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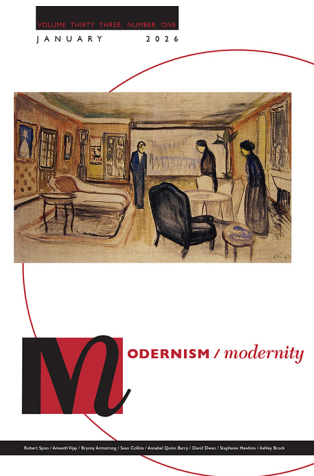
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Roy Fisher's *City* and the Affective Landscapes of Modernization

Ameeth Vijay

ABSTRACT: This article considers Roy Fisher's 1961 prose-poem *City* in the context of slum clearance and urban modernization in the postwar period. Modernization projects, like those in Fisher's native Birmingham, sought to employ figures of destruction and ruin for the sake of constructing a literal and figurative new Britain after World War II. In doing so, it treated the process of clearing "slum" housing as necessary for the sake of progress. This article argues that *City* attempts to register the affective landscapes of the postwar city while not directing those affects to any particular political or representational project. Instead, Fisher is concerned with a nonrecuperative form of mourning for the environments and communities lost amid destruction and violence. The poem presents regional specificity of Britain's postwar landscapes through a late-modernist, fragmentary form for the purpose of gathering together affects of loss, disappearance, and destruction without attempting to resolve their fundamental discontinuity.

KEYWORDS: infrastructure, cities, slum clearance, Birmingham, postwar, modernization

Roy Fisher's 1961 prose-poem *City* is an attempt to think through the cycles of urban unmaking and remaking as they imprint themselves on the city's affective landscapes. On one hand, it is an intensely local poem, recalling Fisher's native Birmingham in the postwar period. Like so many cities in Britain, Birmingham witnessed its own partial disappearance, not only in the form of wartime bombing but also in slum clearance and replanning programs, some dating to the interwar period. Yet, the "city" of the poem remains anonymous, speculative, and fragmentary. It resists the recuperative gestures of the postwar, which took both political and poetical form, and instead focuses

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- 22 on registering the affects of loss without trying to direct them to some more concrete project. Where planners like Herbert Manzoni in Birmingham sought to construct a new Britain out of the ruins of war, Fisher attends to and dwells within those fragments in a way that neither sentimentalizes nor effaces the local.

This essay considers the stakes of a nonrecuperative mourning and relationship to loss in postwar Britain. In poems for Tom Pickard's 1991 documentary on Fisher, the latter wrote that

Birmingham's what I think with.
It's not made for that sort of job,
but it's what they gave me.

As a means of thinking, it's a brummagem
screwdriver. What that is,
is a medium-weight claw hammer
or something of the sort, employed
to drive a tapered woodscrew home
as if it were a nail.¹

In these lines, Birmingham is less an abstract proper noun than something tangible and material that renders thoughts into practical building components—for example, a screw and its wooden “home.” That these tools are imperfect speaks to the givenness of the built environment, and the way that one must work within its infrastructures; here, identity is not derived from place but continually formed through traversal and use. Thus, for Fisher, the city necessarily but imperfectly orients identity and provides a way to perceive, think, and understand—what he calls “perceptual thinking.”² The spectral Birmingham of *City*, likewise, is one that not only looks *at* but looks *through* the materials of the city in order to perceive and register the affects of its transformations, without necessarily perfectly capturing those affects in order to definitively resolve their meaning.

The poem is modernist in its tense ambivalence and fragmentary gestures; at the same time, *City* lacks the apocalyptic tones of Eliot's “unreal city,” and as such finds no need to unify fragments of loss through its poetic form. Rather, it responds more specifically to the experiences of urban modernization that attended the physical and social transformations of the postwar. The poem describes not just the built landscapes transformed during the war and postwar period but also the city's affective landscapes.³ Where the collective imagery of the war—bomb shelters and bomb sites, ruined neighborhoods, blackouts—became part of the apparatus of national consensus-making to be recouped in Britain's reconstruction, *City* is more ambivalent and hesitant, presenting experiences and figures of destruction that are not reconciled or resolved via modernization. In part, it does this by placing the destruction of war and the reconstruction of urban modernization on equal footing; both are forms of violence visited from an outside, with both the existence of urban slums and their often-hasty clearance as forms of unresolved class warfare.

City does not seek to present these experiences in a way that would reify a bounded identity, whether regional, national, or international. Fisher has said that the aim of his poetry is to “play some perceptual games and . . . de-Anglicize England—which seems to me absolutely essential.”⁴ In *City*, these perceptions disclose postwar Britain in its specificity while at the same time rejecting the many determinations of what Britain should or could be, which leads John Kerrigan to note the irony of Fisher being a “locationally obsessed writer” who paradoxically claims that “the ‘place’ tag is not very meaningful to me.”⁵ This ambivalent disposition makes Fisher stand out relative to his contemporaries, especially in the context of the “poetry wars” to come.⁶ Fisher’s poetic oeuvre is formally and thematically heteroglossic, interweaving aesthetics and concerns that are more intentionally separated in other postwar literature. That said, there are resonances between Fisher and his contemporaries, specifically in how he situates the regional in ambiguous relation to other geographies and their identities. For example, a poem like *City* is quite different stylistically from Basil Bunting’s *Briggflatts*; however, they both seek to evoke an intense localness while also questioning and annulling the identities that usually cohere around the notion of “place.”⁷

Instead, belonging as a being-in-place is tenuous, precarious, and discontinuous. Like Birmingham’s “Spaghetti Junction,” place is an infrastructure that connects the local, regional, national, and international both materially and affectively. I employ this infrastructural figure not only as an analogy but as a method: as Lauren Berlant writes, “to attend to the terms of transition is to forge an imaginary for managing the meanwhile within damaged life’s perdurance, a meanwhile that is less an end or an ethical scene than a technical political heuristic that allows for ambivalence, distraction, antagonism and inattention not to destroy collective existence.”⁸ What I find in *City* is precisely this attending to the meanwhile as a response to the more forceful articulations of identity in the postwar, both in the “techno-utopian vision” of high modernist planners and modes of discontent that sought to recover the landscapes of heritage Britain.⁹ In this way, the poem attempts to register loss without directing it toward the particular ends of either “wartime sentimentalization or dystopian critique,” in Kelly Rich’s formulation.¹⁰ Those ends constituted the terrain of both postwar politics and literature; Fisher’s disavowal of them in *City* is thus a mode of attention that focuses on what is left behind amid transitions to a supposed modernity to come.

