

Allen Fisher has been writing and publishing poetry since the 1960s. Part of the London experimental poetry scene in the 1960s and 70s, and with strong links to the USA from Olsonian Black Mountain through to the Language poets and beyond, he has continued to publish extensively. His major poetic achievements include the long poem sequence *Place* and a further three-part sequence, *Gravity as a Consequence of Shape*. He is a visual artist who has exhibited widely, and continues to teach art and art history. His theoretical papers, often using unusual structures and modes of expression, deal with ideas of poetics and aesthetics through concepts such as ‘confidence in lack’, ‘decoherence’ and the ‘imperfect fit’. The focus of this paper will be on his 2010 publication *Proposals*, a text that combines the poetic, the conceptual and the visual through thirty-five full page spreads that include a poetic text, a commentary, and an image. [Picture]

My claim in this paper is that Fisher’s writing and visual arts practices in *Proposals* develop political and ethical ideas and construct aesthetics of materialities that, while not universal, can be true outside the context of the immanent experience of the world which produces them. We, as readers and co-producers of meaning, are changed by the experience, and this change informs our future understanding of other works. I will be describing a process of change that is outside the normal incremental processes of historical change, but occur because of an unpredictable and potentially revolutionary ‘event’. In order to properly describe this process I establish the (quasi) materiality of the work, and examine the disruptive and inconsistent relationship of the work in its dependence on, and distrust of, a broader genre of poetry. I also examine the ways that Fisher’s work depends on the disruption of a

fixed perspective between an individual speaking subject and an object, whether that object is material, or abstract and conceptual.

Fisher's work produces an open and inconsistent multiplicity that is in a tense negotiation with a closure or singularity that the work resists. A striking example of this resistance is the unreferenced bibliography frequently included as part of a work, a practice more normally found in academic texts rather than the poetic.<sup>1</sup> This is the case with *Proposals*, where a list of texts is included at the end of the book under the heading 'Resources' (p.75). In his extended review of *Proposals* Sheppard says:

One function of the 'Resources' list in a Fisher volume is to acknowledge the provenance of quotations, but it also serves to destabilise the text which is often proved to be completely appropriated and collaged (or almost completely so, which makes the 'original' contributions oddly destabilising in return). (Sheppard 2013)

While these bibliographies are generally made up of philosophical texts, and the list for *Proposals* includes Cixous, Wittgenstein, Foucault and Badiou, Fisher also cites cultural history, poetry and aesthetics. The 'Resources' are not footnotes, nor do they reference citations. They therefore cannot be directly linked to particular parts of the poetry as would be the case with a more conventional academic text, but suggest and construct concepts and contexts through which the poetry might be read. This resistance to a single meaning through the construction of multiple, although not unlimited, potential frames of reference produces a sequence that (i) critiques the mimetic qualities of literary writing, in the sense that mimesis produces a kind

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<sup>1</sup> Fisher, is however, consciously in conversation with similar practices used by, for example, T S Eliot in 'The Wasteland'. While the process appears similar its consequences are completely different, opening out the text into arrange of other conversations, in Badiou's terms creating new sets or situations, rather than locating the work within a historical trajectory and continuum as is the case with Eliot.

of copy of the world, and (ii) critiques the notion of the representational, in the sense of a literary text as a method of re-presenting existing images or ideas. Text and visual image, freed from the work of representation, become quasi-material objects, presentations rather than representations, suggesting their own potential for portability between worlds.

Through the inclusion of the ‘resources’ in a text that already includes poetic text, extracts from philosophical texts and visual images that reference scientific processes amongst other things, Fisher is actively working within the combination of ideas of different forms and functions of language, reminiscent of, but not limited to, Platonic notions of ‘Dainoia’ and ‘Noesis’.<sup>2</sup> Despite this emphasis on language and discourse, it is not, however, a poetry that can be satisfactorily explained through recourse to general concepts of deconstructive linguistics. Nor does his poetry suggest a relativistic endless deferral of meaning that a post-structuralist lack of closure might suggest. Similarly, while being implicated in performance, it does not lend itself to the notion that meanings and truths are only true for each individual performance, whether one of production or reception, as a kind of extension of the notion of the site specific. Rather it is work that suggests scientific epistemologies as well as material ontologies, and that is not only interested in problematising truth but develops its own notion of truth based in multiplicity rather than singularity.

