Haddad and many others (2011) 'City living and urban upbringing affect neural social stress processing in humans,' *Nature*, vol. 474, 498ff, 23 June 2011.

⁴ Joseph Beuys (2004) *What is Art? Conversation with Joseph Beuys*, edited with essays by Voker Harlan, Forest Row: Clairview Books.

⁵ Not included in online copy.

⁶ English Channel, France, *The Ecologist*, February, 2011.

⁷ Department of English Language and Literature, University of Chicago and Department of English, College of Arts and Letters, University of Notre Dame, Indiana.

My work has been factured as a response to the living conditions – as memory and research as well as the immediate experience of the situation. I use a structural basis with a planned criteria for selection of materials and plan for when and where materials are applied. The work is both rhetorical and parrhesical; in the first place because it uses language, in the second place because the multiplicity of truth is part of my poetic insistence. All of this leads to a set of questions and positions which, out of necessity, do not cohere.

slide 5 Hereford doors.⁸

At the completion of a project, it has been my practice to evaluate what has been done, with a view to avoid doing it again – as far as it is possible to not repeat myself. In 1981 I had finished two ten year projects, a long poem named *PLACE*⁹ and an installation and performance project that developed through *Fluxus* in Britain and was named *Blood Bone Brain*.¹⁰ Both projects were informed by shorter projects that attended to a variety of new or different attentions in terms of subject, method and facture. These projects included: *The Art of Flight*, *Poetry for Schools*, *Executive Ease*¹¹ and *The Apocalyptic Sonnets*. In 1982 I set out through test and experiment, through evaluation of what had been achieved and the facture of new, shorter work, to plan and prepare for the next projects. One of those became a twenty-four year process and a long poem under the title *Gravity as a consequence of shape*.¹² I am still in the throes of planning and writing a new project. The method used for part of this new evaluation has been to give a set of three talks – using the oratorical tradition of Cicero and the subsequent ideas of the theatre of memory that I had developed as an art historian, through the use of carefully prepared slide shows. (For the Testing and Experimenting talks read from a prepared paper.)

slide 6 oil pipelines, Alaska.¹³

I gave *Complexity Manifold 2* talks at the State University of New York at Buffalo, in 2006; subsequently in Cheshire, London and Manchester, and, more recently in Cambridge, England and at Miami, Ohio. The talks were preceded in 1999 by a brief note for the journal *Boundary 2*, titled, 'The Poetics of the Complexity Manifold',¹⁴ which provided the title for the new talks, *The Complexity Manifold 2*.¹⁵

⁸ Allen Fisher, photograph of doors in Hereford, September, 2011.

⁹ A volume collecting most of this work was published by Reality Street Editions, Hastings in 2005.

¹⁰ Published by Spanner as a set of seven booklets and nine microfiche in 1981.

¹¹ Eventually published as *Imbrications*, Lobby Press, Cambridge, 1981.

¹² Published as *Gravity* (Salt Publications 2004); *Entanglement* (The Gig, Willowdale 2004) and *Leans* (Salt Publications 2007).

¹³ BP's Prudhoe Bay field, Alaska, Bryan and Cherry Alexander, *Guardian*, August 2006.

¹⁴ Published by Duke University Press.

¹⁵ Examples of the talks are now available as video online at University of London Birkbeck http://resources.voiceworks.org.uk/voiceworks_textworks/keyworks_poets/allen_fisher_1.html and the notes and extensions for the talks are on the events section of my web page at <http://www.allenfisher.co.uk/allen-fisher-events-calendar/>

slide 7 3-D Magnet Field computer simulation of Reversing Geodynamo.¹⁶

2. What now follows is a review of the three talks and the 'around-table discussion'. The purpose is to give resumé that will lead to a clusters of concerns and areas of importance in poetic and other aesthetic practice.

Talk one discussed the idea of facture, which in my practice can include writing, drawing or painting.

slide 8 Muse's idealisation of consciousness and time.¹⁷

The image shown is of a three-dimensional ideal form put together by C.A. Muses. It proposes to be an idealised representation of consciousness and time. The talk addressed the concept of a dynamic planet, and proposed a critique of idealised geometries and logic with recognitions of discrepancy and contradiction in these modes of truth, followed by examples of deceit, simulation of reality and various schemes based on material presence in coupling with modelling and invention. Examples included map making, manipulated satellite photography, mythological sculpture and my own work. The talk then shifted into a deeper consideration of truth and truthfulness, how as an artist I encounter truth and engage with the consequences.¹⁸

slide 9 drawn rooms, warrior wrenches.¹⁹

The talk addressed the problem of perception, proprioception and memory. (It might be understood that, in the arts and in poetry, proprioception is the activity of the body's organs, such as the heart and lungs, and the experience of gravity, in relation to aesthetic facture and reception.) It arrived at a new word for a condition that I find myself in – the word derives from quantum mechanics – it is *decoherence*.²⁰ It describes the condition of

