Open Library of Humanities

Part of the Ubiquity Partner Network

Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry

Article

How to Cite: Virtanen, J 2016 Writing on: Context and Visual Culture in Recent Works of Allen Fisher and Ulli Freer. *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 8(1): e3, pp. 1–34, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/biip.20

Published: 27 May 2016

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

Copyright:

© 2016 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

Open Access:

Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

The Open Library of Humanities is an open access non-profit publisher of scholarly articles and monographs.

Journal of British and Irish INNOVATIVE POETRY

Juha Virtanen, 'Writing on: Context and Visual Culture in Recent Works of Allen Fisher and Ulli Freer' (2016) 8(1): e3 *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/biip.20

ARTICLE

Writing on: Context and Visual Culture in Recent Works of Allen Fisher and Ulli Freer

Juha Virtanen
University of Kent, GB
J.P.Virtanen@kent.ac.uk

This article is a study of Allen Fisher's *Proposals* and *SPUTTOR*, and Ulli Freer's *Burner on the Buff*. It aims to demonstrate that these works, despite their individual differences, share certain common parallels: (1) an interest in literary and visual culture, and (2) an awareness of the bearing these aspects of culture have on questions of state and civil authority. In the case of *Proposals*, this is discussed via the context of work – particularly in relation to the marketization of Higher Education (HE) – and Fisher's poetics of 'confidence in lack'. These analyses are extended further through an examination of the social history of the US Space Shuttle programme under the Reagan administration, and the visual practices of collage in *SPUTTOR*. The broader claims of these arguments are subsequently paralleled with cultural and socio-legal perspectives pertaining to graffiti–especially in connection to Banksy's recent work, *Art Buff*, which ultimately provides a crucial context for understanding key aspects of *Burner on the Buff*.

Keywords: Allen Fisher; Ulli Freer; Poetry and visual culture; Collage; Graffiti; Banksy

The intention of this article is to map out some of the contexts and critiques that we can arrive at through reading Allen Fisher's *Proposals* and *SPUTTOR*, as well as Ulli Freer's *Burner on the Buff*. In doing so, it hopes to build upon the existing history of critical reception for the respective oeuvres of the two poets. Fisher's poetry, for instance, has been described as the work of a 'poet/painter whose political radicalism depends on the imagination of formal innovation,' where these innovations may range from the content-specific work in *Place* to the 'apprehension of multiplicity in a single text' in *Gravity as a consequence of shape*.[1] Freer's work, on the other

hand, has been depicted as a 'sensuous poetry' centred on the 'evocation of social and physical space.'[2] The two poets have also been compared via their mutual use of what Robert Sheppard calls creative linkage.[3] In part, then, this essay will extend the existing scholarship on Fisher and Freer by considering the developments of their respective practices in their most recent publications. At the same time, however, it will also seek to demonstrate that the complexity of the analyses in these three books demands that they are explored beyond their formal innovations: context is crucial for grasping the two poets' particular critiques.

These contexts and critiques cannot be mapped out through a monolithic or a linear line of enquiry; the three texts are vastly different in their approaches and aesthetic outlooks. *Proposals* and *SPUTTOR* demonstrate an increased emphasis on the intersections between Fisher's practices as a poet and a visual artist – extending his principle techniques of collage and *re-narration* from combining and altering 'materials from other texts' to a newly heightened visual level – while *Burner on the Buff* continues to develop Freer's text-based 'technique of juxtaposition' and '*indissoluble* compound[s] of diction and discourses' that are also present in his earlier work.[4] The specific contexts of these projects are different as well: whereas Fisher's books are deeply interested in issues involving empathy and scientific enquiry, Freer is more centred on the exploration of urban spaces. However, as this essay hopes to demonstrate, these three texts also share certain parallels through their interest in literary and visual culture. Both of Fisher's projects incorporate painting and collage within their aesthetic approaches, and the language of graffiti – along with the socio-legal and economic frameworks of graffiti itself – are a consistent trope in Freer's collection. Moreover, for both Fisher and Freer, these aspects of visual culture have a strong bearing on issues of state and civil authority: across the three texts examined in this article, practices such as painting, collage or graffiti are all folded into questions concerning the marketization of creative, intellectual and scientific endeavours, as well as the injustice and damage of contemporary capitalism. Throughout, the ethos of Fisher's 'Confidence in Lack' will form a guiding principle for these investigations. It would be contradictory to force these texts, images, and contexts

into a readily paraphrasable interpretation, as this would run against the critique of authoritative pronouncements that is at the heart of Fisher's essay. Instead, the intention of this article is to explore the dialogues between text, image, and context in Fisher and Freer's recent works in order to open out some of the ways in which they address certain pervasive trends that continue to shape our current moment.

To begin, we must turn to Crewe, which forms the milieu for the first poem in Allen Fisher's sequence *Proposals*, published in 2010:

> When I first came to Crewe
> I saw the death of my mind
> and started work again
> to bring it back to life
> through nourishment unknown
> to me until then with
> vegetables and fruit already
> known with tactics
> already tried and sometimes
> previously tested until
> on the third day after
> the railway declined
> I stood on the grime of
> platform 5 and revived
> my confidence in
> a lack I now recognised
> as necessary as demanding[5]

These lines have been a frequent point of attention in the existing critical appraisals of *Proposals*. Ken Edwards' early review considered the poem as a meditation on creative tensions, informed by Fisher's completion of *Gravity as a consequence of shape* and the subsequent commencement of a new project.[6] Robert Sheppard's on-going

research into the meaning of form, on the other hand, analyses the poem in relation to the geographical and social conditions of Crewe, where Fisher's 'confidence in a lack' acts as a cure to the death of one's mind.[7] This essay will expand upon the connection Sheppard establishes between Fisher's use of 'work' and the conditions of employment. While the poem undoubtedly is concerned with issues of labour, it can be argued that it investigates manifold types of work, both institutional and creative, which are often in conflict with one another.

This contention requires some further explanation. Why would the speaker see the 'death of [their] mind' upon first arriving to Crewe? And why would this mental state be restored through a 'confidence in lack'? If we assume that the speaker is Fisher himself, we may approach one possible response to such questions. Firstly, 'confidence in lack' is a clear reference to an essay by the same title, published through Writers Forum in 2007. As a brief summary, the essay argues that poetry, 'at its most efficacious,' cannot – indeed, *should* not –offer the kind of 'logic' or 'coherence' that adheres to the valorization of productivity within a market-oriented public demand.[8] By drawing upon a series of examples and contradictions, including quantum physics, Turing, Plato, Kristeva, Arendt, and Olson, Fisher demonstrates that a demand for a linear continuity and completeness in focus – which he sees as a dominant mode for 20th-century polite intellectual thought – is in fact an act of 'self-deception or more active deceit.'[9] For instance, the essay notes how certain proponents in the early days of quantum theory insisted on coherent mathematical frameworks in their research, even though these coherences became increasingly disconnected from the 'reality' that the theory was trying to describe.[10] In other words, this demand for producing a coherent framework in research undermined the accuracy of the resultant scientific proposals. Fisher sees this situation as analogous to 20th-century poetics, where poetry that adheres to a singular coherence will often achieve little more than a regurgitation of state-sponsored lies. Instead, a 'deliberate and detailed poetic investigation' should take confidence in its *lack* of coherence, as articulated through damage, transformation, or other multifarious vocabularies.[11] For Fisher, this manner of utterance offers a more viable path towards a poetics of critical efficacy.

The rejection of a capitalist culture industry that underpins many of the arguments within 'Confidence in Lack' bears a loose resemblance to Adorno's theories of society and autonomous art. However, it must be stressed that Fisher does not subscribe to Adorno's argument that 'in order to resist the all-powerful system of communication,' art must rid itself 'of any communicative means.'[12] Rather, Fisher's confidence in lack – which is ultimately a position of openness, frailty, and vulnerability – might be better described as a variation of Foucault's *parrhēsia*, in that it characterizes

> a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth [. . .] and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood [. . .] risk [. . .] instead of [. . .] security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of [. . .] apathy[13]

This personal relationship to truth, for Fisher's confidence in lack, is a processual continuum where the poet may speak through convictions and contingencies, asserting their anger and resistance towards manifold injustices without adopting the imperative modes of an oppressive ideologue. But if Fisher's essay is interested in this kind of verbal activity within poetry, why would confidence in lack be offered as a necessary and demanding cure for the death of one's mind?