One ‘resource’ listed by Fisher is Alain Badiou, a French philosopher whose work has developed increasing levels of visibility in recent years. His work on subjectivity, ideas of being, set theory and mathematics, the political implications of the event and the presence of the ‘truth’, provide concepts and terms that resonate with Fisher’s work in *Proposals*. Ba-

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<sup>2</sup> See Badiou 2005, 17-8. Dainoia is an apparently objective language of mathematics (or science in the case of Fisher), and ‘Noesis’, a poetic language of immediate apprehension.

djou's best known works are *Theory of the Subject* (1982, 2009), *Being and Event* (1988, 2007) and *Logic of Worlds* (2006, 2009), although I also refer extensively to *The Handbook of Inaesthetics* (1998, 2005), and *Conditions* (1992, 2008), two collections of essay on the arts (broadly speaking).

Like Fisher, Badiou's work is concerned with the following ideas.

1. The multiple or multiplicity is ontological. The 'one' does not, however, fragment to produce the multiple, but is a possible production of a situation founded on multiplicity. The possibility of the 'one' is therefore subtracted from the situation, rather than unveiled within it.
2. There is a possibility of truths that are true in other worlds, but not in all worlds. Truth is not universal, but neither is it necessarily only true in the context within which it arises.
3. There are extra-linguistic materialities that can be examined and/or calculated through mathematics or science.

Badiou frequently and in some detail writes about poetry, particularly that of Mallarmé, Pessoa and Beckett, proposing the poetic text, as well as the 'matheme', as what he calls a 'truth procedure'. (Badiou 2005a, 22)

### **Poetry and the Event**

Taking mathematics as ontological, as a consistent and unproblematic multiple without perspective or opinion, Badiou develops a set theory that can describe stable and consistent situations. Things belong within sets, a term that he expands to include situations, and finally,

worlds. There are, however, and importantly, concealed inconsistencies within those sets. These inconsistent elements, a cause of instability, are concealed by the state (and I would here conflate a state of the situation, steady state and the nation state), but can be revealed via a ‘movement’ (and I would here conflate a political or artistic ‘movement’ and physical acts of motion). The revelation of these inconsistencies, which rupture the surface of the set, and the subsequent revelation of the context within which the set is located, might result in ‘events’ that will lead, through subjectification and subjects who are faithful to the event, to truth procedures.

Badiou acknowledges regular change that poses no threat to the current state, but also develops the idea of the ‘singular change’, or the ‘event’. In a reverse echo of Parmenides, from a world in which nothing moves that is true outside of the regular changes in the cosmos that can be anticipated, the event causes a rupture that is irreducible to the law of the world. It is an event that cannot be predicted, and therefore contained. In order for the event to become a truth procedure then it must result in a changed subject (and a subject that is never singular, but is always plural, a trade union for example) that will go on to bring about generic change. Badiou’s is a persuasive account of social change. Because it is the state that keeps the elements of a set consistent, and seeks to make invisible the inconsistency that might produce a revolutionary event, the state can only re-present, ‘the existing elements of a situation in such a way as to reinforce the position of its dominant part.’ (Hallward 2003, 96) It deals in groups or classes to keep them in their proper place. If I am suggesting a connection between Fisher’s work in *Proposals* and Badiou’s philosophy of the event as outlined above, I need to demonstrate that *Proposals* contributes to an event, that is to a rupture that creates the conditions for the production of the artistic truth and the ‘possibility of a truth procedure’. Individ-

ual artworks, in Badiou's terms are not an event in themselves, nor a consequent truth, but are a 'local instance', a 'situated enquiry about the truth that it locally actualises or of which it is a finite fragment'. (12) The book, despite the multiplicity of the 'proposals' within it, and the diversity within each 'proposal', can never be more than the 'procedure of its own finitude' (Badiou 2005a, 11) and a 'fact of art' (12). The 'event', arises from the inconsistencies within a set, and for *Proposals* the sets are of contemporary poetry, contemporary art, and works that combine poetry and art. Through the process of subjectification, the event can produce generic change; that is, change in the genres within which it is apparently located.