¹⁶ G.A. Glatzmaier and P.H. Roberts (1995) 'A three-dimensional self-consistent computer simulation of a geomagnetic field reversal', *Nature* **377**, 203-209. Glatzmaier and Roberts are at Los Alamos National Laboratory and University of California, Los Angeles. Palæomagnetic records indicate geomagnetic field on Earth for at least 3 billion years. Records show dipole polarity reversed roughly every 200,000 years with individual reversals taking about 2,000 years each. Fluid outer core surrounds solid inner core both composed mainly of iron. convection of fluid in outer core driven by thermal and compositional buoyancy sources at inner core boundary as Earth cools and iron-rich alloy solidifies onto inner core giving off latent heat and light. These buoyancy forces and Coriolis forces due to the Earth's rotation cause fluid flows to be helical, which twists and shears magnetic field, generates new field to replace that which diffuses away. note: <http://www.psc.edu/science/glatzmaier.html>

¹⁷ C.A. Muses, idealised spatial representation for time and consciousness, *ARK* **40**, 1966, 'Divination, Higher Consciousness and Mathematics'. In quantum spacetime there are resonances and not exact recurrences. Muses' orange threads are tangents to the black sphere developing a helicoidal (seven-angled) surface and a spiral periphery. This work links directly to ideas of Pythagorean (Platonic) solids and the mathematics of Euclid, Fibonacci and Pacioli. Charles Arthur Muses (1919–2000) published *Chronotopology: Destiny and Control in Human Systems*. Muses was an informal student of Norbert Wiener. Wiener published *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* in 1950.

¹⁸ J.H. Prynne writes on the appropriateness of his preferred term 'truthfulness' in his keynote speech at the First Pearl River Poetry Conference, Guangzhou, China, 28th June 2005. Transcribed by Keston Sutherland and then mended by J.H. Prynne, *QUID* **16**, c.2005.

¹⁹ A page from Allen Fisher, *drawn rooms*, 2012, in progress.

²⁰ See Jim Baggot (2004) *Beyond Measure. Modern Physics, Philosophy and the Meaning of Quantum Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; M. Bell, K. Gottfried and M. Veltman (Editors)(2001) *John S. Bell on The Foundations of Quantum Mechanics*, (a collection of his papers), Singapore, New Jersey, London, Hong

having to rely on machines or black boxes as interlocutors between my perception or experience of phenomena and its apprehension. Examples used were photographs from the artifacts produced by particles on bubble chamber screens and information, beyond assisted eyesight, from radio telescopes about distant galaxies. Decoherence was a state that questioned the basis for facticity and coherence, not as incoherence, but as a confidence in lack.

slide 10 *drawn rooms, unpacked.*²¹

The talk then attended to the understanding of qualities in a field where spacetime was uncertain or unpredictable, but where outcomes could be anticipated. Examples came from human physiology: in one example this was understood through structural morphogenesis (known in the popular media as ‘catastrophe theory’) where the spacetime of the occurrence is unknown, but where the quality of what will occur can be predicted; another set of examples attended to the process known as a cell membrane (often presented as a fixed shape from a freeze frame or photograph), which becomes a conceptual understanding of boundary as mobile.

slide 11 *fluorescent cells.*²²

There was a brief excursion at this point into elements of synaesthesia, which developed into an understanding of post-experiential innocence as a component of poetic production.

Returning to the talk, the subject of damage was introduced in which it was noted that in its positive mode, damage was part of artistic practice and part of neurological function as a self-preservation in, for instance, the formation of the fluidity of memory and perception. The talk moved towards a conclusion with an overview about simulation (reproduction of the already reproduced) and construction of the self, a continuous condition from birth.

A summary of this talk coupled proprioception with archæological spacetime into an aesthetic and critique of situation, and led off through process-showing and decoherence

Kong: World Scientific; Roland Omnès (1999) *Understanding Quantum Mechanics*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

²¹ A page from Allen Fisher, *drawn rooms*, 2012, in progress.

²² Fluorescent proteins visualise cancer in vivo. Robert M. Hoffman, *Lancet Oncol* 2002; 3: 546–56.

<http://www.metamouse.com/links/RMH2002.Lancet%20Oncology.pdf>

<http://asia.stanford.edu/events/spring07/slides402S/okazaki.pdf>

A way of imaging metastases in mice by use of tumour cells expressing green fluorescent protein (GFP) that can be used to examine fresh tissue, both in situ and externally. Real-time studies of tumour progression, metastasis, and drug–response evaluations. The GFP gene, cloned from bioluminescent organisms, has now also been introduced into a series of human and rodent cancer-cell lines in vitro, which stably express GFP after transplantation to rodents with metastatic cancer. Techniques were also developed for transduction of tumours by GFP in vivo. With this fluorescent tool, single cells from tumours and metastases can be imaged. GFP-expressing tumours of the colon, prostate, breast, brain, liver, lymph nodes, lung, pancreas, bone, and other organs have also been visualised externally by use of quantitative transcutaneous wholebody fluorescence imaging. GFP technology has also been used for real-time imaging and quantification of angiogenesis (development of new blood cells).