To address this, we should consider *why* Fisher first arrived in Crewe. One possible answer is work: the contemporary arts department of Manchester Metropolitan University, where Fisher worked from 2005 until his retirement in 2009, is located in the town. In this respect, it may be possible – especially if we read the poem in light of more recent developments within academia – to analyse 'the death of my mind' as a product of a social reality where education in the arts and the humanities is impeded by government policies.[14] This impediment is not solely enacted through cuts in arts funding. More broadly, it also manifests as the increasing pressure to measure research outcomes in compliance with metrics and REF (Research Excellence Framework) assessments that are primarily driven

by 'empirical data collection,' as well as an institutional climate where universities are seen to operate 'as corporations according to 'formulae, incentives, targets and plans'.'[15] Under this model of 'entrepreneurial McUniversities,' academic practice becomes a 'performative' response to the marketization and 'commodification of teaching and research.'[16] In other words, Fisher's presence in Crewe is unavoidably connected to a working environment where research and teaching are configured according to a linear coherence of product and outcome. While the REF itself was only announced three years prior to the publication of *Proposals*, its ethos can be traced at least as far back as the 'league tables relying on quantifiable indicators' that were introduced by the Thatcher government under the claims that they would 'rank institutions by the quality of their teaching and research.'[17] In addition to reducing the autonomy of the academic profession, such metrics are also frequently criticised for the way in which their emphasis on outputs blurs the important distinctions 'between the action [of researching] and its outcome.'[18] These developments are not light years away from Foucault's observations of a social universe where the accumulation of knowledge is synonymous with the accumulation of capital.[19] More pressingly for *Proposals*, however, they also construe creative and intellectual productivity as an accumulation of authoritative pronouncements – a mode of thinking that Fisher rejects in 'Confidence in Lack'. Early in the essay, Fisher seems troubled by a scientific experiment at Yale University, which was funded by the American army and agents of commerce.[20] The underlying concern of this observation suggests a close parallelism between poetry and science: in both creative and intellectual labour, an engagement with a market-oriented framework of incentives, targets, and commodified outcomes – i.e. the performative responses that characterize contemporary academic practice – involves an act of self-deception and deceit. In light of this context, then, the death of the mind in 'Proposal 1' could be connected to the commodification and marketization of creative and intellectual labour, which Fisher seeks to counteract by re-instating his personal commitment to a confidence in lack that works against these neoliberal targets and demands.

In part, *Proposals* moves towards this position through the interaction between its textual and visual components. Each section in the sequence is structured in the triadic form of poem-image-commentary. In this respect, the project mirrors the emblem books of the 16th- and 17th-centuries, with one important difference: while emblem books generally featured images accompanied by explanatory text, *Proposals* eschews such immediate logical connections. For example, the accompanying image and commentary for 'Proposal 1' more closely resemble 'collagic disruptions[s] of spacetime' which simulate – rather than impose – a sense of 'continuity.'[21] We can determine that the textual commentary is most likely a collage derived from one of the resources listed at the back of the book – specifically, Drummond's *Crewe: Railway Town, Company and People 1840–1914*.[22] Likewise, it is easy to discern that the image features a town lit by fireworks, which is contrasted with a colourless and damaged antler or bone (**Figure 1**). Although each triadic component bears some relation to notions of commodification and decline – whether

Figure 1: Image from 'Proposal 1' (© Allen Fisher, 2010).[23]

this is academic, urban, environmental or industrial – it seems inaccurate to enforce them into a linear coherence. They are not simply a self-referential system of images and mental concepts, but instead components of a larger sphere of action. While the poem can be read as a critique of the neoliberal academy as a death of one's mind, the bipartite image extends these considerations to further areas of capitalist damage, specifically urbanism and the environment. The urban side dominates the colour palette entirely: it absorbs these signs of vitality, and leaves half of the image in an impoverished state of marginality. As such, the symbolic representations of the image relate to a number of everyday brutalities. The fireworks, for example, could typify the ceremonial celebrations that accompany national holidays or major sporting events such as the Olympics or the World Cup. This colourful display acts as a distraction from the continual violence that capitalism enacts on the vulnerable, represented here by the grey palette around the antlers. To adapt Adorno's writings on Kafka, the visual component of 'Proposal 1', in which the 'monopoly capitalism appears only distantly,' nevertheless opens up a possible representation of 'what becomes of people under the total social spell' of that monopoly.[24] Finally, the commentary – which collates phrases describing the production of railway uniforms in Crewe – relates these explorations of capital and death back to the social and cultural history of Fisher's immediate milieu:

> The first fustian and velvet cutting shop was established in Crewe produced railway uniforms, 650, people, mostly women, with a need to change trains at a Grand Junction and in comfortable imitation of Crewe Hall.[25]

Railways play a significant role in the history of Crewe: for instance, Crewe Works – which was once a major railway engineering facility – is housed within the town. However, after the facility was privatised in 1988, its profile has largely diminished. By the time Fisher first came to Crewe in 2005, only around 1000 people worked at the site – a stark decline from the 20,000 who were employed there at the height of its success. As with the aforementioned analyses within the poem and the image, the site-specific concerns of the commentary point towards a communal decline caused by capital and private interests.[26]

Therefore, the emblems of *Proposals* opt for a certain kind of *decoherence*: this neologism – which physicists use to describe the unobservable disturbances that a quantum system enacts on its environment – is, for Fisher's poetics, a condition that subverts the demand for 'completeness or holistic conception' without resorting to the incommunicability that is associated with terms such as incoherence.[27] To put this differently, decoherence is the operative model of Fisher's *parrhēsia*, where the verbal activity of telling the 'truth' avoids the linear logic of 'paternal and public thinking.'[28] Instead, it achieves its understanding through non-sequential and multidimensional routes and means. In 'Proposal 1', this methodology leads to a series of multiple transformations of site and discipline, which open new spaces to investigate numerous manifestations of capitalist damage.

The openings offered by the decoherence between poem, image and commentary in 'Proposal 1' suggests that Fisher's critique of the marketization of universities should be seen as just *one* facet within the broader ramifications of capitalism. Thus, taken more broadly, the poem conveys a synecdochic example of the damage that potentially occurs when capital and authority interfere with communities, knowledge, and understanding. This is a frequent concern within Fisher's critical and theoretical work, as evidenced by the aforementioned sections of 'Confidence in Lack' and – additionally – certain topics that the poet covered during his 2010 *Complexity Manifold* talks in London. During the second installment of these talks, held on October 13th at Birkbeck College, University of London, Fisher noted that contemporary sciences are often marked with a condition of uncertainty, as our observations can affect the momentum, movement, or energy of the observed phenomena. However, in order to gain funding from corporate sponsors, scientists are forced to rely on the use of English instead of specific scientific or mathematical language. This has given rise to a number of metaphors that may not accurately depict the exact situation, which – Fisher argued – often involves phenomena that might not be clearly communicated via the language of funding bids.[29] Similar concerns regarding the interfaces of capital and research also loom in the background of Fisher's *SPUTTOR*, a book comprised of poetic fragments, visual collages and prose commentaries, all of which are pasted on top of scanned pages from Andrew Wilson's *Space Shuttle Story*.

A central aesthetic to this project is therefore its collagist practice, which – if we accept Stephen Fredman's observation that such methods require the artist to adopt a position of 'situatedness' and 'non-controlling [. . .] vulnerability' – alludes towards a continuation of the confidence in lack that Fisher first re-instated at the beginning of *Proposals*.[30] At the same time, however, the presence of each collagist fragment calls us to consider 'how the biography of *that* [specific] fragment was formed.'[31] Fisher's process, in other words, engages with what Fredman calls contextual practice, where the work's visual aspects facilitate 'interactions among the clusters of associations' accrued by its constituent parts.[32] As a result of this praxis, it is crucial that an examination of *SPUTTOR* pays attention to the associations and articulations that occur in the text that forms Fisher's physical 'canvas' – that is, *Space Shuttle Story* itself.