Violence and the Recuperation of Loss

The particular character of the wartime cityscape created an enduring if multifaceted and ambivalent structure of feeling the postwar era. The anxiety about air warfare, the shock of invasion, the nighttime blackouts, and the human loss and material destruction of the bombs themselves were directed toward narratives of resilience and rebuilding. Where the shock and senselessness of the violence of World War I led to a crisis of meaning, the experience of the air raids forwarded discrete social and political projects (Rich, “Nowhere’s Safe,” 1188). One of those projects was the political consensus from which the welfare state emerged: Ben Highmore writes that, in scenes of postwar bomb

24 sites, “the landscape literalized a set of analogies for damaged youth, as well as being a material space fashioned from the aggressions of warring nations and from the dreams of those wanting to build the ‘new Jerusalem’ on the plains of urban Britain.”¹¹ Equally part of this structure of feeling was discontent with the aesthetics and politics of the postwar consensus from traditionalists and conservatives who sentimentalized the imagined landscapes of a little England. Here, too, figures like John Betjeman sought to direct the semi-anonymous forces of destruction toward creating a “new” England that would do away with both pre and postwar modernity for the sake of uncovering a pastoral landscape, and with it, a more reactionary understanding of English identity.¹²

City, however, attempts to register loss, disappearance, and change without directing it toward a particular political or aesthetic project. In other words, the arbitrariness and shock of destruction is mourned without being recuperated and put to social use. Here, the war does not prompt community and solidarity and carrying on, but rather simply creates an emptiness that can be filled with something else. From a section titled “The Entertainment of War”:

I saw the garden where my aunt had died
And her two children and a woman from next door;
It was like a burst pod filled with clay.

A mile away in the night I had heard the bombs
Sing and then burst themselves between cramped houses
With bright soft flashes and sounds like banging doors;

...

Now the garden lay stripped and stale; the iron shelter
Spread out its separate petals around a smooth clay saucer,
Small, and so tidy it seemed nobody had ever been there.

...

These were marginal people I had met only rarely
And the end of the whole household meant that no grief was seen;
Never have people seemed so absent from their own deaths.¹³

The bombs “sing and then burst themselves between cramped houses” like a natural disaster, coming from the sky with no apparent volition, destroying that which was anyway marginal. They create death as absence, as an emptiness required for the speaker to “keep a long story moving” (Fisher, *Long and the Short*, 34). The pacing in this section seems to mime that of war, with long, continuous lines broken suddenly by punctuation and followed by something deflated, empty, *burst*. The people here are marginal instead of heroic, and in the speed and totality of destruction, the fact of their prior existence evaporates so that there is nothing to lament.

Furthermore, this garden is not much of a victory garden—that symbol of community that yoked together wartime austerity and a nationalized idea of the land and small-scale agriculture. Its destruction is total, but incidental. The lack of pathos reinforces the anonymity of the destruction—what is destroyed is not a community, but rather a household for whom no one grieves. Instead, wars “come down the streets from

the unknown city and the unknown world, like rainwater floods in the gutters" (33). Rather than being connected to the social through an organic sense of the purpose, the garden forms a boundary; what is outside of it may as well be another world, and yet a world that is still intent on destroying what is marginal and meaningless to it. The relation is opaque.

Whereas Fisher's poetry foregrounds such opacity, other literature in the postwar put the bombsite to use. The pathos of the bombed-out urban ruin was in many ways established in advance of World War II. As Leo Mellor writes, violence and ruination were running themes in both apocalyptic high modernism and speculative genre fiction in the interwar period. He notes the ease with which writers imagined "the phantasmagoric in a ruptured cityscape," especially when the "actuality of destruction seemed to literalise and release images that were previously purely hidden in mental depth" (Mellor, *Reading the Ruins*, 138). These aesthetic prefigurations provided a template for wartime culture to manage anxieties about air raids and for the postwar to narrate bombsites within the emerging paradigm of a new Britain. The apocalyptic visions of the destroyed city employed a "vocabulary of dread and anticipatory retrospection" that, as Beryl Pong writes, "engaged in a kind of pre-emptive remembrance that compels the documentation of what would 'inexorably' be lost."¹⁴ Yet, after the war, bombsites were not only about loss but also about how those losses could be recuperated and directed toward the construction of a new British identity. For example, bombsites became represented as a kind of accidental archaeology through which layers of British history could be made visible at once; in this way, the bombsite was not a figure of vacant destruction, but one which revealed an enduring and essential identity to the people who inhabited the ruins.

I would extend Pong's thoughts on the "temporal phenomenology of being bombed," with the losses of urban development and modernization, with the difference being that wartime raids were more amenable to their (almost immediate) recovery in a postwar national mythos (*British Literature and Culture*, 18). *City*, however, tracks a coincidence between the destructions of war and those of modernization. The dramatic changes associated with slum clearances included the destruction and transformation of the built environment and the loss or at least significant displacement of existing working-class communities. These changes were all visited from sources—the state, professional planners, and private developers—whose motives, ethics, and actions could seem distant, arbitrary, and violent. In this way, slum clearance acquires an affective character similar to the wartime bombing campaigns that also violently cleared the way for a new Britain to be built (both literally and figuratively); yet, the destruction of the latter was to be much more firmly narrativized and mythologized in postwar national culture.

Eric Falci writes that many postwar poets approach place in a way that is scopic and/or excavatory—a way of looking at landscape that gives way to digging, thereby uncovering layers of place and identity (whether figured as architectural foundations, or, per Seamus Heaney, as more organic roots). Fisher, however, questions whether "landscape is readable" at all, and, as such, disavows both "Wordsworthian ambulatory

26 remembrance” and “Eliotic . . . apocalyptic spectatorship” while remaining attached to the regional and the local.¹⁵ For Fisher, the bombsite, like the development site, is not excavatory insofar as what it turns up are objects that recollect only to estrange.¹⁶ The violence does not make landscape more readable, but instead produces decontextualized fragments. For example, *City* opens by observing the streets that line “all the buildings [that] have been destroyed within the past year,” and cars that “move cautiously across this waste, as if suspicious of the emptiness; there is little to separate the roadways from what lies between them” (Fisher, *Long and the Short*, 29). Here, we are introduced to this spectral Birmingham by what is absent rather than what is present, both defined by and blurring with the contours of the cities’ infrastructural passageways. *City* is sensitive to such blank spaces, the emptiness through which presence can be perceived. The affects of the poem’s landscape veer toward self-questioning, uncertainty, and ambivalence rather than to a more polemical position. As mentioned above, *City* is not recuperative of any particular community or form of life among those extinguished or displaced through war and development.