into dislocation, that is almost into the conception of *place* as I had first proposed it in 1971.²³

slide 12 glacier.²⁴

Talk two led into a description of the relationship between constructivism and conceptual art, using examples from both modes of discourse and their contributions to poetic facture. This was followed by an outline of the æsthetic theory and practice I have been involved in demonstrating and clarifying over the past thirty years. This shows the relationship between consciousness, with the æsthetic component in cognition, and its contribution to artistic production. In summary the proposal is that æsthetic practice is at its most effective when the engagement of consciousness with an artefact, poem, visual image or music, is realised as an imperfect fit. In this process it was noted that the tendency to perfect fit was a tendency to normalise and, so to speak, reduce the efficacy of the æsthetic component. The imperfect fit, however, is tenderly on the cusp of being imperceptible or obscured if made too disparate from the capacity of the consciousness involved. As that consciousness – that readership – expands so does the potential impact of the efficacy reduce – articulated by the inverse square law.

There was then a return to what a pattern of connectedness was – what constituted it. This was done in two ways. It was first of all demonstrated that human beings are part of a natural world and as a consequence have an affinity or direct organic connection with many aspects of life on Earth. In terms of geometry and ideal proportions this has led to ideas of the Golden Mean and the Fibonacci series, which were comprehended as part of the same system by the inventor of double-entry book-keeping, Luca Pacioli, in 1500.

slide 13 Luca Pacioli and his student.²⁵

Golden Section, as it became known in 1835,²⁶ and Fibonacci series involve patterns abstracted as spirals and serpentine geometries from forms in nature and part of the larger complex of a dynamic, rotating planet moving through the galaxy and producing the Coriolis force. Humankind recognises forms in nature from glacial spirals moving at the speed of eons to the life spans that produce shells around some snails and

²³ *PLACE* was written and published in parts throughout the 1970s and until 1981. An extensive collection of the books comprising most of the work appeared as *PLACE* published by Reality Street Editions, Hastings, 2005.

²⁴ Carolyn Blake (1997) photograph, glacier at Maloja Pass, Upper Engadine, Switzerland, The site is close to Friedrich Nietzsche's house at Lake Sils.

²⁵ *Fra Luca Pacioli and Student*, tempera on wood, 1495, painting attributed to Jacopo de' Barbari, Museo & Gallerie di Capodimonte, Naples. The ideal geometries derived from serpentine and spiral forms were exemplified in the early work of the Babylonians and then the Greeks. They were codified by Euclid in his *Elements* in 323 BCE. In the medieval period Arab mathematicians and the European, Leonardo Pisano Fibonacci, provided the algebra needed for ideas of proportions from natural phenomena. Around 1500, Fra Luca Pacioli, the inventor of double entry book-keeping, brought the ideas of Euclid's Golden Section or Golden Mean (names attached in retrospect in the nineteenth century) into mathematical connection to the Fibonacci series in his *Divine Proportions*, illustrated by Leonardo da Vinci or one of Leonardo's workshop.

²⁶ Named by the mathematician Martin Ohm, see: Underwood Dudley (1999) *Die Macht der Zahl: Was die Numerologie uns weismachen will (The power of numbers: what numerology would have us believe)*, New York & Heidelberg: Springer, p.245.

cephelopods; humans recognise proportion in the growth of some plant stems in relation to their main stems. These logarithmic forms have been transformed into ideal solids and ideal measurement by artists from ancient Babylon to the present day, in architecture, poetry, painting and music. They have been linked directly to the iconography of health and beauty. From images of Asclepius in 400 BCE to William Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* in 1753 – from ancient Mesopotamia to Christian Europe.

slide 14 patterns of connectedness.²⁷

The talk then presented a second set of patterns of connectedness, more subtle than the first, which can be identified culturally in the use of diagonals in drawing and graphics and contemporary rhetoric and in the use of margins in writing. This second set of connectedness is also linked to natural experience, but mainly through proprioceptive experience, both in human physiology and cultural practice. Both ways of constituting patterns of connectedness are reliant on idealised forms, wonderfully activated in the arts – but here is the rub. These wonders of human achievement are now seen to be unreliable, can now be shown to rely on approximations. The truth value – necessary for the city and for the individual – is no longer valid.

Using examples of my own work for the talk I demonstrated damage to the Fibonacci proportions as the basis for structuring proportionate decisions in my facture. I used, for example, J.S. Bach's notations for *The Art of the Fugue*, which uses Fibonacci ratios, to facture, through transcription and transformation, my own poem *The Art of Flight*.²⁸

slides 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 Fibonacci series on cylinder, J.S. Bach, *Die Kunst der Fuga* and Allen Fisher, *The Art of Flight*.²⁹

²⁷ Patterns of connectedness: using simulations from the inside of Polyomavirus at 25-Å (Ångström) resolution from James P. Griffith, Diana L. Griffith, Ivan Rayment, William T. Murakami & Donald L. D. Caspar (1992) 'Polyomavirus capsid and vision electron density maps computed by Fourier analysis', *Nature* **355**, 6361, 1992.