Wilson's book, first published in 1986, is curiously keen to emphasize the financial and economical aspects of the Space Shuttle programme. From the very start of the book, Wilson celebrates the income generated by Communication satellites.[33] He argues that a system costing $100 million can easily produce $1000 million in returns during its ten-year orbital life, and that – more broadly – the use of near-earth satellites can yield 'revenue and savings' that surpass the costs of the moon landing.[34] As this opening suggests, Wilson's enthusiasm for the space shuttle seems less interested in space exploration than it is in the 'exploitation [. . .] of near-Earth space.'[35] As a consequence, his book consistently emphasizes the Space Shuttle as a cost-effective technology, with a potential to enhance numerous commercial applications.[36] In particular, his study is keen to valorize the use of the portable Spacelab within the shuttles. When discussing the third deployment of the Spacelab, Wilson focuses on an experiment that produced 'a bright-red mercuric oxide crystal' that could be used in X-Ray and gamma ray detectors, before noting that the sample batch was 'worth several million dollars.'[37] He also expresses his hope that the services of the Spacelab would evolve into a fully-fledged 'commercial venture' aimed at producing technological materials such as electronic chips.[38] At times, Wilson's enthusiasm for the Space Shuttle as a profitable venture appears to gloss over

some of the more troubling aspects in the programme's history: although the text concludes with an overview of the *Challenger* disaster in 1986, where seven crew members died, the primary emphasis of these passages seems more concerned with the future continuance of the programme as a whole.[39]

This brief summary of *Space Shuttle Story* highlights a noteworthy issue: Wilson's account lacks a sufficiently critical appraisal of the shuttle programme. In actuality, the development of the spacecraft proved so costly that it would have been prohibitively expensive for NASA to operate it exclusively. Consequently, the commercial applications that Wilson valorizes were originally devised as a leverage to gain political support from Congress. The threat of these costs also led NASA to seek backing from the US Department of Defense, which – as David Harland notes – meant that the 'shuttle's configuration' was dominated by the 'requirements' of the DoD.[40] In addition, this agreement gave the Air Force virtually exclusive use of the *Discovery* shuttle.[41] Diane Vaughan's study extends this critique of the problematic implications that arose from the political pressures on the space shuttle programme. In her view, the Reagan administration's emphasis on the interfacing relationship between government and business permeated into NASA's working culture, which became increasingly preoccupied with efficiency and production deadlines.[42] In other words, the organizational structure of the shuttle programme reinforced and affirmed the cultural beliefs where

> capitalism and competition are 'the' economic way; concerns with cost, production goals, and efficiency dominate industries; bureaucracy and hierarchical authority relations are the most frequently occurring form of organization, and technology and technological achievement are prized.[43]

This bears a striking resemblance to the aforementioned criticisms involving the HE sector, as noted by Bazeley, Lorenz, and Olssen and Peters.[44] In the case of the space shuttle, these neoliberal demands had tragic consequences: Vaughan points out that during the run-up to the *Challenger* launch, NASA 'knowingly violated safety

requirements' in order to stay on schedule and thus secure further 'resources for the organization's well-being.'[45] These oversights were ultimately a significant contributory cause to the *Challenger* crash.

This situation gives further emphasis to Fisher's aforementioned concerns about the damaging impact that capital and authority can have upon the exploration of knowledge. On a conceptual level, Wilson's study presents a certain coherent, fixed face of the space shuttle's history. But in presenting this face as a type of 'signifying totality,' his account seeks to impose an order that codifies that history according to the categories and classifications of successful commerce and exploitation.[46] It plasters a mask on top of the questionable associations and events that occurred in the history of the programme, and omits the data that does not conform – or that seems suspicious – to the regime of this account. To accept that this mask is the fixed face of the histories at stake would be tantamount to effacing the 'multidimensional, polyvocal [and] corporeal' reality involved.[47] Or – as Fisher might put it – Wilson's account of cost-effective and commercial exploitation of near-Earth space is an act of 'active deceit.'[48] In other words, Fisher has deliberately chosen a piece of promotional literature as the 'canvas' for *SPUTTOR*, and consequently, a part of the project's motivations may also involve a challenge to the apparent fixity of Wilson's account.

Framing *SPUTTOR* through this context, we can better understand how Fisher's process relates to the iconoclastic and subversive tradition of collage.[49] Although the components of the book bear a resemblance to the triadic structure of *Proposals*, its collagist aesthetic effectively collapses these constituents into one another. The poems, images, and commentaries are no longer identifiable as discrete (albeit interconnected) entities, but instead they mutually permeate each other's pores and interstices. Consequently, a critical reading that privileged the textual content of *SPUTTOR* above its other components would overlook the full scope of Fisher's engagement. As with *Proposals*, there is a larger sphere of action taking place. Nevertheless, as a result of the intense permeations between *SPUTTOR*'s various stylistic disciplines, there is a further emphasis on the necessity to observe its aesthetic process as a whole. In addition to the significations and representations offered by the book's aesthetic elements, one should also observe how these interact with Wilson's original narrative.

Consider, for example, Fisher's comments on his early encounters with Burroughs' cut-ups:

> What particularly attracted me about Burroughs' work wasn't so much what he was telling me, in terms of his own fiction. It was to do with the way in which he displayed the cut-ups [. . .] It was to do with damage, destruction [. . .] Those ideas interested me more than reading it as a fiction.[50]

Such notions of 'damage' and 'destruction' are also enacted within the visual presentation of *SPUTTOR*. The work cleaves through Wilson's narrative with 'damaged pasting[s]' that enact a 'series of transformations.'[51]

On one spread, the Missions Operations Control Room (MOCR) in Houston is defaced with scrapes of white paint, along with textual scraps composed of Fisher's poetry, scientific headlines, and an extract from Foucault's *The Courage of the Truth* (**Figure 2, 3**). Foucault's commentary–which centers on the figure of the Cynic-philosopher as an agent of care intent upon 'the true political activity' of 'speaking to all humankind of happiness, good and ill fortune, slavery and freedom'–almost reads as if it were a mission statement for the spread where it appears.[53] The poem pasted on the opposite page is an example of this type of utterance. In it, Fisher writes:

> [. . .] well beyond boundaries favour
> national thought exactly [. . .]
> violence there an experience there as connect language[. . .]
> individual or form with critical invention survives
> education in the wall back of a camper van equal
> importance only concern one way forward change[54]

Here, the boundaries of national thought are recognized as a state of violence, perpetrated through both physical experience and public language. This is a social reality from which – the poem proposes – there is only one way forward: change. Although the poem's ultimate aspiration is for societal transformation, Fisher also suggests that an individual can try to survive these brutal conditions through acts of

Figure 2: Page 56 from SPUTTOR (© Allen Fisher, 2014).

critical invention. This bears a resemblance to Fisher's arguments from 'Confidence in Lack', where the vital frailties and vulnerabilities of 'sensitive thinking' are necessarily in opposition to the logic of 'paternal and public [thought].'[55] The poem re-articulates this conflict, although it modifies the earlier terminology: the dangers of public thinking are now represented by national thought, while critical invention substitutes sensitive thinking. However, these pages do not simply verbalise these oppositions. On a visual level, *SPUTTOR*'s collagist aesthetic performs them on the page. The clippings from Foucault and Fisher conceal and erase Wilson's original text, and this dual act of defacement and effacement is further expressed through

Figure 3: Page 57 from SPUTTOR (© Allen Fisher, 2014).[52]

the white paint that is brushed over the photograph of the MOCR. The coherency of Wilson's original narrative is therefore disrupted, damaged, and reconfigured to communicate in a different register. Or, to phrase this differently, Fisher's critical inventions 'facture and transform' Wilson's public thought until it assumes 'a new image.'[56]