The Affective Landscapes of Modernization

Urban modernization carried with it both promise and anxiety in the postwar period. Ostensibly, modernization in planning attempted to address practical and longstanding issues over the availability, quality, and cost of housing, the efficiency of urban infrastructure, and the intentional design of the city as a whole. Responses to these concerns led to the building of council estates (both small and large), the creation of new towns, and the extension of comprehensive town and country planning that would preserve open and rural spaces.¹⁷ It also involved the clearance of slums for housing and ambitious new infrastructure projects. Despite the ascendancy of the welfare state, these various developments were always politically vexed and at least partially conditioned by the needs and influence of various private market forces, including homeowners, landlords, construction firms, and businesses.

Modernization, however, encompasses not just the material changes to the built environment but the ideology of progress that subtended them and the politics of reaction and discontent that they provoked. That is, there were figurative stakes to the building of a new Britain in the postwar period. In *City*, Fisher attempts to register the cumulative effects of these changes. There are historical passages that describe how the city has changed, how once arterial roads have been supplanted by others as the city grew, and how its edges are thus always in flux. In one section, he writes:

These lost streets are decaying only very slowly. The impacted lives of their inhabitants, the meaninglessness of news, the dead black of the chimney breasts, the conviction that the wind itself comes only from the next street, all wedge together to keep destruction out; to deflect the eye of the developer. And when destruction comes, it is total: the printed notices on the walls, block by block, a few doors left open at night, broken windows advancing down a street until fallen slates appear on the pavement and are not kicked away. Then, after a few weeks of this, the machines arrive. (Fisher, *Long and the Short*, 33)

In this passage, the city is suspended between a past characterized by a parochial, slow decay and a future that obliterates and replaces, wholesale if necessary, what had previously escaped attention. The passage speaks to the experiences and stakes of modernization in the city. These are places that shift from being too inconsequential to even be destroyed—places where, *City* remarks, “these streets are not worth lighting”—to then warranting clearance under the baleful “eye of the developer” (32). *City* recalls the town and country transformations that attended the postwar period, not only as a result of war bombardment that unevenly leveled parts of Britain, but also public and private development that sought to rebuild the country after, development that included the continuation of slum clearances for the sake of modernizing buildings and infrastructure. The forces of destruction in these lines are anonymous and ominous; for Fisher, the sources of power are not able to be fully apprehended, but rather appear to the individual in the form of structures to inhabit, infrastructure to traverse.

In registering these changes, the city of the poem is not sentimentalized in any of the usual ways. There is no nostalgia, *per se*, in the working-class spaces and peoples that are displaced and replaced, nor does urban modernization carry any trace of utopia. Even urban ruin is divested from its usual pathos and presented with a certain facticity. In this way, the affects of loss, change, and disappearance—both as tropes of urban life and as historical determinations of the postwar—are mourned in a nonrecuperative fashion. The hybrid form(s) of the poem serve to complicate and unravel the supposed antinomies of the city, caught between the local, national, and global. The result is that loss—of spaces, lives, and structures of feeling—can be dwelt with and worked through without binding resolution in the poem. Similarly, *City* evokes locality through the discreteness of its language without that locality being definitely closed off from an outside (or even identified in its particularity, as the city described in the poem goes unnamed).

As Alan Sinfield writes, the violences of poverty, war, and modernization were already conjoined for working class subjects, such that the claims of progress, consensus, and national unity that emerged in the postwar were, if not inherently hollow, then flawed and unstable.¹⁸ The slum itself emerges not just as a built environment but as a particular object of knowledge and discursive site of class struggle in the nineteenth century. By the time of the postwar period, slum clearance was already taken for granted as a necessary for the sake of modernization.¹⁹ Damage from the war and the prerogatives of the new welfare state allowed planning, and its associated clearances, improvements, and construction, to operate at much larger scales.²⁰ The question of the postwar was not whether slum areas should be redeveloped, but rather how to clear large areas, where to rehouse slum dwellers, and how to avoid negatively affecting landlords, businesses, and industry.²¹ Together, the “sustained programmes of slum clearance and council house building . . . reconfigured domestic environments, social practices and networks and the ways in which working class neighbourhoods were discursively represented.”²²

Yelling writes that Birmingham became an “exemplar” of trends in slum clearance and planning in the broader postwar era, through to the 1970s (“Incidence of Slum Clearance,” 234). In the immediate postwar, one-third of housing in Birmingham was

28 declared “unsuitable for habitation,” with approximately 38,000 houses eventually destroyed.²³ These concerns were widespread among planners and academics. In particular, Herbert Manzoni, the primary individual responsible for Birmingham’s development in the postwar, was “concerned about the sea of slumdom which encompassed the city centre, [and] had the vision of sweeping it all away in one operation.”²⁴ As David Adams recounts, Manzoni argued that “slums weren’t only slum buildings, they were also slum conditions of all sorts including a slum mentality . . . unless we get rid of the lot, then we can not only get rid of our slums, but we can make a new environment” (“Everyday Experiences,” 244). This characterization of the slum as the central problem of the city was typical of planning in this era, emphasizing the environmental determinism of slum upon people. Like many other planners, Manzoni hypostasized the slum as not only a space of informal housing, but as an outmoded way of living, thinking, and relating to the world. Within this framework, slum clearance was not merely a technical solution to the problems of poor housing and overcrowded neighborhoods, but an attempt to manufacture a particular future. In this future, the capitalist power dynamics that created the slums would be reconciled less through class struggle and political change than through the material reconstruction envisioned by planners. The slum spoke to an area in ruin but holding potential, so that the “wasteful and uneconomic character of existing land use” that characterized Britain’s cities could be ameliorated by clearance and rebuilding on a mass scale (Yelling, “Origins,” 285).