Polyomaviruses are a group of small, non-enveloped DNA viruses that can infect birds, rodents, and primates. See also: Elizabeth A. Hewat, Nuria Verdaguer, Ignacio Fita, Wendy Blakemore, Sharon Brookes, Andrew King, John Newman, Esteban Domingo, Mauricio G. Mateu and David I. Stuart (1997) 'Structure of the complex of a Fab fragment of a neutralizing antibody with foot-and-mouth disease virus: positioning of a highly mobile antigenic loop', *The EMBO (European Molecular Biology Organization) Journal*, **16**, 1492-1500.

Gregory Bateson (1979, 1980) *Mind and Nature, A Necessary Unity*, London: Fontana/Collins.

Carl Schuster and Edmund Carpenter (1996) *Patterns that Connect, Social Symbolism in Ancient and Tribal Art*, New York: Harry N. Abrams.

'Patterns of connectedness', as part of an æsthetic theory, was articulated in Allen Fisher, *Necessary Business*, Spanner, London, 1985 (rewritten 1992). Rewritten version in *Topological Shovel*, The Gig, Ontario, 1999 (which also includes the 'Thumbnail Lecture', 'The Mathematics of Rimbaud', and 'Topological Shovel').

²⁸ Hugo Norden, 'Proportions in Music', *Fibonacci Quarterly* vol 2 (1964) pages 219-222, talks about the first fugue in J S Bach's *The Art of Fugue* and shows how both the Fibonacci and Lucas numbers appear in its organization. Tushaar Power, 'The Proportional Design of J.S. Bach's Two Italian Cantatas', *Musical Praxis*, Vol.1, No.2. Autumn 1994, pp.35-46, is part of the author's thesis, *J.S. Bach and the Divine Proportion* presented at Duke University in March 2000. Part of *The Art of Flight* was published as Allen Fisher, *Paxton's Beacon*, 1975, Todmorden: Arc Publication.

²⁹ Allen Fisher, *Fibonacci cylinder 1*, 2002, marked off in approximate Fibonacci ratio.

J.S. Bach, 'Contrapuntus II' from *Die Kunst der Fuga (The Art of Fugue)*, posthumous edition, 1751.

Allen Fisher, example transcription from Bach's *Die Kunst der Fuga* for *The Art of Flight*, 1974.

This image shows a cylinder marked off in a Fibonacci ratio. I used many existing structures in my work as a ground from which to make innovations and developments. I used a late string quartet by Beethoven to facture *Birds Locked in the Roof*;³⁰ notation for piano work by Karlheinz Stockhausen to facture *As Fast As Possible*;³¹ *Time and Motion Study* by Brian Ferneyhough to facture *Defamiliarising* _____*.³² The transformational intent combined with a deconstructionist attention to critique ideal form. This shows the sequence from Bach's score to my mathematical representation of it, onto my application of words to the figures then to the first typescript (as it was then) of the poem. The last image here shows Fibonacci cylinder folder in a vice and causing the original ratio to change its pattern, which is a representation of the device that helped facture the poem *Gravity as a consequence of shape*.

The summary at the end of Talk two showed that attentions had changed. The summary now signalled a combination between assemblage, in the work of constructivism and conceptualisation, with empathy and ideas of human ontology. This showed how ideas of the *Situationist* *dérive* and the concept of strangers or imperfect fits coupled to an understanding of anticipation of the quality of processes and transformations, as a preparation and praxis for artistic production.

slide 21 drawn rooms, in transit.³³

Talk three took off into three considerations: the concept of transformation of language in poetry, the premise of the essay *Confidence in lack*³⁴ and a complex cluster of lecture, drawings, paintings and documents titled *Traps or Tools and Damage*.³⁵ Some depth was given to the aesthetic theory with detailed examples in studies of specific projects and artworks by R.B. Kitaj and by Joseph Beuys. This led into an excursion into the use of rhetoric in various works with a particular focus on metonymy. There was then a return to give a summary description of the relationship between the facture of a work of art, poetry or music, and its performance.

Matters of performance led into a brief development of the terms in the title *Traps or Tools and Damage* and also reflected on my performance and installation work from the 1970s under the heading *Blood Bone Brain*. The initial recognition in the former led from the discussion of transformations and signalled the shifts from the negative connotations of words like 'traps' and 'damage' into positive praxis, shifting the positive connotations of words like 'tools' into a critique of their misuse.

Allen Fisher, example translation from transcription to text for *The Art of Flight*, 1974.

Allen Fisher, example typescript from translation for *The Art of Flight*, 1974.