These acts of damage and reconfiguration are a pattern that occurs throughout *SPUTTOR*. Later in the book, an image of Ronald and Nancy Reagan greeting astronauts after a space mission is interrupted by intersections of a graffitied, derelict warehouse or shack; below this image, Fisher has included a clipping where the term *parrhēsia* features prominently. In this instance, the act of truth telling is carried out entirely by the visual presentation: the presidential photo opportunity is broken up by an image that is frequently associated with impoverishment. The collage overrides the original representation of public relations in order to highlight the notion that Reaganomics aggravated 'the disparities between the rich and the poor.'[58] While Reagan presided over an 'inflated, overblown military budget,' his policies also engineered a 'deteriorating situation in income distribution' and a decline in 'domestic income and wealth (**Figure 4, 5**).'[59]

This critique is made even more explicit later on, as some of Fisher's cuttings and pastings leave small traces of Wilson's text visible to the eye, in order to make them communicate different sentiments. On one spread, Wilson's original sentence – which describes the $110-million worth of surplus parts for the shuttle fleet – is obstructed so that it produces the neologism 'pay-damage.'[61] This term, in conjunction with the preserved caption concerning the US military communication network on the right – as well as a further set of the derelict and dilapidated doors depicted on the left – forms a metonymic image of a 'broken civilization' where military spending is privileged over the protection of vulnerable communities (**Figure 6, 7**).[62]

These examples illustrate the critical inventions carried out in *SPUTTOR*. If we consider Wilson's *Space Shuttle Story* as presenting a certain fixed face of a particular history, the visual aspects of Fisher's work seeks to dismantle it through techniques such as 'rubbing [. . .] brushing' and collage – all of which serve to 'disorganize' this fixity in an effort to allow other perspectives and histories to proliferate.[63] The book's verbal and visual *parrhēsia,* at least in these instances, becomes an act of defacement that seeks to decohere the existing canvas, and – ultimately – to efface the traits of this active deceit and displace them through other investigative trajectories. In this respect, *SPUTTOR* is a plane of intersections, and these intersections are violent. Its methods are, in certain respects, comparable to Adorno's analysis of Picasso's *Guernica*: although Fisher is not expressing a 'wordless gesture' or a 'social protest

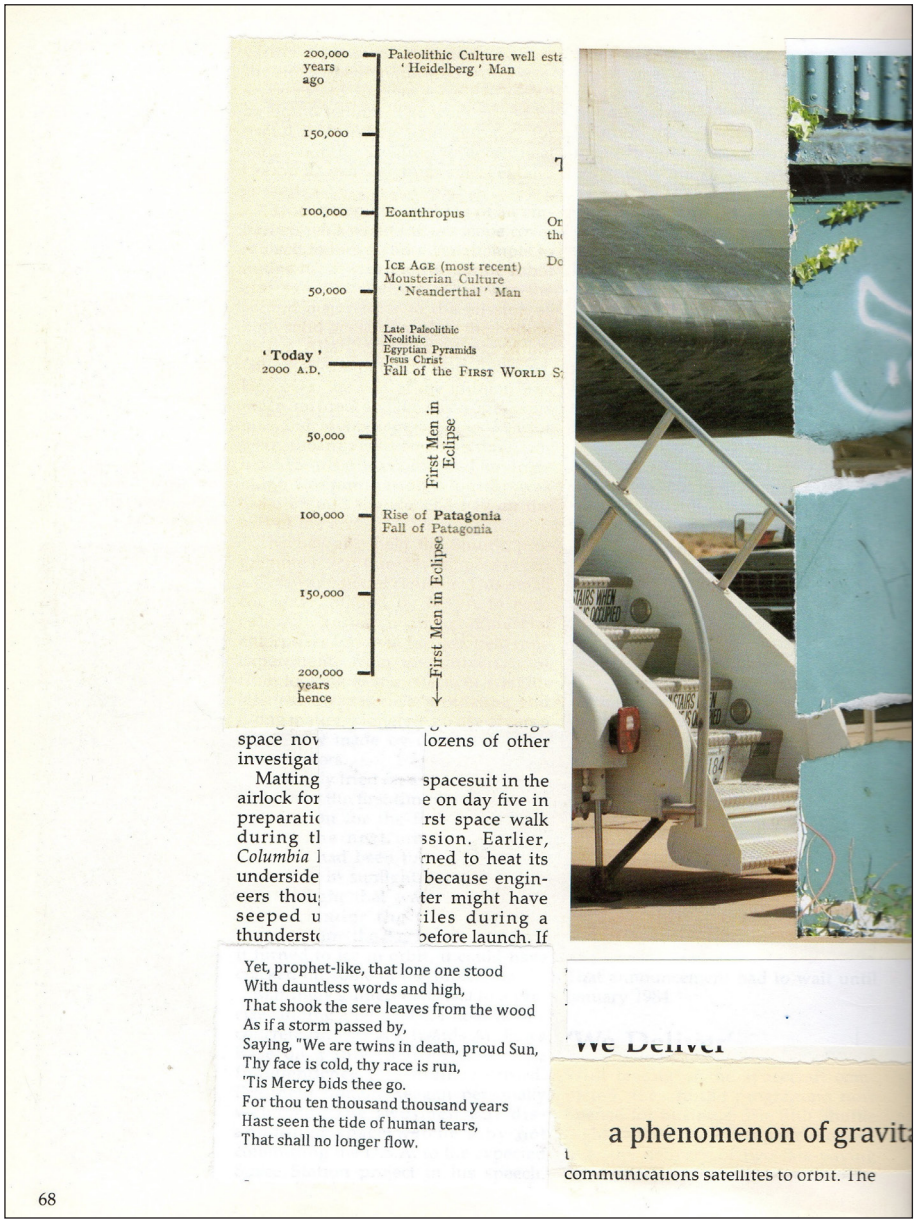

Figure 4: Page 68 from SPUTTOR (© Allen Fisher, 2014).

beyond all contemplative misunderstanding', the effacements and defacements of *SPUTTOR*'s collagic disruptions nevertheless 'reveal themselves as the wounds of society.'[64] They are 'socially critical zones' of hurt where the 'untruth' of our national thought 'comes to light.'[65] But while the book visually registers this damage, its

Figure 5: Page 69 from SPUTTOR (© Allen Fisher, 2014).[57]

textual contents extend these reflections further. The core of *SPUTTOR*'s poetry is based around Fisher's earlier sequence of 'Human Poems', which first appeared in 2010.[66] Although this title echoes Vallejo's *Poemas Humanos*, Fisher's emphasis is specifically related to the paradoxes between empathy as a human faculty that enables intersubjective emotional experiences on the one hand and 'the human

Figure 6: Page 108 from SPUTTOR (© Allen Fisher, 2014).

oppression of humankind' on the other.[67] In a method that recalls Blake's parallels between 'The Divine Image' and 'A Divine Image', Fisher's 'Human Poems' examine empathy and oppression, and thus act as an echo or – alternatively – a counterpoint to the violence that is exhibited through the book's visual qualities.[68] *SPUTTOR,* as a