By contrast, the images of modernization presented served as “subverse place promotion” for individual cities.²⁵ The modern, planned city could thus distinguish itself from its archaic, “sea of slumdom” self: for some, the plans themselves demonstrate the “confidence in the capacity of organized interventions to reshape space and secure a better future [that] . . . would bring tangible social benefits and decisively erase the Victorian slums from both reality and memory.”²⁶ Postwar Birmingham evinced not only Manzoni’s high modernist planning but also, in turn, his vision for infrastructural modernism. As Simon Gunn writes: “By 1970, Birmingham stood as Britain’s most unabashedly modern and even ‘transatlantic’ city, a status that owed much to the car and the associated system of urban expressways, of which the Inner Ring and Gravelly Hill Interchange, popularly known as Spaghetti Junction, were the prime exemplars,” with “the ‘great red road’ becoming the symbol of Manzoni’s techno-utopian vision of Birmingham as a ‘motor city’” (“Ring Road,” 228).

Thus, modernizing the postwar city was not just a matter of rebuilding that which had been cleared by war, but also involved its own clearances. While clearances of urban slums may have cited objective criteria for when to remove and replace parts of the city, Alison Ravetz remarks on their arbitrariness:

At the height of the clearance campaigns, it was quite normal for [officials] to condemn houses *en bloc*, sometimes from a cursory inspection made from a moving car; and the list of defects, when eventually released, might include trivial items like broken window sashes and banister rails. Owners were not allowed to see this list. . . . Without knowing what was supposed to be wrong, owners could not, of course, put it right. And should they decide to risk their own money on improvements, they could not get the necessary planning permission, on the grounds that their houses were condemned.²⁷

The result was that people cleared from slums “were often ignorant, confused and traumatized by the prospect of losing their homes and being kept in suspense about where they would be sent and how long they had to wait.”²⁸ The speed of the destruction caused by developers public and private, and that it is total, links it to the arbitrary destruction of the war, notices of planned demolition replacing warning sirens.

Further, Ben Jones remarks on the divergence of scholarly opinion as to whether council housing in particular was a political victory for the working class or simply a response to the postwar housing market. In either case, the combination of slum clearance and mass rehousing meant that certain estates were still at least regarded with chauvinistic attitudes as residual.²⁹ Moreover, incidents of slum clearance and the construction of council housing by no means sidelined the private sector. Residualization of council estates was exacerbated by increased owner occupation, and council housing itself was in part a private sector endeavor. Ray Forrest and Alan Murie remark that “council housing has been largely built by the private sector. It has been privatised in its production throughout its history. And this privatisation has affected its costs and determined aspects of technology . . . council housing has never been separate from the private market and its form and function have been largely determined by market processes.”³⁰ Together, scholars of postwar housing suggest that the processes of slum clearance and rehousing were more complex and contradictory than the narrative of ameliorating postwar construction would suggest. Some of these contradictions would be later seized, in opportunistic fashion, by those that would dismiss the project of the welfare state as a whole: as Sinfield and others note, the modernization enabled by welfare capitalism concealed lingering antimonies (around class and race, for example) that would be exposed during the collapse of the postwar settlement in the 1980s.

By contrast, the affective landscapes presented in *City* reference but do not attempt to adjudicate and resolve the politics of consensus and the project of the welfare state as such. Rather, they dwell within and among multiple forms of violence and destruction, and, in doing so, reveal discontinuities in narratives of consensus and progress. It similarly indicates gaps and fractures in consolidated understandings of belonging and subjecthood, whether articulated through international cosmopolitanism, national reformation, or reified locality. Notably there is not much to mourn about what is destroyed in Fisher's *City*, a fact which does not affirm destruction. Rather, what is replaced was already characterized as impacted and meaningless, isolated and parochial, and not able to imagine an environment beyond its local streets. This slow half-absence is what deters a more complete emptiness, for a while.

That is, the smallness of these places in comparison with the bombs or machines or wind that come from an unknown, transcendental outside, does not have an innate, redemptive particularity. The violence that empties it out resembles those that brought it into being; here, “some have lived through three wars, some through only one; wars of newspapers, of mysterious sciences, of coercion, of disappearance” (Fisher, *Long and the Short*, 33). Altogether, Fisher's poetic method renders the “city” not as a located setting or even as a narrative character, but rather as a tool or vehicle through which the contradictions of modernity might emerge and linger. The poem explores the postwar

30 urban experience, and yet not in a way that aims at accuracy and recuperation. What is lost, through war and development, is not added up and placed in a ledger compared to what was gained by the process of modernization. Rather, it presents an affective landscape with all its contradictions, occlusions, and incoherences.

The nonrecuperative aspect of a poem like *City*, along with the heterogeneity of his collected works overall, is part of what makes Fisher difficult to place among his contemporaries. Fisher himself, as Peter Robinson writes, had a persistent “reluctance to be placed,” perhaps especially in a postwar scene that associated “particular poetic forms with particular ethical commitments.”³¹ Initially associated with Fulcrum Press, publisher of poets like Basil Bunting, Fisher later published in “fugitive magazines . . . and ephemeral pamphlets,” only later receiving attention through Carcanet, Oxford, and Bloodaxe (Robinson, introduction to *Roy Fisher*, 4). His poetry is regional without becoming the atavistic modernism of Geoffrey Hill or Ted Hughes; neither does it depict the shrinking, parochial “little” England of the Movement poets.³² That very regionalism, however, means that he is also somewhat out of place when compared to the enthusiastic internationalism of other British Poetry Revival poets, including contemporaries like Bob Cobbing and Ian Hamilton Finlay. Many critics have detailed the historical divides between mainstream and avant-garde poetry in Britain, where a divergence of formal sensibilities and influences lined up with differing political commitments, all of which was brought to bear on the competition over publishing resources.³³ My analysis here, however, is more in line with criticism that considers modernist writers who are “diverse in terms of their regional and national belongings as well as in terms of poetic practice,” and who bring those concerns into “provocative juxtaposition with one another, suggesting new locations . . . and possible re-locations.”³⁴

City reckons with these antimonies in multiple ways. For example, in being unnamed, the city has a certain archetypal quality resonant with high modernist literary representations of the urban. Yet, the poem tells us: “This could never be a capital city for all its size. There is no mind in it, no regard. The sensitive, the tasteful, the fashionable, the intolerant and powerful, have not moved through it as they have moved through London, evaluating it, altering it deliberately, setting in motion wars of feeling about it. Most of it has never been seen” (Fisher, *Long and the Short*, 37). In this way, Fisher both claims and disavows the modernist city, juxtaposing the plenitude of politics, culture, and affect in a city like London with a more parochialized, blank urban space. As Sean O’Brien writes of this half-real, at times surreal, city, “the place described seems at once charged and emptied, concrete but constantly sliding into the typical.”³⁵