Allen Fisher, *Fibonacci cylinder 2*, 2002. *Fibonacci cylinder 1* folded and crushed in vice providing displacement and disruption of Fibonacci ratio.

³⁰ Included in *Unpolished Mirrors* and published as part of *PLACE*, 1981, Spanner and 2005, Reality Street Editions,

³¹ Included in *Kessingland Studies*, Spanner 1979 and in *Stepping Out*, Pig Press, 1989.

³² Reissued by Veer Books (London) 2013.

³³ A page from Allen Fisher, *drawn rooms*, 2012, in progress.

³⁴ Published as a group of essays by Writers' Forum, 2007.

³⁵ Published in a variety of forms.

In the preamble I used the term, which many of you wondered if they misheard, parrhesial. It may be addressed as meaning, for this talk at least, truth-telling. Michel Foucault notes in one of his last public lectures that parrhesia is indispensable for the city and the individual.³⁶ The difficulty at arriving at truth in situations with a strong reliance on ideals and ideal forms, a strong reliance on what we want the situation to be or presume what it must be or are even misled into thinking are the case. If poetry is to have substance, any weight for me, it rests here. This is not a pre-Socratic matter of being true to yourself, but a matter of recognising that the self is constructed and continues to be in a flux of construction. The worry my interlocutors and readers have with critique of coherence and logic begins here.

slide 22 drawn rooms, Feltham Car Park.³⁷

The *Complexity Manifold 2* talks were followed in May 2011 by a gathering of participants from the talks around a table-assembled to discuss some of the questions the talks had raised. A synopsis of this public conversation (there were 16 interlocutors, all poets and artists) was to some extent less fragmentary than the synopsis already presented, and this allowed for a focus on clusters of important issues that can be summarised here. I have grouped the issues into five clusters and have denoted these with key words.

- (i) The first and most important cluster for me arises from the ideas that participants and readers have regarding *perception and truth*, or rather, as they often referred to it, as the assurances given to them by perception or empirical knowledge.
- (ii) The second cluster can be characterised as *vocabulary* and the problems encouraged by the use of scientific or technical vocabulary in my work, which for me bifurcates into repossession and transformation, that is the repossession of vocabularies evident in some specialisms and by dint of this thought owned by them and critique of these vocabularies inside of my work, repossessing them. This is also a matter of inventing vocabularies through damage control and transformations.
- (iii) The third cluster attends to *damage and disruption*, terms recognised as positive in these talks, both terms cross into the discussions of perception and vocabulary. The other clusters also cross back into other discussions.
- (iv) I have labeled the fourth cluster *transformation and vulnerability*.
- (v) The fifth cluster is around the brief discussion of the concept *negentropy*.

slide 23 drawn rooms, string drawing.³⁸

perception and truth

The proposals made in the talks were not meant to be provocative, well they were, but that wasn't the the main reason for the disruptive intrusion against western civilisation. The premise for the intrusion is parrhesial, that is a personal construction as a poet, a necessity I impose on myself as a way of acting in the world, in that torn activity between allegiance to my self and the state, between my attention to myself and others,

³⁶ Michel Foucault (2011) *The Courage of Truth. The Government of Self and Others II, Lectures at the College de France 1983-1984*, edited by Frédéric Gros, translated by Graham Burchell, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

³⁷ A page from Allen Fisher, *drawn rooms*, 2012, in progress.

³⁸ A page from Allen Fisher, *drawn rooms*, 2012, in progress.

which is not solved by dialectic logic. The situation, the momenergy of decoherence, is one in which there is a recognition that some aspects of phenomena are not perceived, not even proprioceptively, but rely on my trust in an interlocutor.³⁹ This can be an advantage and I am confident in that knowledge, but the notion that idealised forms or logic resolve this matter appear to me to be fraught with difficulty.

slide 24 *drawn rooms, foot and mouth.*⁴⁰

vocabulary

In discussing vocabulary the participants noted the idea of perception becoming multiple. There were issues of deliberate breakdowns of vocabulary; vocabularies introduced from particular specialisms, like biochemistry or quantum mechanics; there were worries about referentiality; what you do or do not hear in the momenergy of an event, in a reading in a performance; the denotation in part of the reading encouraged by a radical attack on conventional language use; the disallowal of full comprehension; the use of obdurate terms and concepts; the experience of language being made; the mobility of vocabularies; the different kinds of reading, we never get it all.

slide 25 *particle routes in bubble chamber.*⁴¹

damage and disruption

These terms reiterate inside and against others in the clusters. The idea of deliberate disruption, promoting the imperfect fit, the aesthetic necessity, pertain. There is a brazen incompetence that can be read as *damage and disruption*, it is a knowing damage, a positive turn. The cluster engages with an articulation of undermining that artefact of human existence, the self.