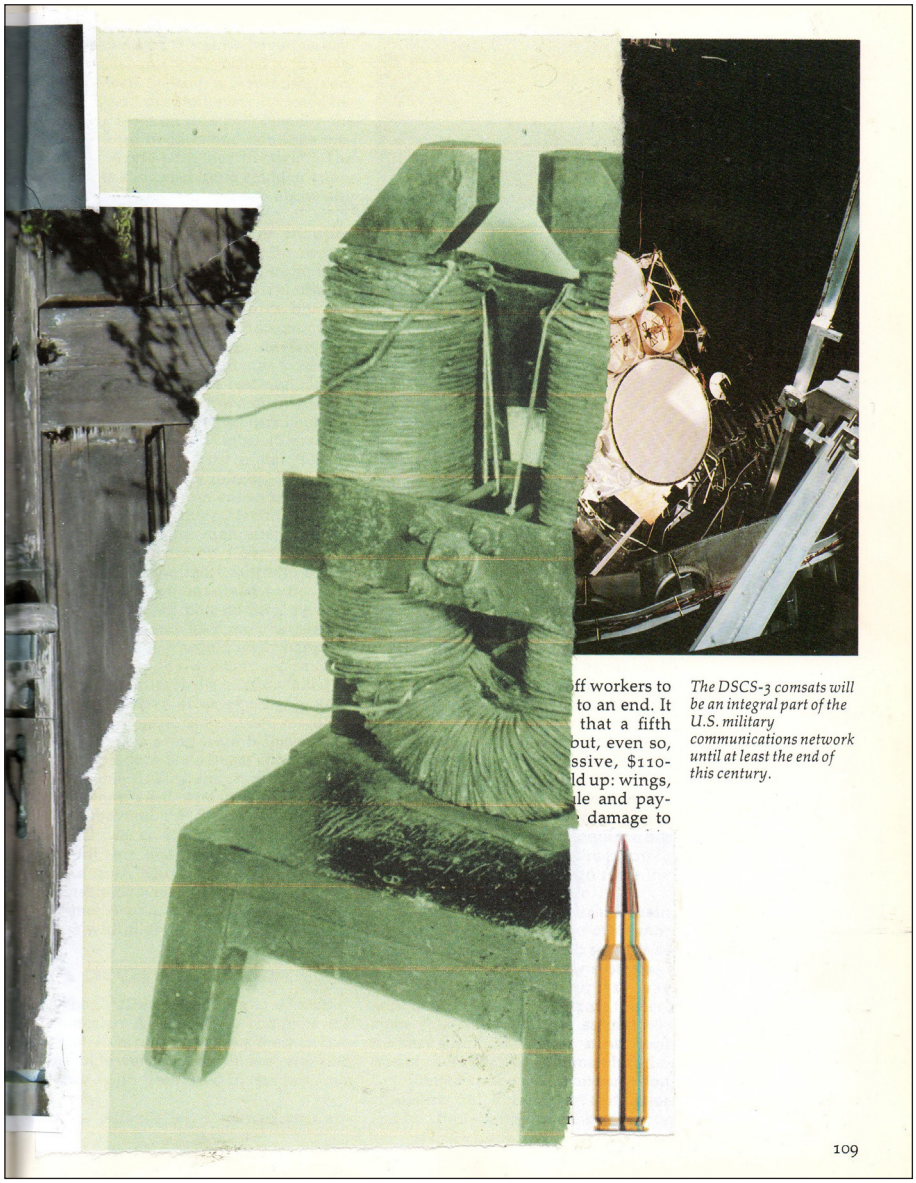

Figure 7: Page 109 from SPUTTOR (© Allen Fisher, 2014).[60]

continuation of the concerns that Fisher articulated in *Proposals*, seeks to respond to the damages it registers from a position of openness, frailty, and vulnerability that intends to deface a surface littered with commercial interests with utterances that insist on the centrality of empathy and human interaction.

In this respect, the verbal and visual practices of *SPUTTOR* act as both a scar and a possible counterblow. The centrality of the 'Human Poems' is crucial for understanding this. Although the work is partially focused on the fields of science and cosmogony, Fisher's continued insistence on empathy and humanity highlights that his concerns are inextricably connected to the conditions of everyday life. Of course, a reproduction of an image of graffiti in the artistic context of a book does not necessarily convey the same cultural messages as a graffitied wall in a physical space; the distinctions between these different circumstances are significant enough to make a seamless comparison between the two impossible. However, Fisher's defacing act of writing on top of Wilson's original narrative nevertheless shares some broader resonances with this urban phenomenon. In fact, it is through this approach of 'writing on' that we may begin to draw parallels between Fisher's projects and Freer's *Burner on the Buff*.

Initially published in 2006, some of the early scholarship on Freer's book suggested that it resituates the 'primacy of meaning from semantic structure to that of sound,' in the sense that his lines and phrasal units were seemingly in a continuous state of 'coming into being.'[69] However, though the recently published revised edition of the book – which features a different sequencing of the poems, as well as previously uncollected sections of the project – does not exactly annul such interpretations, some of its paratextual components disclose new and detailed insights about the exactitudes of Freer's process. Most notably, the back of this edition features a 'glossary of graffiti', which highlights a persistent motif in many of the poems. The defacements of graffiti – as written on the walls of contemporary cities – play a crucial role in Freer's book, where they often populate the vocabularies and spaces of the poems. It is in Freer's engagement with this subject that we may uncover an interesting point of convergence between these two poets' recent works.

To outline the complexities of these synchronicities in more detail, some context will again be helpful: in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre posits that a 'capitalist society [. . .] strives to distil its essence into buildings.'[70] The verticality of its skyscrapers – whether they are public or state buildings – convey an expression of phallocratic authority to passing spectators, while the heights of impoverished

tower blocks serve to compensate for the pathetically small size of the living-quarters within.[71] There is nothing innocent about the politics of this space: its outward appearance acts as a visual measure for varying degrees of social standing and prestige.[72] But if we accept this theorization of urban spaces, the presence of graffiti within such settings opens up some further possibilities. Whereas earlier studies explored graffiti as an exercise in gaining a 'sense of control' that tried to communicate at all costs, Jeff Ferrell's more recent work theorizes graffiti as an act of contempt towards the sanctity of private walls in a spatial environment where public spaces are defined and controlled by developers, management companies, multinational corporations, and other private interests.[73] In other words, Ferrell sees graffiti as an enactment of Daniel Guérin's vast anarchistic 'operation of deconsecration' insofar that it challenges the increasing authority of corporate advertisers and city governments over the spaces of our daily life.[74] In this respect, his study offers a way of thinking about graffiti as an act of defacement that can *potentially* rewrite the face of the enforced monotony that characterizes the social standing and prestige of Lefebvre's capitalist cities.

Ferrell situates his research exclusively in Denver, Colorado, but his arguments are also helpful for analysing the UK's recent legislative and cultural attitudes towards graffiti.[75] New Labour's approach to it, for instance, was largely synonymous with the language of the Denver-based anti-graffiti campaigners: while the US crusaders claimed that neighbourhood residents 'experience disgust and frustration' at the sight of graffiti, Hazel Blears – as the Home Office minister in 2006 – described graffiti as a 'depressing and unsightly menace' that 'affects people's quality of life, increases fear of crime and reduces pride in a community.'[76] The ideologies behind both positions are clearly influenced by the Broken Windows theory of James Wilson and George Kelling, which argued that graffiti and other acts of vandalism are examples of 'untended' behaviour that 'leads to a breakdown in community controls.'[77] If these behaviours are not redressed quickly, Wilson and Kelling argued, they will lead to – or, at the very least, be accompanied by – a correlative escalation in more serious crime. Even though the theory has been widely criticized for its flawed conceptual

framework that relies on unexamined categories such as 'law abiders' and 'disorderly people', as well as its overall lack of empirical support, it still provided the rhetorical basis for some of New Labour's principal legislative acts.[78] The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 granted powers to police officers, local authority officials, or community support officers to issue on-the-spot fines to anyone caught graffitiing; it also forbade the sale of aerosol paints for under-16s.[79] However, despite the severity of this legislative and public rhetoric, contemporaneous judicial sentencing for graffiti violations reveals some contradictory practices. Consider, for example, the discrepancies that emerged between the cases of *R v Charan Verdi (2005)* and *R v Michael Holmes (2006)*.[80] In the trial for Verdi – who had admitted to nine counts of writing graffiti on trains – the court ruled for a two-year custodial sentence, followed by a ten-month anti-social behaviour order. The court intended these measures to be a deterrent sentence, in the hope that the courts could make some contribution to stamping out graffiti offences, and stated that

> people who insist, night after night, in going round with spray cans and so forth and making all this mess on public trains will have to be shown that there comes a time when it can no longer be put up with, and [. . .] taking into account [Verdi's] age and the fact [Verdi] [. . .] admitted all this, that time has come now.[81]