The relationship between the philosophy of Alain Badiou and Allen Fisher's poetry is also supported by Badiou's extensive commentary on poetry and literature (and art more generally) that forms an important part of his work. Art is, for Badiou, one of the four domains, along with politics, science and love, that has the potential to produce truths. Modern poetry, more particularly, is described as a 'form of thought' (20) and his examples include Mallarmé and the multiple identities of Pessoa. Poetry, he asserts, has moved beyond that which caused Plato to banish it from the republic and for Badiou: "The modern poem is the opposite of a mimesis." (21) Hallward agrees when he says that for Badiou 'poetry is language reduced to the strict presentation of presentation' (Hallward 2003, 197) which is 'freed of the existing regime of re-presentation'. (197) Re-presentation, as noted above, is left to the state. Poetry, or the poetic, on the other hand, is characterised by its capacity to make manifest the powers of language itself through the subject. As he says in the *Handbook of Inaesthetics*:

The poem is neither a description nor an expression ... The poem is an operation [and] The reader must enter into the enigma in order to reach the momentary point of presence. Otherwise the poem does not operate ... The rule is simple: To enter into

the poem – not in order to know what it means, but rather to think what happens in it. Because the poem is an operation it is also an event. The poem takes place.’ (Badiou 2005a, 29)

He continues to stress the performative nature of poetry when he says in *The Age of the Poets*: ‘... to think the thought of the poem cannot be a reflection, since the poem offers itself only in its act.’ (5) In contrast with Philosophy, whose work is to think about thoughts and thinking, the poem affirms a presence that coincides with, for Badiou, the affirmative nature of being. If poetry cannot be found in thinking about poetry, then being cannot be discovered in thinking about being. This anti-Cartesian stance is affirmed when he says: ‘Being does not give itself in the thought of being, for all thinking of being is in reality only the thinking of a thought.’ (p.8)

### **Mobile subjects and mobile forms**

Rancière’s work is helpful here. Although as Badiou asserts above, the poem is something that takes place, and that the reader enters into, it is neither stable nor fixed. Rancière’s essay on Badiou, ‘Aesthetics, Inaesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics’, constructs the idea of poetic form as a ‘momentary point of presence’ to suggest that the stability of aesthetic form is only ever temporary. (Rancière) Art, for Rancière is ‘what testifies to a passing of the idea through the sensible’ (Rancière, 219), that is we sense forms of art in their movement towards an edge of disappearance: ‘[the] form of a pure passage and at the same time a moment in a history of forms’. Not only do the materials of a poem remain mobile and produce instabilities and demonstrate inconsistencies, as in, for example, an Olsonian notion of field poetics, but the form itself remains mobile in its passage through time, momentarily glimpsed in its distinc-

tion from non-art, and always in the act of disappearance.<sup>3</sup> The form is related to a passing of time, as well as a spatial construction. Movement involves change, and not only in the thing that moves but also in the thing that is moved through, just as the subject not only produces space and time by movement but is also produced by movement through space and time. There is, therefore, a double effect. For Rancière, ‘thought’s immanence to the sensible is ... doubled’ by the ‘difference between what passes and that through which it passes’. The passing of the idea does not ‘produce a determinate form within a specific materiality’, something that can be pinned down for examination:

Thus, the aesthetic identification of art as the manifestation of a truth through the passage of the infinite within the finite originally links that passage to a ‘life of forms’, a process of formation of forms ... what vanishes are all criteria for differentiating between the forms of art and forms of life of which it is the expression ... (220)

Art is apprehended as difference, but then becomes part of the world, and its difference, the form that identifies it, disappears.

The finite truth of the art work is made infinite, and therefore capable of traversing worlds, through its irregular change of the generic and the lives that it changes. There is movement, and there is change, but this brings about more potential truths than simple assertions of the presence of movement and change.