For many critics, the ambivalent, shifting character of Fisher’s poetic mode becomes most clear when juxtaposed with the Movement poetry of the 1950s, which “privileges a poetry of closure, narrative coherence and grammatical and syntactic cohesion, which colludes with the processes of naturalization” (Sheppard, *Poetry of Saying*, 2). That is, “its poetry favours an empirical lyricism of discrete moments of experience” (2). Sheppard’s usage of “discrete” is similar to O’Brien’s use of “concrete,” and, in fact, it is from the collection and cohesion of these discrete moments that Movement poets are able to familiarize and generalize. The relationship and the terms in which it is

constructed endeavor to be clear so as to produce a common understanding. As such, "Fisher is precisely the kind of British poet who will suffer from inappropriate comparisons with figures like Hardy and Larkin . . . [because] if it is assumed that Fisher must be striving for such Anglo-Saxon virtues as concreteness and low-key precision then he will be taken to task."³⁶ The implication is that a poet like Larkin attends to detail and to the particular in a way that renders him typically Anglo-Saxon, whereas Fisher is a different kind of British poet: Fisher problematizes the local, not by eschewing its details but rather by including its gaps. In doing so, he expresses something of a working-class experience of the changing city without presenting that experience as either empirical or polemical. Movement poetry did express a certain discontent with modernization, one that lamented the ethos of consumer society and its homogenized landscapes. Magdalena Kay writes of Larkin that "an increasing pessimism motivates his desire to see England as a country in decline" and that "by subscribing to the view that Modernism set literature on the wrong course, and that only a dedicated few might salvage what remains useful of the English literary tradition, Larkin stakes out his space in literary history as he vents his dissatisfaction."³⁷ While not explicitly political, this "salvage" of both English poetry and the associated concern with heritage England is a mode of recovery, one that sought to be an authentic voice in the postwar and found resonance after the collapse of the postwar settlement.

By contrast, *City* is a poem that presents fragments of experience without unifying them into a new, larger narrative. This refusal of the larger narrative contains aspects of a Lyotardian postmodernism while being much more firmly grounded in its concerns.³⁸ Here we might inquire as to the ethics of Fisher's nonrecuperative stance. Paula Derdiger has persuasively shown that the materialism of postwar literature emerged from the necessity to address a society that was questioning the prewar status quo. She argues that fiction of this era turned to realism to "counter alienating fragmentation and abstraction."³⁹ If this was a turn to the domestic, it was not to escape inward or into the past, and if it privileged accessibility, it was not for its own sake. Rather, accessibility has an ethical quality, as it "pauses and redirects perception of the relationship between individual subjects and the material and social world they encounter," making that relationship clearer and more traversable (Derdiger, *Reconstruction Fiction*, 36). There was a need to "face up" to the material conditions of precarity in postwar Britain and the capitalist ideologies that had sustained those conditions for too long.⁴⁰ As opposed to the discontent voiced by poets like Larkin, postwar fiction turns to realism as a mode of grounded optimism about Britain's political and social future. Given the dismantling of the welfare state and concomitant reassertion of liberalism in the 1980s, it seems fitting to turn to postwar literature to understand what a new Britain *not* based on these predations might look like.

At the same time, an analysis of urban modernization and slum clearance, as shown above, paints a more nuanced and contradictory picture of the ethical stance of the postwar. It suggests that the idea of a "consensus" emerging from resilience in the face of war and austerity was yet another national myth, one that, notably, has only been further played upon and reinforced in post-Thatcher political culture. That is,

- 32 this narrative of national solidarity was overdetermined in ways that served multiple, contradictory political projects and ethical sensibilities, not only in some later appropriation but in the postwar itself. The losses of slum clearance, not fitting with this self-mythologization, become subordinated to those of the war itself. There is thus a separate ethics in mourning without rejoining the fragments caused by multiple forms of violence. Fisher's city gathers together affects of loss, disappearance, and destruction without attempting to resolve their fundamental discontinuity. In *City*, community, where it is found, is not an analogue for consensus, and is not grounded in a reified local or, certainly, a mythologized new Britain.

In this sense, Fisher's poetry shares concerns with the work of British modernists like Basil Bunting and Hugh MacDiarmid. As Samuel Rogers argues,

British poets utilize processes of historical and geographical rooting in order to strengthen positions that are supposedly marginal to a dominant English/British centre. Through the relation of identity to specific places, the poets attempt a reconstruction of prevailing and homogenizing notions of British space, and this is part of what defines a British modernist poetics of place.⁴¹

A poet like MacDiarmid, writing from the provincial town of Montrose, "underlines that fact that identity is constructed in relation to place via history, and via a utilization of the local site's historical depth."⁴² Similarly, Fisher's modernism both evokes and puts into question a West Midlands regionalism, and if Birmingham is not as provincial as Montrose, it is still marked as a not-London. That said, the city of the poem retains a sense of anonymity, and in that way does not substitute a homogenized local community for the weightlessness of the cosmopolitan metropolis. Instead, the city is another kind of unremarked, transitional in-between: as noted above, the poem tells us that "most of it has never been seen." That is, the excavatory concern with the "local site" in Fisher's poetry illustrates how historical depth is both overdetermined and, in parts, opaque and unrecoverable.

For example, in one section *City* presents what might be a characteristically modernist image of ruination, or, per Mellor, a modernist image that had been uncannily realized during the war. Fisher writes,

Already, half-built towers
Over the bombed city
Show mouths that soon will speak no more,
Stoppered with the perfections of tomorrow. (*Long and the Short*, 31)

This "tomorrow" is as vacant as

the white-flanked towers, the stillborn monuments;
The thousand golden offices. (36)

In the idiom of modernization, these towers would have a recuperatory gesture: they are a visual indicator of hope for the future, emerging from the ruins of the “bombed city,” promising social, economic, and technological progress. Fisher, however, disrupts the continuity of this narrative by rendering these towered as inert and muffled, not rising from the ruins but apiece with them.⁴³ As Simon Jarvis writes, Fisher “does not take the tower blocks at their word, as an expression of soberly functional imperatives,” instead evincing a landscape that “all too accurately reflects human feelings.”⁴⁴ Planning specifically contrasted its own operations with the destruction of war and aligned its prerogatives with the promise of futurity; in this, it had no vocabulary to address its own destructive capacity and force of imposition. The excess of a discourse of rebuilding produces an inarticulate remainder, creating a scene of transition and ambivalence.