A year later, however, this emphasis on deterrents was absent in Holmes' case, and the court did not rule for a custodial sentence. Although the only evidence against Holmes was that he had photographed a friend graffitiing, this did not rule out the possibility that his involvement had extended further. Nevertheless, the court's explicit reasoning for this decision relied on Holmes' character:

> This appellant [. . .] is of good character and has been in full employment since leaving college [. . .] Nothing [. . .] was said in Verdi concerning the sentence in the case of a person of good character.[82]

As these discrepancies indicate, graffiti is not always an unsightly menace in the eyes of the law. It can be tolerable if it involves a person of good character with a 'genuine interest in art.'[83] Furthermore, as the court explicitly associated Holmes' good character with his status of employment, it seems fair to suggest that this official sanctioning of graffiti depends upon the conditions of class and capital.[84] Graffiti is only associated with disgust and menace when it is viewed as anonymous and unproductive; when it somehow 'fails' to cohere with the values of work and productivity. If the good character of the graffitist can be described according to the bourgeois sensibilities of work and income, graffiti is no longer seen as a depressing sight of criminal damage. Instead, the work of graffiti is assigned with its own financial value. To borrow Adorno's phrasing, the 'good character' of graffiti permits its inclusion 'in the pantheon of cultural commodities,' where it can decorate 'the walls of the newly prosperous.'[85]

This situation complicates some of Ferrell's earlier arguments. While some graffiti could represent an act of anarchistic deconsecration, the conditions for this seem ambivalent; the art form can just as easily serve the interests of commodity and capital, as well as national propaganda. The latter of these ambivalences might be exemplified by the state-sponsored graffiti of Chavez's eyes on buildings in Venezuela, but I want to focus more specifically on the issues of commodity and capital by examining *Art Buff*, Banksy's contribution to the 2014 instalment of the Folkestone Triennial. The piece, depicting an elderly woman with headphones staring at an empty plinth, originally appeared in September 2014 at the back of an amusements arcade near the town centre. However, two weeks after it was first revealed, *Art Buff* was defaced by another piece of graffiti depicting a large cartoon phallus positioned on top of the previously empty plinth. Initially, the authorities installed a perspex cover to protect *Art Buff* from further acts of vandalism. However, in November 2014 – after further pieces of graffiti appeared on the perspex cover – the owners of the building removed this section of the wall in its entirety and shipped it to the US, where it was exhibited at Art Basel Miami, priced at £450,000. After a lengthy legal battle initiated by the organisers of the Triennial, the piece was returned to

Folkestone in October 2015, where it is, at the time of writing, stored in an undisclosed location.

It is hard to find redeeming qualities in this dispiriting saga. *Art Buff* evidently intends to satirize a perceived sense of vacuity in contemporary art. In situ, it targets the works exhibited in the Triennial itself, which included exhibits from artists such as Yoko Ono and Alex Hartley, as well as a reproduction of a piece by Ian Hamilton Finlay. Banksy's titular 'art buff' stares only at absence, thereby suggesting that contemporary art signifies nothing, and that its appreciators – through both patronage and observation – are active participants in sanctioning that vacuity. But this satire seems superfluous and problematic, as the piece *itself* signifies nothing: it only offers a *mise en abyme* where we stare at someone staring at absence. Thus, instead of critiquing the perceived vacuity of contemporary art, *Art Buff* merely regurgitates that vacuity; it is without subversive motives, amputated from satirical impulses, and devoid of convictions.[86] Consequently, the excitement around *Art Buff* is based on the notion that it is Banksy's work. Its value depends on his 'good character', which is derived from cultural and financial prestige. This leads to some incongruous aspects in its public reception. When the piece was originally defaced, Kent Police reported that an artwork had been subjected to criminal damage, even though both *Art Buff* and the phallus could legitimately be identified according to the definitions in The Criminal Damage Act 1971.[87] In other words, *Art Buff* is – paradoxically – a work of culturally sanctioned criminal damage that requires protection from *public* acts of criminal damage. Furthermore, if the purpose of the Triennial is, as its custodians claim, to enable the regeneration of Folkestone through creative activity, *Art Buff*'s contested status as a commodity that can be removed from its site-specific location by the private owners of its 'canvas' seems antithetical to these intentions. Even if the piece is eventually returned to public display somewhere in Folkestone, it is highly likely that it will be placed under strict surveillance in an effort to prevent any further interference from members of the public. As such, the only potential source of deconsecration in this situation is the original defacement of *Art Buff*. In theory, such an act could have had the ability to transgress the concepts of good character and

cultural commodity by desacralizing *Art Buff*'s capitalist prestige. However, in this particular instance, the specific content of the defacement in question nullifies the possibility of such desacralizing qualities. Instead of the previous absence, Banksy's female spectator now stares at an autocratically positioned phallus. This is not a liberating development: the 'structure of the economic class system' cannot be distinguished from the structure of 'the sexual class system,' as Shulamith Firestone has observed; the biological 'nuclear family' is the embryonic model for the wider social organisations of exploitative class relations.[88] Therefore, while the painted phallus might deface the sanctity of *Art Buff* as a cultural commodity, it simultaneously *re-inscribes* it with a symbol of patriarchal privilege, where the phallus only reinforces the hegemonic patriarchy of capitalism. With or without defacement, Banksy's piece embodies systems of oppression.

In light of this analysis, we can ascribe a further level of significance to the title of Banksy's piece. In the specialist lexicon used among graffitists, 'buff' describes the erasure and eradication of graffiti, either through the use of chemicals or with flat-coloured paints. In this sense, *Art Buff* unwittingly represents a metaphorical effacement of radical impulses, as the piece itself ultimately abrogates all traces of the anarchistic deconsecration that Ferrell associates with the work of graffiti. Similar questions of graffiti's radical efficacy are also raised within *Burner on the Buff*. Consider, for example, the following extract:

> capital corrugated line
> married couples peripherals
> crew the width of two cars
> stroke to beat spray stainless
> a clique bombs prolific
>
> a painting short for unsuitable
> violence glossary masterpiece
> and sides up
> def really painting stocks decrease[89]

A graffitist lexicon informs this passage. Not only is the apparent milieu indicative of the urban settings described in Lefebvre and – more specifically – Ferrell, but much of the diction also pertains directly to graffiti. A 'married couple', for instance, describes two adjacent and graffitied train carriages; a 'crew' signifies a collective of artists; and 'bombing' refers to the proliferation of graffiti over several surfaces in a particular area. This suggests that Freer utilizes graffiti as a tool for investigating notions of damage in contemporary capitalist cities. The reference to a stock decrease, for example, carries ironic echoes of the aforementioned Broken Windows theory, which argued that graffiti's violation of property rights dissuaded businesses from moving into different areas, thus damaging the local economy.[90] But while this rhetoric understands graffiti as 'registering urban decay,' Freer's poem also recognizes graffiti's potential to disrupt the prefabricated imagery of a capitalist city.[91] A graffitied train – such as the work done by Verdi – creates a mobile display of anonymous and unproductive pieces that are visible to a vast number of commuters. Moreover, the uninterrupted creation of such elaborate works itself represents certain metonymic realities of austerity: as Colin Ward once observed, 'staff-cutting exercises in the interest of economy' often mean that 'unmanned railway stations' are left unsupervised and open for graffitists.[92]

But the poem is not unambivalent in its approach to graffiti. While the mobility of a 'married couple' does increase its visibility, the poem still identifies it as peripheral, which conveys a sense of doubt about the radical efficacy of any graffitist work. Freer is not blind to the issues exemplified by Banksy's *Art Buff*. This is further emphasised by the ambiguous syntax of 'capital corrugated line'. If it signifies a 'corrugated line' of 'capital,' the image could simply represent the fluctuations of the market economy. However, if the 'line' in question has been 'corrugated' by capital, it could also represent a line of graffiti that conforms to the delineations of 'good character' and 'cultural commodity'. As Freer acknowledges later in the book, graffiti is first buffed, 'then tabled.'[93] In other words, while the first response to graffiti may be disapproval and erasure, capitalist marketization eventually effaces its radical impulses and potential by admitting it to official

consideration, appraisal and legitimation. These concerns are brought to a sharp focus in a subsequent passage:

> crew from tides spray fresh cobalt discard cans
> and sun reproduction
> recycles voice from auctioneer's hammer jargon
> from consorting to cover up
> time shifts fit forms
> unrecognizable table-top a buckled construction
> cashing spillage
> elongated hoods conversion
> blocks out walls resolution
> dresses insider nobody's burner trucks breakdowns[94]

Here, Freer's 'syntax of creative linkage' adopts a less ambiguous tone.[95] The crew's fresh cobalt spray is no longer anonymous and unproductive; instead, it simply recycles – or regurgitates – the values and valuations of an auctioneer's hammer jargon. The graffiti in this passage does not transgress the ideals of work and private property, but instead it aspires towards them; 'it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity.'[96] Consequently, this particular burner – i.e. a large and elaborate piece that is, due to the time required in completing it, often painted legally on the permission of the property owner – offers no disruptions to the prefabricated imagery of the contemporary city. It says nothing about the monstrous accumulation of cashing spillage nor the bureaucratic administration of 'fit forms' or the wage labour of time shifts. In its collusion with the auctioneer's jargon, it agrees to cover up the damage caused by capital.