### ***Proposals and the event***

Fisher’s *Proposals* produces a world that connects elements within a set in a mobile form. It begins with a train journey and ends with: ‘The movements / of a reasonably healthy

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<sup>3</sup> see Charles Olson’s ‘Projective Verse’ at [http://writing.upenn.edu/~taransky/Projective\\_Verse.pdf](http://writing.upenn.edu/~taransky/Projective_Verse.pdf)

person / walking about'. In between this beginning and its ending, the sequence explores the consequences of a body moving through the worlds or situations it produces, whether 'transported' or under its own volition. Its presentation as a series of full page spreads that feature a 'poem- image-commentary' (as Fisher describes it on the title page of the book) mean that the eye and the mind are always moving between them, and trying to create connections between the different elements.<sup>4</sup> The 'Proposals' construct worlds within which there is no closure either within or between the three elements and no final form of combination. In Rancière's terms the form is mobile, and reconstructed each time the material passes through it in the process of what Fisher calls 'facture'.<sup>5</sup> The elements in Fisher's work neither explain themselves nor each other, nor attain a full and independent identity. The images, for example, use visual layers, some with text that can hardly be deciphered or requires magnification to be interpreted and is partly obscured by added paint, and others with ready-made images that are painted over. The references are not only obscure, but are purposefully obscured.

The sequence therefore suggests what Fisher calls 'patterns of connectedness' without ever producing a 'steady state'. They exist within an 'imperfect fit' and with 'confidence in lack' where that lack is one of consistency and coherence as well as information and knowledge. It is the confidence which, in Badiou's terms, allows Fisher to work with a set of information he knows to be either incomplete or with incompatible elements, and allows the poems to contain those consistent elements of a set and those inconsistent ones that, in this case, are out of visual range. *Proposals* presents in sociological terms, a situation, and one that is a mobile multiplicity.

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<sup>4</sup> What Fisher calls 'Patterns of connectedness'.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert Sheppard's discussion of 'facture' in 'Facture and Fracture: Resisting the Total in Allen Fisher's Gravity as a Consequence of Shape'. (Sheppard 2011)

The title of Fisher's poetry collection is suggestive. A 'proposal' arises from an event and might test the truth of something in different worlds. The event, 'brings to light a possibility that was invisible or even unthinkable.' (Badiou 2013, 9) It produces a rupture in the thinking of 'the State, the state of things' that 'claims to have the monopoly of possibilities' (11) through making a proposal. It therefore 'proposes something to us' (10), but that proposal has to be grasped, either by group effort in political terms or by the individual through artistic creation. The poetic work that is *Proposals* might therefore be characterized as a set of individual 'proposals' that form a set, as might the images or the commentaries. If according to Badiou the consistent multiplicity of a set is sustained by neither presenting nor representing the unqualified and uncountable elements, I would argue that while Fisher's work in *Proposals* constructs sets, or at least contributes towards them, it also, and simultaneously challenges them, by assembling other 'uncountable' elements within them. It thereby introduces the possibility of truths, as the elements become inconsistent. In order to construct truths outside the immediate and immanent context of their production or creation, that is, in other worlds, he works across art forms, materials, disciplines and discourses to destabilize any steady state, working in 'evental sites'. These inconsistent (or pure) multiplicities are, potentially, the very 'being of being and the sole ground of a truth' (Hallward 2004, 8), as set theory ontology 'unfolds being performatively.' (Badiou 2005b, xxiv).

In the commentary of 'Proposals 34' Fisher writes, echoing Badiou: 'You are of course always in a situation, neither unified nor perennial, a multiple composed of an infinity of elements, the relative lie and burn of ontological consistency.' (Fisher 2010, 71) The poetic text, as an example of a multiplicity that contains both consistency and inconsistency, links London, Gilgamesh, Ravenna, Mexico and the Hittite, all places he encounters actually or

virtually on the way to a poetry reading. The form of *Proposals* therefore suggests multiple and unpredictable changing states in the relationship between its elements and their movements as they combine and re-combine. They achieve a consistency through their presence, presentation and the process of observation that combines them, while representing an inconsistency in their variety and diversity.