Notably, the half-built towers do not afford an excavatory scope, because they are the “stillborn” ruins of the future. Neither the bombed city nor the “thousand golden offices” offers the insight of what Rogers called historical depth; stoppered and stillborn, they challenge the readability of the landscape while still registering its affects. What results is something atemporal; neither the uncompromising futurism of modernist planning nor the saccharine and equally idealist nostalgia for places of the past dominates in Fisher’s city. Here, O’Brien observes that “rather than helping the poet to establish a total picture, the detail forbids it” (*Deregulated Muse*, 115). Similarly Ian Gregson, referring to the documentary gestures in the text, writes that “for Fisher, realism is an impossible goal whose pretensions, nonetheless, annex experience.”⁴⁵ This appears as a problem through the collage of styles and registers in *City*; the historical register is one and has an “ambiguous status in the poem” in that its realism is “inspected and satirised” but also “part of what the poem refuses” (O’Brien, *Deregulated Muse*, 120). In the preface to the original edition, Michael Shayder remarked: “what follows seems to me a ruined work of art. It lies around as a series of sketches might lie around a studio waiting in vain for the total act of sculpture they were drawn to serve.”⁴⁶ Yet still, this would be ruined in advance, a ruination without the pathos of the ruin because it would exist without a temporality to occasion a lament.

In another section of the poem, we are told that “once I wanted to prove the world was sick. Now I want to prove it healthy. The detection of sickness means that death has established itself as an element of the timetable; it has come within the range of the measurable. Where there is no time there is no sickness” (Fisher, *Long and the Short*, 41). Ironically, the practices and tools of the technocratic management of cities are those that drain them of time. “Healthy” does not seem to connote any specific vibrancy but rather is a self-negating metaphor, because what is proposed is existence without the time of life. This might correspond to the existence of its inhabitants, whose sleep is “aqueous and incomplete, like that of a hospital ward” (41). The city is absent of its own life as its people were earlier absent their own deaths; in between, there is a timeless, incomplete sleep.

City is a text that provisionally offers modes of “perceptual thinking” that do not quite remain phenomenologically immanent to themselves but gesture towards edges, gaps, and empty spaces (Barry, “Language and the City,” 240). Its variegated form

- 34 produces “provisional statements leading to other provisional statements” (Gregson, *Contemporary Poetry*, 172). In this way, it disturbs continuity, producing both unexplained gaps and abrupt associations between different modes of perception, and between perception and nonperception: in the poem, the observing subject is offered and withdrawn, suspended and stuck. Perception in *City* also marks itself through infrastructure and materials, as the city is less a setting than a tool for perceiving and thinking. In a section entitled “North Area,” one learns that this is

A place where I can never go.

No point in asking why, or why not.

I picture it, though —

There must be dunes with cement walks,

A twilight of aluminium

Among beach huts and weather-stained handrails;

Much glass to reflect the clouds;

And a glint of blood in the cat-ice that holds the rushes. (Fisher, *Long and the Short*, 34)

This is the industrial “edge of the city,” imagined because it is off limits, as if the city would lose its coherence if set against an outside (35). Once again, a sense of parochialism is reinforced by this refusal to venture forth, and, in fact, others “avoid all mention” of this place (34). What is imagined is both majestic and delimited: dunes, twilight clouds, and rushes in and alongside cement, aluminum, and glass (and, mentioned later, dye works and “pre-fabricated workshops”) (35). Here materials as such are mediatory: one sees the clouds in the abundant glass and knows the weather through its mark on the handrail; evening light is itself aluminum.⁴⁷ If anything is suggestive of people, it is the “glint of blood.”

In this text, materiality extends beyond materials, as “the sun hacks at the slaughterhouse campanile” (Fisher, *Long and the Short*, 36). Sun, light, wind, and darkness acquire capacities to impose themselves onto the physical structures of the city and to condition its presences. For example, in “By the Pond,” vision is mediated by

Brick-dust in sunlight. That is what I see now in the city, a dry epic flavour, whose air is human breath. A place of walls made straight with plumbline and trowel, to dessicate and crumble in the sun and smoke. Blistered paint on cisterns and girders, cracking to show the priming. Old men spit on the paving slabs, little boys urinate; and the sun dries it as it dries out patches of damp on plaster facings to leave misshapen stains. I look for things here that make old men and dead men seem young. Things which have escaped, the landscapes of many childhoods.

Wharves, the oldest parts of factories, tarred gable ends rearing to take the sun over lower roofs. Soot, sunlight, brick-dust; and the breath that tastes of them. (35)

Natural phenomena like sunlight, materials, and human labor form a kind of perceptual matrix through which the city is both understood and composed. Dryness here is also

the process by which the human body becomes encoded into physical works that age and decay. It is in this latter process that “sun and smoke” concrete themselves into the building and enter into a relation, so that gables work to carry sunlight rather than partially blocking it. There is a spiritual totality here produced by the “human breath,” but what is produced is already ruined—“blistered,” “cracking,” and seen through its own dust. The fragmented sentences indicate something in addition to the romance of the ruin, however—namely the “[t]hings which have escaped, the landscapes of many childhoods.” The obliqueness of this interruptive reference shows how difficult it is to form a relationship with those escaped things from the affective landscapes of childhoods when the means of visibility are only brick-dust. Perhaps this is why the whole scene is unmistakably masculine, with little boys, old men, and dead men appearing or not. That is, the concretion of labor, bodies, breath, materials, and sunlight into paving slabs and plaster facings omits more than it includes, even when it seems to include everything, and there is a lingering unease amid the resulting fragmentation.

These materials are both objects of a perception and that which mediates and suspends perception. The rebuilt city is a “place of arcades, passages, easy ascents, good light” in which “the eyes twinkle, beseech and veil themselves,” as if blinded by the excessive visibility of the consumer city (36). Elsewhere the poem meditates on the light reflected by a small loop of wire: “Under my heel a loop of wire / Dragged in the dust is earth’s wide eye, / Unseen for days, / Unseen days” (38). These eyes are disembodied yet personified, a mode of visual perception blinded both by light and darkness, and in suspended relationship to the “I” of the subject.