It is not difficult to imagine graffitists such as Banksy as an emblematic target of these remonstrations. Freer's critique is specific: it is these large and, more importantly, legitimized pieces that ought to be put on the buff. However, a quickly painted tag – the simplest and most prevalent type of graffiti – is still frequently seen as an 'inherently ugly' violation of property rights, and thus unlikely to ever be

officially sanctioned in the same capacity as the pieces that Freer critiques.[97] No one has installed perspex covers to protect the obscene graffiti that has appeared on the original site of *Art Buff* after its removal. This is also the aesthetic that appears closest to Freer's own solidarities. In the author's note that opens the new edition, the poet explains:

> The Burner project, continued by Sticking, I would set the Burners down on peel off A4 sticky label sheets. Only a part of the poem would be present with every label pull off. This however, would only be a part of the whole, the rest of the poem moved on, being distributed in clusters through [London] and cities abroad. A few lines over many locations, on differing surfaces, differences of readings, there is no completion but a spreading persistence of wildstyle.[98]

Sticking is a graffitist practice whereby the individual artists' tag is quickly deployed via adhesive labels placed on surfaces such as stop signs or phone booths. Thus, the poems in *Burner on the Buff* are not simply *about* graffiti; nor are they poems that simply incorporate graffitist lexicon; as a part of Freer's process, fragments of the text can in fact aspire to become graffiti, bombing prolifically through the urban environment.

These vandalistic activities in Freer's continuation of his project share some common characteristics with Fisher's praxis in *SPUTTOR.* As suggested earlier, Fisher's defacement of the scans from Wilson's text disorganizes the earlier fixed face of a narrative that valorises the commercial exploitation of near-earth space. Likewise, Freer's stickers are designed to intersect the façades of social standing and prestige on the buildings of Lefebvre's capitalist cities. Each adhesive label, in other words, also seeks to represent minute socially critical zones of hurt where the untruth of our social situation comes to light. Moreover, Freer's introductory note explicitly associates his 'persistent spreading' with wildstyle, i.e. a heavily stylised type of graffiti, which often features complex, interlocking, or three-dimensional designs. This is significant, as wildstyle – with its multi-dimensional transformations of letters into

intricate designs – opts for a kind of decoherence, a practice that Freer similarly follows in the complex syntax and sequencing of his lines and phrasal units. Therefore, the parallels between Fisher and Freer's respective works can be folded together even further, as decoherence also has a bearing on the multi-dimensional process of poem-image-commentary that we find in *Proposals.*

Such parallels and intersections between literary and visual culture do not, however, make Fisher and Freer's works – and their respective contexts –entirely identical. The artistic defacement of a book is not tantamount to a graffitied train; the poetic fragments on adhesive labels that Freer sticks on city walls are not the same as the complete poems from which they are drawn; and graffitist lexicon does not equal an act of graffiti. *Proposals*, *SPUTTOR*, and *Burner on the Buff* cannot be homogenised through totalising gestures. Nevertheless, in placing these texts, images, and contexts in dialogue with each other, we can see that Fisher and Freer are both engaged with multifarious strategies of the same charge. In the contexts and damage that emerge from their poetry, paintings, and pastings – whether these appear on the page or on the walls – we must look devastation in the face, and linger with it.[99]

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Notes

[1] Clive Bush, *Out of Dissent: A Study of Five Contemporary British Poets* (London: Talus Editions, 1997), p. 104; Robert Sheppard, *When Bad Times Made for Good Poetry: episodes in the history of the poetics of innovation* (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2011), p. 193. Also see Peter Barry, 'Allen Fisher and 'content-specific' poetry' in Peter Barry & Robert Hampson, eds, *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 198–215.

[2] Andrew Duncan, *The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry* (Cambridge: Salt, 2003), p. 199.

[3] See Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and Its Discontents 1950–2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), pp. 194–213.

[4] Scott Thurston, 'Allen Fisher: Reading "Mummers' Strut"' [Online] http://usir.salford.ac.uk/2749/2/Allen_Fisher_-_Salt_reader.pdf (Last accessed: 20.04.2016); Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying*, p. 208.

[5] Allen Fisher, *Proposals* (Hereford: Spanner, 2010), p. 4.

[6] See Ken Edwards, 'Allen Fisher Proposes' (2011) [Online] http://realitystreet.co.uk/kens-blog/allen-fisher-proposes (Last accessed 29.06.2014).

[7] Extracts of this monograph have been published through Sheppard's blog. See Robert Sheppard, 'Proposals by Allen Fisher' in *Pages* (2013) [Online] http://robertsheppard.blogspot.co.uk/ 2013/11/proposals-by-allen-fisher.html (Last accessed: 29.06.2014).