In the case of *Proposals* the three elements on each page form an interacting environment, whose form is produced through the process of observation itself. Through the constructed nature of the triptych that make up each of these 'proposals' the aesthetic nature of the work is recognised through a pattern of connectedness, but not one which suggests a perfect fit or 'coherence', or in Badiou's terms consistency, but through an 'imperfect fit' that is 'part of the effectiveness of aesthetic reception'. The 'pattern of connectedness experiences an interruption, a difference from exact expectation.' (Fisher, 2012) The notion of the imperfect fit is not just between the different elements in each triptych in *Proposals*, but also between the overall work and the world of poetry. Fisher's *Proposals* not only don't fit within themselves, in the sense that it is hard to resolve connections on the page and between pages, but 'interrupt' the expectations of poetry itself. The art event is not, therefore, only a finite multiplicity, but an event that, through the production of a subject (a process connected to Fisher's notion of 'aesthetic reception') goes beyond finitude to question the genre itself. It is possible to pose Fisher's work as a double configuration in relation to genre. His own work suggests a non-ending of itself in the long sequences that make up *Place* and *Gravity as a Consequence of Shape*. These are multi-volume works, that never predict their own completion, and each new volume becomes an 'evental rupture' in the 'configuration'. Secondly, these configurations do, also, ultimately become works, where the separate volumes are gath-

ered together and this doubled perspective develops the relationship between the one and the many

Fisher, I want to suggest, increases the possibilities of poetry through the production of *Proposals*. In his essay 'Testing and Experimenting' Fisher says: '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 this leads to questions and positions which, out of necessity, do not cohere.' (Fisher 2013b) He is critical of 'idealised geometries and logic [as] ... modes of truth', but remains concerned with the ways that 'as an artist I encounter truth and engage with the consequences.' (2013b) His concern leads him to the concept of 'decoherence' which Fisher directly relates to the process of producing meaning from the observation of phenomena, echoed in his use of sub-legible text that is part of the images in *Proposals*.<sup>6</sup> For him:

It describes the condition of having to rely on machines or black boxes as interlocutors between my perception or experience of phenomena and its apprehension ... Decoherence was a state that questioned the basis for facticity and coherence, not as incoherence but as a confidence in lack. (Fisher 2013b)

In quantum mechanics to stop movement in order to experiment or observe would be to initiate the process of 'decoherence' whereby that which is under observation will move in a random manner. An abstraction from the material nature of matter, decoherence does not generate wave function collapse but provides an explanation for the observation of wave function collapse, as the quantum nature of the system "leaks" into the environment. If no

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, 'Proposals 18', where the text on the left hand image in the diptych can barely be read without magnification, and the text on the right hand image is obliterated through damage by tearing.

physical system is ever completely isolated from the environment, or poem from its genre, then any perfectly isolated system is by definition unobservable. By extension, in terms of reading Fisher's *Proposals*, the elements are not only always in combination, but always moving between the terms they establish in ways that demonstrate their consistency and inconsistency in the context of their genres. They can only be examined on the move, and caught in the act of disappearance.

Truth does not therefore arise from the direct observation of phenomena. Fisher would extend this to say that direct observation, observing a body in its 'natural' state, that suggests a possibility of a complete evacuation of meaning, is unachievable. Not only is a body never normal in its relationship to its environment, but the environment itself is never normal and always changing. In an inflation of 'the medium is the message', Fisher constructs a phenomenology that operates via scientific instrumentation, where the medium is the only possible means of observation but is also an addition to the process. In so doing Fisher, like Badiou, reintegrates mathematics, science and philosophy, to construct objects that become things, the perception of which cannot be verified.

Fisher's work, despite its relationship to science and mathematics, does not seek out truth through the relationships between organic form and transcendent abstractions such as Euclid's ideal proportions, the 'Golden Section' or the Fibonacci series, but through the ways these ideas suffer damage when integrated into practice. He combines a Platonic notion of form with an Aristotelean approach to experimentation and speculation when the Fibonacci cylinder, for example, is folded in a vice to form a 'representation of the device that helped [manu] facture the poem 'Gravity as a consequence of shape'.' He gives more detail in an interview with Andrew Duncan:

So I made this diagrammatic, geometrical diagram which used the arithmetic of Fibonacci and The Golden Section and crushed it ... Bent the cylinder ... And that diagram moved the numbers with it. Numbers crunched into numbers ... And what that did was disturb the romantic sense of order ... undermines it in a way that leads to a positive transformation, because it means that the artist ... then has to tackle the situation of the damage, and transform that damage into part of a creative activity, part of an aesthetic act. So although there's a direct numerical correlation between 'Banda' and some other poems in *Gravity as a consequence of Shape*, what there is also is a damage of 'Banda'. Such that you wouldn't need as a reader to understand it geometrically or numerically. (Duncan [ed], p.106)