Though subjects are scarce *City*, bodies are not. For example:

In an afternoon of dazzling sunlight in the thronged streets, I saw at first no individuals but a composite monster, its unfeeling surfaces matted with dust: a mass of necks, limbs without extremities, trunks without heads; unformed stirrings and shovings spilling across the streets it had managed to get itself provided with. (37–38)

Such an image of crowds is not unfamiliar. However, from here the text changes scale to the individuals in the crowd and, finally, to one individual: in the former, people are “made of straws, rags, cartons, the stuffing of burst cushions, kitchen refuse,” and, given this, it is claimed of the latter, “for a person made of such scraps she was beautiful” (38). Clive Bush writes that this passage “not only revalues something that has not truly been seen for what it is against a vision of a tempting and too ethically insistent wholeness, but also simultaneously recognizes, dispassionately, the loss of that wholeness. Even more subtly it articulates the depredations of the neurotic desire for wholeness that produces ‘composite monsters.’”⁴⁸ Thus the crowd, as composite, becomes individuals and then one individual, made of scraps. These entities and their sociality seem to be conditioned by these changes in scale, perception, perspective. The “I” doing the seeing changes register and position along with the text, and at a given time is only one partiality among others. Unlike the “eye of the developer” referenced earlier, the modes of perception in the poem do not seek a unified perspective, but exist conjoined with the fragmented material and affective landscapes of the city.

36 **Conclusion: Salvaging Community**

Fisher's nonrecuperative mourning is perhaps more than anything an attempt to disrupt and defer the consolidations of identity and belonging in the postwar period. If Fisher, and *City* in particular, is hard to "place," it is because it disavows the usual associations between identity, location, and scale, both in politics and poetry: its modernism is regional, and yet any discontent with modernization that it records is not transfigured into an elegy for some more authentic "English" identity. Here, I argue against the notion that "*City* revisits Eliot's *The Waste Land* not only in registering squalid and dull post-war landscapes but also in adopting a collage of heterogeneous materials that move towards achieving a unified whole."⁴⁹ Rather, whatever hints at unity or consensus remain subtle, as the poem constantly rejects the impulse to recuperate, salvage, and recover.

Michael Rubenstein has argued that modernizing public infrastructures "bind us together into groups that rely on the same networks of water pipes, gas lines, [and] power grids," thus creating informal and partially occluded communities of modernity.⁵⁰ Yet, while this essay shares his concern to "reevaluating literary representations of the welfare state," any community in *City* forms—if it does at all—through a built environment that is not connected but fragmented: destroyed and erased in some places, half-built in others, these modes being often indistinguishable (Rubenstein, *Public Works*, 8). This can be seen in the moments where the poem shows us what a different kind of salvaging would look like. For example, in "Starting to Make a Tree," there is some sort of community that salvages materials for a sculpture. The first part of this section is written in the first-person plural, as a "we" gathers together miscellaneous material for the purpose of constructing a tree made of scraps, like the girl in above passage (Fisher, *Long and the Short*, 39). As quixotic as this project may be, the tone here is genuine and thoughtful, with the endeavor treated as work rather than as play. The cityscape both lacks particularity, as it "stretched away" on all sides, yet characteristically presents the reader with a litany of random materials culled from its streets and houses: "a great flock mattress; two carved chairs; cement; chicken-wire; tarpaulin; a smashed barrel; lead piping; leather of all kinds; and many small things" (40). These collect in a space that has an almost postapocalyptic quality, with the "burnt, chemical blue of the soil" paired against the "even hue of the sky which seemed to have been washed with a pale brownish smoke" (40). The day ends with the tree unfinished, yet the makers and the salvagers still discussing how they might best put this list of materials to use for the sake of making a "very beautiful" tree (40). These fragments of the city, like Fisher's Birmingham, enable a sort of perceiving, thinking, and being-with, not because there is something special about its historic character or future prospects, but simply because they are available and at hand.

The penultimate section of *City*, "The Wind at Night," ends with a rumination on fragmentation; that, despite how the speaker may want to keep the world singular, it fragments itself between the imaginary and the real, "countries on the map divide and pile up like ice-floes," and the material divisions of "iron fences and the shallow ditches

of the countryside" that prevent passage (43). These reflections speak both to the way the poem brings forth detail, particularity, and locality only to problematize their operations. Read in the context of slum clearance, the real losses and transformations of the local are registered as are the contradictions and overdeterminations of those spaces. Rather than tell a coherent, singular story of postwar development, the poem dwells with fragmentation and ambivalence.

Notes

1. Roy Fisher, *Birmingham River* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 11, quoted in Peter Barry, "Birmingham's what I think with: Roy Fisher's Composite-Epic," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 1 (2000): 87–105, 91.

2. Roy Fisher, quoted in Peter Barry, "Language and the City in Roy Fisher's Poetry," *English Studies* 67, no. 3 (1986): 234–49, 240. Fisher says this, referring specifically to *City*, in a 1975 interview with Jed Rasula and Mike Erwin for Grosseteste Review Books. He says that the unnamed city of the poem is "a city which has already turned into a city of the mind" (Roy Fisher, interview with Jed Rasula and Mike Erwin, in *19 Poems & An Interview* [Grosseteste, 1975], 12–38, 12).

3. Christine Berberich, Neil Campbell, and Robert Hudson, "Affective Landscapes: An Introduction," *Cultural Politics* 9, no. 3 (2013): 313–22.

4. Roy Fisher, quoted in Robert Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents, 1950–2000* (Liverpool University Press, 2005), 79.

5. John Kerrigan, "Roy Fisher on Location," in *The Thing About Roy Fisher: Critical Studies*, ed. John Kerrigan and Peter Robinson (Liverpool University Press, 2000), 16–46, 19.

6. Peter Barry, *Poetry Wars: British Poetry of the 1970s and the Battle of Earls Court* (Salt Publishing, 2006).

7. Meanwhile, Fisher's approach to half-destroyed city through collaging effects seems to anticipate work like Ciaran Carson's 1989 *Belfast Confetti*, despite the particular historical context of the latter work.

8. Lauren Berlant, "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (2016): 393–419, 394.

9. Simon Gunn, "Ring Road: Birmingham and the Collapse of the Motor City Ideal in 1970s Britain," *The Historical Journal* 61, no. 1 (2018): 227–48, 228; The latter response is perhaps exemplified by the conservatism of John Betjeman. See Peter Merriman, "'A new look at the English landscape': Landscape architecture, movement and the aesthetics of motorways in early postwar Britain," *cultural geographies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 78–105, 91.

10. Kelly M. Rich, "'Nowhere's Safe': Ruinous Reconstruction in Muriel Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means*," *ELH* 83, no. 4 (2016): 1185–209, 1187.