[8] Allen Fisher, *Confidence in Lack* (Surrey: Writers Forum, 2007), p. 7.
[9] *Ibid*, p. 12.
[10] *Ibid*, p. 14.
[11] *Ibid*, p. 13.
[12] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 330.
[13] Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), pp. 19–20.
[14] There have been numerous articles and reports that address the current state of HE within the UK. Two frequently discussed examples amongst academics in the Humanities include Marina Warner, 'Diary: Why I Quit' in *London Review of Books* 36.17 (2014), pp. 42–43; and Marina Warner, Learning My Lesson' in *London Review of Books* 37.6 (2015), pp. 8–14. For briefer references, see Sean Bonney, 'Critique of Ben Watson's *Blake in Cambridge*' (2012) [Online] http://ammarxists.org/sean-bonney-critique-of-ben-watsons-blake-in-cambridge/ (Last accessed: 30.06.2014). For a response to these issues that is more closely related to poetry and poetics, see Robin Purves, 'Contemporary Poetry, or the University Discourse: a Response to Sous les Pavés 3 (March 2011)' (2014) [Online] http://sadpress.wordpress.com/2014/01/28/contemporary-poetry-or-the-university-discourse-a-response-to-sous-les-paves-3-march-2011/ (Last accessed: 30.06.2014).
[15] Pat Bazeley, 'Conceptualising Research Performance' in *Studies in Higher Education* 35.8 (2010), p. 890; Mark Olssen & Michael A. Peters, 'Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism' in *Journal of Education Policy* 20.3 (2005), p. 327.
[16] Chris Lorenz, 'If You're So Smart, Why Are You under Surveillance? Universities, Neoliberalism, and New Public Management' in *Critical Inquiry* 38.3 (2012), p. 603; Olssen & Peters, 'Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy', p. 316.
[17] Lorenz, 'If You're so Smart, Why Are You under Surveillance?', p. 603.
[18] Bazeley, 'Conceptualising Research Performance', p. 901.
[19] See Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: conversations with Duccio Trombadori* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), p. 165.
[20] *Confidence in Lack,* p. 7.
[21] *Confidence in Lack*, p. 13.
[22] *Proposals*, p. 75.
[23] *Ibid*, p. 5.
[24] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 312.
[25] *Proposals*, p. 5.
[26] For additional discussions of the image and commentary in *Proposals,* see Sheppard, 'Proposals by Allen Fisher'.
[27] *Confidence in Lack*, p. 7. For a discussion of decoherence that relates specifically to the field of physics, see, for example, Roland Omnés, *Understanding Quantum Mechanics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 73–74.
[28] *Confidence in Lack*, p. 7.
[29] Allen Fisher, *Complexity Manifold: Talk two* (*13.10.2010)* [Digital recording in possession of author].
[30] Stephen Fredman, *Contextual Practice: Assemblage and the Erotic in Postwar Poetry and Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 30.
[31] Brandon Taylor, *Collage: The Making of Modern Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p. 9.
[32] Fredman, *Contextual Practice*, p. 15.
[33] Andrew Wilson, *Space Shuttle Story* (New York: Crescent Books, 1986), p. 8.
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Ibid*, p. 105.
[37] *Ibid*, p. 98.
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] *Ibid*, pp. 120–1.
[40] David M. Harland, *The Space Shuttle: Roles, Missions and Accomplishments* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1999), p. 176.
[41] *Ibid.* p. 188.
[42] Diane Vaughan, *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 215.
[43] *Ibid,* p. 237.
[44] See, for example, Lorenz, 'If You're so Smart, Why Are You under Surveillance?', pp. 603–4; and Olssen & Peters, 'Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy', p. 234.
[45] Vaughan, *Challenger Launch Decision*, p. 31.
[46] Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 4.
[47] *Ibid,* p. 188.
[48] *Confidence in Lack,* p. 7.
[49] For more arguments regarding collage's relationship to iconoclasm and subversion, see, for example, Sally O'Reilly, 'Collage: Diversions, Contradictions and Anomalies' in Blanche Craig, ed., *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2008), pp. 8–20.
[50] Allen Fisher, *Interview with A. Fisher 18.08.2010* [Digital recording in possession of author].
[51] *Confidence in Lack*, p. 13.
[52] Allen Fisher, *SPUTTOR* (London: Veer Books, 2014), pp. 56–7.
[53] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), p. 302.
[54] *SPUTTOR*, p. 57.
[55] *Confidence in Lack,* p. 7.
[56] *Ibid*, p. 13.
[57] *SPUTTOR*, pp. 68–9.
[58] Marian Lief Palley, 'Reaganomics and Class Cleavages in the United States' in *The Journal of Politics* 46.3 (1984), p. 945.
[59] Wallace C. Peterson, 'The Macroeconomic Legacy of Reaganomics' in *Journal of Economic Issues* 22.1 (1988), pp. 6–7.
[60] *SPUTTOR*, pp. 108–109.
[61] *Ibid*, p. 109.
[62] *Confidence in Lack*, p. 13.
[63] Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 21.
[64] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 323.
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] For examples of the early drafts of 'Human Poems', see Allen Fisher, 'Three Human Poems' in *Blart* 1 (2010) [Online] http://blartmagazine.jimdo.com/blart-1/allen-fisher/ (Last accessed: 08.06.2015); Allen Fisher, 'Three Poems' in *Vlak* 1.1 (2010), p. 48; Allen Fisher, 'Three Human Poems' in Adrian Clarke & William Rowe, eds., *Veer About* (London: Veer Books, 2011), n.p.
[67] Allen Fisher, 'iDamage', in *Plantarchy* 4 (2007), p. 144.
[68] For 'The Divine Image' and 'A Divine Image' see William Blake, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 75, p.106.
[69] Aodán McCardle, 'Burner 3 accessing the before' in *Readings* 3 (2008) [Online] http://www.bbk.ac.uk/readings/issues/issue3/AodanMcCardle (Last accessed: 16.06.2015).

[70] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 232.

[71] *Ibid*, p. 98.

[72] *Ibid*, p. 361.

[73] Stanley Cohen, 'Property Destruction: motives and meanings' in Colin Ward, ed., *Vandalism* (London: Architectural Press, 1973), p. 53; Jeff Ferrell, *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality* (USA: Northeastern University Press, 1996), p. 185. Also see Jacques Selosse, 'Vandalism: speech acts' in Claude Levy-Leboyer, ed., *Vandalism: Behaviour and Motivations* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 1984), p. 48.

[74] Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 13; Ferrell, *Crimes of Style*, p. 176.

[75] Although the focus here is on legislation from the 21st century, a fuller account of the legal framework involved would also need to acknowledge the significance of The Criminal Damage Act 1971. The Act defined criminal damage as an action of a person who 'without lawful excuse destroys or damages any property belonging to another intending to destroy or damage any such property or being reckless as to whether any such property would be destroyed or damaged shall be guilty of an offence,' and thus, anyone caught writing graffiti could be charged and fined under this legislative definition. See *Criminal Damage Act 1971* (London: The Stationary Office), s. 1.

[76] Clean Denver, *Denver Graffiti Removal Manual* (Denver: Clean Denver, 1988), p. 5; Home Office, *More Powers to Tackle the Menace of Graffiti and Fly Posting* in M2 PressWIRE (2006) [Online] http://www.m2.com/m2/web/story.php/2006302C1F98CC15756F802571480038851F (Last Accessed: 16.06.2015).

[77] James Q. Wilson & George L. Kelling, 'Broken Windows: The police and neighborhood safety' in *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1982) [Online] http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/304465/ (last accessed: 08.04.2015).

[78] For a more in-depth critique of Wilson and Kelling's theory, see Bernard E. Harcourt, *Illusion of Order: the False Promise of Broken Windows Policing* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[79] *Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003* (London: The Stationary Office), s. 43, s. 44, s. 45, s. 54.

[80] For more on these cases, see, for example, Alison Young, *Street Art, Public City* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 113–14.

[81] *R v Charan Verdi*, EWCA Crim 1485 (2005), para 8.

[82] *R v Michael Holmes*, EWCA Crim 2510 (2006), para 8.

[83] *Ibid,* para 10.

[84] The arguments here are indebted to Barnes' socio-legal scholarship, as seen – for example – in Lucy Barnes, 'Laughing all the Way to the Bank(sy): Situating Graffiti in the Built Environment', Downing College, Cambridge University. 08th September 2011. Conference Presentation; and Lucy Barnes, 'Localising Graffiti', De Montford University, 4th April 2012. Conference Presentation. The emphasis of these studies, however, is perhaps more explicitly focused on concepts such as performance, which are not discussed in this article.

[85] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 312.

[86] This reading of *Art Buff* is loosely based on Jameson's critique of pastiche in postmodern art. See Frederic Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' in *New Left Review* 146 (1984) [Online] http://newleftreview.org.chain.kent.ac.uk/I/146/fredric-jameson-postmodernism-or-the-cultural-logic-of-late-capitalism (Last accessed: 09.04.15).

[87] See Criminal Damage Act 1971, s.1.

[88] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution.* (London: Verso, 2015), p. 35. The argument here also paraphrases some of the central arguments that Firestone posits in the first two chapters of her book. See pp. 3–37.

[89] Ulli Freer, *Burner on the Buff* (London: Veer Books, 2013), n.p.

[90] Ferrell, *Crimes of Style*, p. 111.

[91] Cohen, p. 52.

[92] Frank Coffield, *Vandalism & Graffiti: The state of the art* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1991), p. 68.

[93] *Burner on the Buff*, n.p.

[94] *Ibid*, n.p.

[95] *The Poetry of Saying*, p. 208.

[96] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 308.

[97] Ferrell, *Crimes of Style*, p. 179.

[98] *Burner on the Buff*, n.p.

[99] The final sentence is very loosely in reference to Hegel's description in his Preface to *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*: 'But the life of the spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself [. . .] Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it' Georg W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishing, 1998), p. 19.

How to cite this article: Virtanen, J 2016 Writing on: Context and Visual Culture in Recent Works of Allen Fisher and Ulli Freer. *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry,* 8(1): e3, pp. 1–34, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/biip.20

Published: 27 May 2016

Copyright: © 2016 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

OPEN ACCESS