There is a pattern of connectedness, but it is an imperfect fit. It is not the one that produces the many, a unified lyric self that fragments and therefore capable of reconstruction, but the many that construct only the possibility of the one. His notion of an imperfect fit and a confidence in lack in conditions of complexity perceived in conditions of decoherence multiplies uncertainty to the extent that mediated processes of perception are themselves decoherent, damaging the uncertainty of the relationship between coherent and incoherent, or, as Badiou might put it, consistent and inconsistent.

### **Poetry and Truth**

Fisher, like Badiou, links truth to subjectivity. He develops the notion of 'a care for truth telling' as a 'care for the self', which is 'especially a care for the world and others'. The truth is, however, 'unbearable, as soon as it leaves the domain of discourse to be embodied in existence.' As a consequence the 'true life can only manifest itself as other life' and is 'with

any poetry worth its salt, a scandalous, disturbing, immediately rejected and marginalised other life.' He continues:

The poetic life that tests truth cannot fail to appear to most people as a transgressive other experimental life ... 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 another world to be contrasted, to be imagined. The philosopher and the 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.' (Fisher 2013b)

Fisher and Badou both critique a lyric process that takes regular change, as perceived by a static narrator, and generalises that change through locating it within a broader context to make it more recognisable. Their interest is in the singular change of the event. As Sheppard points out, the *Proposals* sequence begins with a mobile subject, located at 'Crewe' a major interchange. The poem is therefore materially and metaphorically linked to mobility and movement as processes that bring about unpredictable or singular change. For Fisher this is a life enhancing process, and by the end of the poem the subject is 'revived'. Formally however, the subject is located between a situated multiplicity of materials and combinations that is contained within the borders of the page that is itself contained within the book. Fisher produces an evental rupture that does not simply present or represent what is, but sets about creating what could or will be. It is, in Badiou's sense of the term, revolutionary, and a truth procedure will radically alter knowledge. Alex Ling, in his book *Badiou and the Cinema* says of Badiou and truth that:

‘ ... the conception of truth we adopt here is ... exceptional, which is to say eventual ... as Badiou demonstrates if the concept of truth is to be of any real significance ... it can be shown to radically affect knowledge and power structures ... a truth is both radically singular ... and must be capable of completely re-writing the logic of a world ... this is not to say Badiou upholds any naïve conception of absolute truth ... .’  
(Ling 2011, 7)

Badiou, in his chapter ‘Truth: Forcing and the Unnameable’, repeats Lacan in his claim that ‘truth is ... a kind of powerlessness or weakness’, a weakness that is a kind of castration or lack, and ‘Truth is a veil thrown over the impossibility of saying it all.’ (Badiou 2008, 130) The ‘love of truth’ therefore becomes a ‘love of weakness’ or in Fisher’s terms, a ‘confidence in lack’. Badiou’s reformulation is to claim that truth is only lovable for the philosopher through an attempt to grasp its ‘*subtractive* dimension’ as opposed to seeking its ‘plenitude or complete saying.’ (131) The lyric subject becomes a fragment of the situation that is an inconsistent multiplicity. To see the lyric subject as the origin of the poem is to carry out an operation that mistakenly positions the count-as-one as ontological. Truth, like being, is subtracted from the multiplicity of the situation, and not ‘unveiled’ in a Heideggerian sense.

The ‘poem-image-commentary’ structure of *Proposals* creates a multiplicity that deranges the lyric subject. In ‘Proposals 16’, the speaking subject of the poem, or at least the one suggested by the ‘He’ of the opening line, goes from stasis of observation and privilege of perspective where ‘He looks from a parapet’ to a movement in which he is ‘skidding | down a roof | hitting a pavement.’ (Fisher 2010, 34) The image is in two parts, like the pages of a book, and the left hand side uses the aesthetics of collage to present what appears to be a

page of a book or magazine about uranium mining with both image and text manipulated through the inclusion of a roughly painted frame that suggests three dimensions as we look through a bore hole to a scape beyond. The right has a crudely painted image that suggests a piece of chemistry equipment composed of a closed piped loop and an expansion chamber, reminiscent of the pressure vessel of a nuclear reactor that might run on the uranium brought out of the mine in the first picture. There is a small simple tap or valve on the loop, that suggests a human scale and a home-made quality that is reflected in the style of painting. In his review of 'Proposals' on his blog, Ken Edwards discovers an organising sequence to the images:

In the first 14 Proposals, the left hand panels of the diptychs relate to fire or heat/light in some way: as well as fireworks there are furnaces, oxy-acetelene equipment, forest fires, lightning ... From then on the left-hand images of the diptychs becomes more various, the iconography encompassing tunnels or a wine glass shattering, among others, though the fire images still prevail ... (Edwards 2011)

Both images are therefore linked to 'science' or scientific processes, but are presented in an aesthetic that challenges the usual presentation of scientific equipment or processes. They are made human, and bear traces of human manipulation. The third element of the spread, what Fisher calls the commentary, is more directly philosophical and says something about the ways we might know things of the materiality of the world when: 'We step over the bounds of direct empirical observation and establish the existence of elusive or recondite entities that are without ontology.' (Fisher 2010, 35) It sounds like a quotation but isn't attributed, nor could it easily be traced. It might come from one of the many sources listed at the back of the book but, of course, part of the point of the list is that it's impossible to read them all. Its

meaning, however, is to generalise from the specifics of the texts and images in front of us, and to ask a question that is epistemological but says something about ontology, that is, what do we do to know something of the world and what do we find when we get there. Within the context of the work in front of us, the spreads of *Proposals*, it is the text and image that step beyond the bounds, particularly when linked to the commentary. The trinity creates a unity that is always unsettled, and where no pairing is ever privileged, and meanings don't easily settle. Stepping over the bounds of direct observation is therefore carried out through a poetic text that combines the materiality of presentation and the semiotics of representation. The fragmented or diffuse nature of any experience that might be represented forces the attention onto the form and structure of the poem itself, making words into the things that make the poem. The pictures of the scientific processes are equally complex. They are, first of all, reproductions of constructed aesthetic visual images, joined together like the pages of a book. They are tonally homogenous, using a similar palette of colours. Science is represented not in shiny reflective surfaces, but as homemade, torn up, barely legible and incomplete. The images are crudely drawn, counterposing the unevenness of the line and colour with the sharp lines of scientific calculation. Yet, Fisher seems to be saying, it is through science that we know how the world is made up. To go back to the poem, it is when the birds fly up, flushed out by the beaters, that they are shot dead, in part by 'Darwin's gun', and killed by science. (34) Similarly the figure in the poem ends up 'skidding' and 'hitting'. (34) If these processes of stepping over the bounds establish anything it is not the real material of which things are made up, or the ontologies of being, but to establish 'elusive' and 'recondite' entities without ontology. Yet for Badiou, the ontological is not reduced to the 'one', but is the multiple from which there is the possibility of one. What is without being for Fisher, Badiou might interpret as being itself. How does this help us read the poem? It does so in that the multiple that is the

work itself of 'poem image commentary' can be interpreted as a multiple that makes the possibility of a single meaning as a finite work. The single meaning does not however become the ontology of the work, whose being is in the very act of being multiple, but can be subtracted from it. It is also a multiple amongst other multiples, number 16 out of 35 'proposals', a Fisher publication amongst other Fisher publications and a poetry book amongst other poetry books etc etc. The elusive and recondite entities discovered through poetic and visual art practice, and through the science the visual art refers to, are the multiplicities that make up the ontology.

In 'Proposals 8' the method of travel changes from train to plane, although the experience, in the spirit of decoherence, seems more about watching a plane than travelling on it. (p18-9) The commentary deals directly with the notion of infinity, but again deals with it through the notion of what can be perceived by normal processes of perception: 'It's too hard to know the concept of infinity; from the very outset I am confined within certain spatio-temporal limits imposed by my perception.' (19) Like Giordano Bruno, Isaac Newton and others we can deal adequately and within conditions we understand in everyday contexts of time and space. It is only when the limits are arrived at that we begin to lose our understanding of how these concepts can function. The poem in 'Proposals 8' changes scale as it shifts between the 'jet trail' and the 'strawberry cages', and the 'cooking steam' and 'aircraft take-off'.