slide 26 *drawn rooms, drawn wire.*⁴²

transformation and vulnerability

There is an almost natural lead into ideas of transformation from sophisticated ideas of damage, but of course, these are not agreed or idealised shifts and they make the recipient or owner vulnerable. Such a vulnerability is proposed as necessary and contributes through what has been summarised as a post-experiential innocence. It is an outrageous concept, first discussed in an article I wrote about the work of Cy Twombly in 1987.⁴³ It proposes an openness, in danger of attack from the norms of civic behaviour. It can be experienced through a tonal shift in the poetry as much as by

³⁹ Momenergy is only a name, and some prefer the hyphenated form momentum-energy. It has four properties: it is proportional to mass; it has direction; the arrow of a mass points in the same direction in spacetime as the worldline of the object itself; it is governed by the ratio of its displacement and its duration. (John Archibald Wheeler [1990] *A Journey into Gravity and Spacetime*, New York: Scientific American Library. p96ff.)

⁴⁰ A page from Allen Fisher, *drawn rooms*, 2012, in progress, using Elizabeth E. Fry, John W. I. Newman, Stephen Curry, Saloua Najjam, Terry Jackson, Wendy Blakemore, 'Structure of Foot-and-mouth disease virus serotype A1061 alone and complexed with oligosaccharide receptor: receptor conservation in the face of antigenic variation', <http://vir.sgmjournals.org/cgi/content/full/86/7/1909> - FNC1

⁴¹ An Omega Minus (Ω^-) produced in the British National 1.5m liquid hydrogen bubble chamber. C. Henderson (1970) *Cloud and Bubble Chambers*, London: Methuen & Co, plate 1 figure 1.

⁴² A page from Allen Fisher, *drawn rooms*, 2012, in progress.

⁴³ Available online from e-space: <http://www.e-space.mmu.ac.uk/e-space/bitstream/2173/9747/2/Fisher%20-%20The%20Crowd.pdf>

explicit shortfall. It conceptually overlaps with ideas of indeterminacy, extemporisation and improvisation.

slide 27 Street scream.⁴⁴

negentropy

The concept negentropy derives from ideas of entropy. I wrote to one of the participants after the discussion, in answer to their question, what is this? I said: I've been using the term *negentropy* in relation to artistic practice for a long while and it would be good to address this in writing. I think I first came across it in Erwin Schrödinger's *What is Life?*⁴⁵ but I'm sure Buckminster Fuller addressed it as well, maybe implicitly in his *Synergetics*.⁴⁶ I'd guess that my usage is a 'development' or figurative use of these origins. It was Léon Brillouin's idea in 1962 that acquiring information about the fragments of a system can be thought of as decreasing entropy. This doesn't really violate the second law of thermodynamics because the local system's entropy produces an increase in thermodynamic entropy elsewhere. Negentropy is contrary to the theory that the universe is running down, because the results of artistic practice may be thought of as a gain, rather than a loss, of energy. Reading an efficacious poem has the potential of providing more than its parts first appeared to offer.

perception and truth

Interlocutors at the Complexity discussion also raised the concept of dialogics and compared this to the reservations I have with dialectic logic. This encouraged a concern in some readers attending to question how I proposed to analyse the material world. The ideas of pre-Socratic Greek thinkers and ideas of logic in subsequent Greek and Latin work. When raised, one interlocutor noted, "I have to live by my perception." But the issue of the efficacy of that perception for parrhesia remains and it can never be easy to say something the first time it is said. The language of things is used to talk about consciousness. When I experience my perception of the world I am simultaneously other and, as one interlocutor put it, not knowing during drawing is the enduring experience of drawing.⁴⁷

As an assembly we didn't resolve these disturbances. The difficulty resembles the elephant in the room thesis, to be critical of ideal forms, coherence and dialectic logic was to question the bases of too much. My fellow participants, through varied attentions, were keen that I revisit the subject of dialectics, but were various in how they thought this might be done.⁴⁸ There were then a few examples using some of the matter I have just been considering and examples from English poems by my contemporaries published since 2006. At the Chicago, Indiana and Birkbeck talks this was followed by a coda, which follows below.

⁴⁴ Allen Fisher, *Street scream*, digital painting, 2012.

⁴⁵ Erwin Schrödinger (1944) *What is Life? the physical aspect of the living cell*, Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁶ R. Buckminster Fuller, in collaboration with E.J. Applewhite (1975) *Synergetics. Explorations in the Geometry of Thinking*, New York: Macmillan.

⁴⁷ 'The importance of knowing during,' is from Brigid Mc Leer, which she drew from Andrew Patrizio in his essay on Claude Heath's work in Angela Kingston (2003)(ed.) *What is Drawing?*, Black Dog.

⁴⁸ Two of the interlocutors thought I needed the work of Fredric Jameson (they specifically suggested *Valencies of the Dialectic*), one thought I should go back to the early nineteenth century and the work of Hegel. A fourth participant, subsequently proposed *The Theory of the Subject* by Alain Badiou. Response to these propositions will be addressed in due course.