If Badiou and Fisher have an aim in common it is that their various works challenge the genres that limit their possibilities. Both are interested in a 'revolution' that might rewrite the formal qualities of a genre, and that happens through subjectification. For Badiou in an echo of an Althusserian interpellation, the event calls to the subject. He says:

Under the contingent conditions of an event – an insurrection for example – a process, a truth procedure, is set in motion. The individuals who are incorporated into this procedure are, then, all going to constitute a subject together. A subject can take various forms. In the twentieth century, the party, class, the proletariat were conceived as subjects. In all these cases, it is evident that ‘subject’ designates something that emerges with a truth procedure ... It’s not a matter of individuals as such. (Badiou 2013, 59-60)

Badiou continues to speak helpfully and directly about the relationship between the subject and the work of art. Invoking the term ‘subject of truth’, he says:

Say, you go to an art exhibition and find yourself dazzled by a painting: this involves your incorporation within a truth procedure – in this specific case an artistic one ... What’s involved is an experience of subjectivization: the human individual, in his/her absolute singularity and as an element of the world, becomes a part of this body of truth that appears. The work of art being contemplated is the symbol or manifestation of a body of truth.’ (60)

## **Conclusion**

Allen Fisher’s work makes a significant contribution to our understanding of visual and textual aesthetics and to poetry. He has done this through the production of texts, visual artworks and performance, and in their combination. *Place* remains his best known work and has informed a post-Olsonian notion of spatial relations in poets and critics as distinct as

Robert Sheppard, Rhys Trimble, Charles Bernstein, Juha Virtanen, Ann Matthews, Tim Woods, Will Montgomery, Nathan Thompson, Steve Hitchins, Robert Hampson and Carol Watts. Relating his work to the philosophy of Badiou does it no violence, the links are already present in Fisher's work, but I was unprepared for the way that relationships between mobility and truth become significantly expanded when they are read together. In particular, they further develop the politics of Fisher's work, linking his interest in materiality, multiplicity and subjectivity.

There are formidable difficulties in the work of both, and they share a suspicion of an approach to aesthetics that either discovers meaning through internal relationships divorced from the contexts in which they are produced, or locates them so securely in their context that no transfer of ideas seems possible. Similarly, both are politically committed, and in Fisher's case aesthetically so, to the notion of a multiplicity that is not unified by any one, but is the ground from which the possibility of a one may emerge. This one that emerges, and it may be the unified form of the artwork, its speaker or its reader, is not transcendent, or if so it is only for the briefest of moments, and does not subsume or make coherent the multiplicity of the ground in permanent ways. In order to sustain this notion of the one that is produced by the multiple, the form of the artwork must be mobile, and constantly re-distributed within and outside the contexts of its production. The mobility of form does not, however, itself transcend the notion of the lyric subject or the speaking voice, but work with it, constructing a subject and a subjectivity that can move between worlds. In so doing the truths of the artwork themselves become mobile through the subjects that are the collective producers, and are integrated into new sets, new situations and new worlds. They take their truths with them, through new and different ways of being.

I move between notions of ‘meaning’, in the sense of interpretation, and the term ‘truth’. The term truth has its own history of course, and a relation to theological exegetic practices, that literally ‘lead out’ (exigo) of the context of the text in ways that support the notion of their applicability outside the context of their production. Meaning, on the other hand, suggests something altogether more inward looking and more finite and specific. The generality of these abstractions of truths support the broader claim I am trying to make about the ways that truths can be true in more than one world without being transcendent. They can also be made specific in the work of Fisher, who considers these questions in relation to his own poetic and artistic practices. Resistance to ideas and practices of mobility will arise from different poetics. In some political contexts, for example, the ability to produce a form that will withstand change may be more important than a mobile form that wilfully loses its authority, in just the same way that loss of identity is a privileged position in relation to a politics that needs to assert its identity in the face of historical and cultural invisibility. Further work will determine the more general applicability of relationships between truth and mobility in poetry, and the ways these might add new understandings of the contribution of poetry and poetic practices to political and ethical questions.

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