4. Parrhesia as truth-telling, indispensable for the city and the individual: a coda.

From a contemporary perspective, looking at the reduction in the development of human thought and action, it becomes more and more difficult for humankind to survive beyond this century. There is little doubt that aspects of thought still provide contributions to effective continuation, but they are substantially insufficient in the contemporary context.⁴⁹ These matters and weathers can be focussed into the fore through some works by contemporary poets, as the examples given today begin to indicate, but only just about, given the fraught nature of so much of the best stuff. Already the sleepers awaiting the lines of steel are laid out in equally spaced formation, just before the entrance to the circular form of the sewage plant. What is becoming apparent at express momentum is the viable attention to articulation in the shift from 'know thyself' at the ancient Temple of Apollo, to the late Modernist work by George Oppen, to the subsequent understanding of the construction of the self as other.⁵⁰

Throughout the first months of 1984, and until his death in June in that year, Michel Foucault 'set out a ... concept of truth which [he proposed] had a major presence in ancient philosophy [and] which has been largely hidden by the modern regime of discourse and knowledge.' (Frédéric Gros 2011: 344)⁵¹ Foucault proposed a typology of styles of veridiction in ancient culture, different from the post-Aristotelian tradition that ranked discourses according to their logical form. Foucault distinguished the truth-telling of parrhesia from the truth-telling of teaching, prophecy, and wisdom, proposing that parrhesia aims for the transformation of the ethos of its interlocutor, involves a risk for its speaker, and belongs to the spacetime of present reality. In so doing the problem of the government of people becomes dependent upon an ethical elaboration of the subject that is able to bring out in an interlocutor and in front of others the differences of a discourse of truth. He characterised three components of praxis, which I have elaborated into four, these are: Knowledge, Power, Aesthetics and the Self. These components, of course, need unpacking and explaining, but I will not try to overstep my task here by attempting it. For our purpose here today I can note that Knowledge is fraught with the difficulties of veridiction. This brings focus into what Merleau-Ponty eloquently named *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945, translated into English 1962), which Charles Olson began to develop, largely from different sources, in his poetry and his work on history and proprioception. We can quickly recognise what will be involved in elaborating on Power when we hear of Foucault's late preference for the term governmentality, which he immediately links to subjectivation and thus the Self.

⁴⁹ There is little doubt that aspects of thought (in, for instance, Heraclitus, in the translations and commentaries of G. S. Kirk (*The Cosmic Fragments, A Critical Study*, 1954, corrected 1962), Charles H. Kahn (*The art and thought of Heraclitus*, 1979), Brooks Hoxton (*Fragments, The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, 2001) and S. Marc Cohen (Heraclitus lecture, 2002, revised 2006) still provide contributions to effective continuation, but they are substantially insufficient in the contemporary context. I am thankful to two of the interlocutors for drawing my attention to Kahn and to Cohen.

⁵⁰ The extended attention this brings can be first articulated through Foucault's late work, including the last lecture in 1984 and its preceding work in 1983, Michel Foucault (2005) *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*; Foucault (2010) *The Government of Self and Others, Lectures at the College de France 1982-83*; Foucault (2011) *The Courage of Truth. The Government of Self and Others II, Lectures at the College de France 1983-1984*; all of these were edited by Frédéric Gros and translated by Graham Burchell, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁵¹ Frédéric Gros (2011) 'Course Context', Foucault (2011).

Aesthetics is that component which informs and makes eloquent knowledge, power and the Self, and is so doing is the ground from which any ethics can be made efficacious.

Frédéric Gros, Foucault's editor, notes how Foucault begins to bring some of these components together when he says, 'To the possible reproach that he had not got involved in politics, Socrates replied: If I had done so I would have long been dead. However, Foucault shows that this answer does not signify a fear of dying, but rather the attempt to preserve for as long as possible a mission given to him by the gods; the care of others: that insistent and perpetual vigilance aimed at checking whether everyone is taking proper care of themselves.' (2011: 347) 'It is in order to be able to safeguard this task [to take care of themselves correctly] that Socrates refuses to engage in politics. It is not out of fear of dying; it is fear of his crucial mission being compromised by his disappearance.' (2011: 348)

Taking the famous phrase of Socrates, 'Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; take care of it',⁵² Foucault calls on an interpretation by George Dumézil:⁵³ if Socrates thanks Asclepius in his last moments, it is indeed because he has been cured, but cured by philosophy of the disease of false discourse, of the contagion and dominant opinions, of the epidemic of prejudices.' (Gros 2011: 348) 'Of all diseases, the one which is genuinely mortal is the disease of discourses (false clarity and deceptive self-evidence), and right to the end philosophy cures me of it.' (2011: 348) Socrates last words (take care of it, don't neglect my request) refers to the care of the self, dear to Foucault and which Foucault wanted to place at the heart of ancient ethics, will have been in fact the last word on Socrates lips.' (2011: 348) That is in the light of the self as an invented, or rather constructed, condition. This care of the self is implicitly a care for truth-telling, 'which calls for courage, and especially a care for the world and for others, demanding the adoption of a "true life" as continuous criticism of the world.' (2011: 349) Socrates is the person with the courage to assert this requirement of truth in the visible fabric of his existence, it will make it possible to pose the problem of the "true life" and hence provide a general theoretical framework for the study of ancient Cynicism. (2011: 349)

Two major directions of thought and feeling are then derived, one from *Alcibiades*, a work once attributed to Plato, but now thought to be by an unnamed person writing in the fourth century BCE, in which the idea of know thyself is best gained through a philosophical friendship and where we see ourselves, as if in a mirror. Charles Olson begins to take this up in his work in the 1960s. The second direction may be thought of as problematized in the *Laches*, where courage is a kind of wisdom, an aesthetics of existence pursuing the task of giving a visible, harmonious, beautiful form to life. These directions put the poetics here into a significant connectedness between constituted knowledge and the proposal to test and experiment, that is to take a particular stance or attitude.

⁵² Plato, *Phaedo*, 118a. G.M.A. Grube's translation reads: 'Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget.' John M. Cooper notes: 'Socrates apparently means that death is a cure for the ills of life.' (*Plato Complete Works*, edited by Cooper [1997], Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing).

⁵³ Georges Dumézil (1984, 1999) *The Riddle of Nostradamus. A Critical Dialogue*, translated by Betsy Wing,, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press.

An emphasis in these late concerns in Foucault is that ‘The truth, definitely, is that which is unbearable, as soon as it leaves the domain of discourse to be embodied in existence. The “true life” can only manifest itself as “other life”.’ (2011:353) But this true life is, with any poetry worth its salt, ‘a scandalous, disturbing, immediately rejected and marginalised “other “ life.’ (2011: 354)

In the last lectures, by pushing the reading of the discourses by Epictetus as far as possible, he is able to say that this life is at the same time the criticism of the existing world and supports the call for “an other world”, ‘giving rise to the demand for a different world.⁵⁴ The ascesis [severe self-discipline] by which Cynics force their lives, ‘to permanent exposure, radical destitution, unrestrained animality, and unlimited sovereignty (the four reversed meanings of truth) is hardly designed ... merely to guarantee inner tranquility as an end in itself, albeit edifying at the same time. The Cynic strives for the “true life” so as to get others to see that they are mistaken and have lost their way, and to explode the hypocrisy of accepted values. ... This critique, presupposes a continuous work on self and an instruction to others, should be interpreted as a political task. And this “philosophical militancy,” as Foucault calls it, is even the noblest and highest politics: ... Certainly the virtue of this reorientation was first of all polemical, since it involved deposing the classical privilege of self knowledge and contradicting Christian ascesis, entailing self-renunciation and obedience to the other, with an ancient ascesis leading to a self-construction.’ (2011: 354) For Foucault this is a social practice, ‘and even an invitation to good government (correctly caring for the self in order to care correctly for others).’ (2011: 354) ‘... the Cynics represent in fact the moment at which the value of ascesis consists in it being addressed as a provocation to others, since it involves constituting oneself as a spectacle which confronts each individual with [their] own contradictions, so that the care of self becomes precisely a care of the world, the “true life” calling for the advent of an “other world”. (2011: 355)

The poetic life that tests truth, cannot fail to appear to most people as a transgressive other experimental life. In 1984 Foucault wants to emphasise that the hallmark of the true is otherness: that which makes a difference in the world and in people’s opinions, that which forces one to transform one’s mode of being, that whose difference opens up the perspective of an other world to be contrasted, to be imagined. The philosopher and poet thus become those who, through the courage of their truth-telling, make the lightning flash of an otherness vibrate through their life and poetry. (2011: 356) On the last page of the manuscript of Foucault’s final lecture he wrote:

“... there is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness; the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life.” (2011: 356)

It is the work of some of the poetry I attend to, that the æsthetic component of these potentials and positions are realised. It remains to be understood how effective these matters will become in human existence this century. In any effective poetry now, it continues to be necessary to test and to experiment.

⁵⁴ See Foucault (2011): 271 pp. Foucault is reading Epictetus’ discourse III-22,

Here is an introduction to a book of essays I put together for publication in 2010 (still forthcoming 2013). It begins:

'There is a large dialectic undermining this book which perpetuates the appalling logic that has sustained the disgrace of western civilisation for more than two and half millennia, an appalling logic that is necessary for the premise of this critique and its perpetuation. This is the kind of nonsense that these texts, the texts in this book, will be unable to overcome because of the texts' reliance on their readability and comprehension by those who will argue for the various fallacies they will discern from what is being proposed. There is nothing to be done about this, if the book is to venture into publication it must be reconciled to this ridiculous position and must stride out into the performance of its presentation. I wish it all the fortitude it deserves.'