11. Ben Highmore, "Playgrounds and Bombsites: Postwar Britain's Ruined Landscapes," *Cultural Politics* 9, no. 3 (2013): 323–36, 324; The link between war and housing production was in some cases explicit: Ashley Maher writes that "ex-aircraft factories produced approximately one-third of postwar temporary houses" ("Swastika arms of passage leading to nothing": Late Modernism and the 'New' Britain," *ELH* 80, no. 1 [2013]: 251–85, 259).

12. A disposition prefigured by the likes of Clough Williams-Ellis. See Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Modernism, Bombsites and British Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13.

13. Roy Fisher, *The Long and the Short of It: Poems 1955–2010*, 2nd ed. (Bloodaxe Books, 2012), 33–34.

14. Beryl Pong, *British Literature and Culture in Second World Wartime: For the Duration* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 192.

15. Eric Falci, "Place, Space, and Landscape," in *A Concise Companion to Postwar British and Irish Poetry*, ed. Nigel Alderman and C. D. Blanton (Wiley, 2009), 200–20, 209, 211.

16. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Michael Shanks, and Matthew Tiews, "Archaeology, Modernism, Modernity," *Modernism/modernity* 11, no. 1 (2004): 1–16, 4.

17. See David Matless, "Geographies of the Reconstruction," in *Landscape and Englishness* (Reaktion Books, 2016), 275–317.

18. Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, 3rd ed. (Continuum International, 2007), 10.

19. While the destruction of the war may have led to an altered political landscape that made large-scale planning possible, slum clearance was a more long-standing practice, with its height actually coming in the late 1960s due to the expansion of public housing (J. A. Yelling, "The Incidence of Slum Clearance in England and Wales, 1955–85," *Urban History* 27, no. 2 [2000]: 235–54, 236).

20. All together some 4 million homes were destroyed or damaged during the war, in addition to the extensive damage caused to infrastructure and other kinds of buildings (Pablo Sendra, "Revisiting Public Space in Post-War Social Housing in Great Britain," *Proyecto, Progreso, Arquitectura* 9 [2013]: 114–31, 116).

21. Although slum clearance was a priority for urban planning, Yelling writes that it emerged as a common sense in policy more slowly. The Housing Act of 1935, however, signals a shift from small to large scale slum clearance as a priority for cities. He writes that "[b]y the mid 1930s whole parts of cities were frequently described as slums, extending well beyond the remit of current clearance operations" (J. A. Yelling, "The Origins of British Redevelopment Areas," *Planning Perspectives* 3, no. 3 [1988]: 282–96, 288).

22. Ben Jones, *The Working Class in Mid-Twentieth-Century England: Community, Identity, and Social Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2012), 16.

23. Leigh Michael Harrison, "Factory Music: How the Industrial Geography and Working-Class Environment of Post-War Birmingham Fostered the Birth of Heavy Metal," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 1 (2010): 145–58, 146.

24. Herbert Manzoni, quoted in David Adams, "Everyday Experiences of the Modern City: Remembering the Post-War Reconstruction of Birmingham," *Planning Perspectives* 26, no. 2 (2011): 237–60, 244.

25. Peter J. Larkham and Keith D. Lilley, "Plans, Planners and City Images: Place Promotion and Civic Boosterism in British Reconstruction Planning," *Urban History* 30, no. 2 (2003): 183–205, 183.

26. David Parker and Paul Long, "'The Mistakes of the Past'? Visual Narratives of Urban Decline and Regeneration," *Visual Culture in Britain* 5, no. 1 (2004): 37–58, 41.

27. Alison Ravetz, *The Government of Space: Town Planning in Modern Society* (Faber, 1986), 75.

28. Alison Ravetz, *Council Housing and Culture: The History of a Social Experiment* (Routledge, 2001), 133.

29. Ben Jones suggests that "residualization implies a process whereby the provision of a particular tenure (in this case council housing) is targeted at poorer households, rather than catering for the general housing needs of the wider population" ("Slum Clearance, Privatization and Residualization: the Practices and Politics of Council Housing in Mid-twentieth-century England," *Twentieth Century British History* 21, no. 4 [2010]: 510–39, 511).

30. Ray Forrest and Alan Murie, *Selling the Welfare State: The Privatisation of Public Housing* (Routledge, 1988), 40.

31. Peter Robinson, introduction to *The Thing About Roy Fisher: Critical Studies*, ed. John Kerrigan and Peter Robinson (Liverpool University Press, 2000), 12; Bryan C. Chitwood, "Tom Pickard and the Voices of Postwar British Poetry," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 66, no. 3 (2020): 361–84, 362. Chitwood argues that in this "fantasy," political and ethical commitments determine poetic form, in particular the poet's relationship with modernism. I am arguing here that Fisher's heterogeneity complicates this fantasy of political/poetical association.

32. Geoffrey Hill was disparagingly described by Tom Paulin as a "chthonic nationalist" (quoted in Neil Roberts, *Narrative and Voice in Postwar Poetry* [Longman, 1999], 72).

33. See Peter Middleton, "Warring Clans, Podsolized Ground: Language in Contemporary UK Poetry," in *Modernist Legacies: Trends and Faultlines in British Poetry Today*, ed. Abigail Lang and David Nowell Smith (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 17–39, 23.

34. Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins, introduction to *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry*, ed. Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3–30, 10. See also Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, 2nd ed., (Edinburgh University Press, 2000).
35. Sean O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse: Essays on Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (Bloodaxe Books, 1998), 114.
36. Peter Barry, "Language and the City in Roy Fisher's Poetry," *English Studies* 3 (1986): 234–49, 236.
37. Magdalena Kay, *Poetry Against the World: Philip Larkin and Charles Tomlinson in Contemporary Britain* (Routledge, 2018), 13.
38. "Postmodern" was similarly eschewed, at least as a label, by Fisher's modernist contemporaries. See Juha Virtanen, *Poetry and Performance During the British Poetry Revival 1960–1980: Event and Effect* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 15.
39. Paula Derdiger, *Reconstruction Fiction: Housing and Realist Literature in Postwar Britain* (Ohio State University Press, 2020), 25.
40. Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, "The New Brutalism," *October* 136 (2011): 37.
41. Samuel Rogers, "'Local Site and Historical Depth': Briggflatts, A Drunk Man, and British Modernist Poetics of Place," *English: Journal of the English Association* 65, no. 251 (2016): 332–62, 334.
42. Rogers, "Local Site and Historical Depth," 350. See also Robert Crawford, "MacDiarmid in Montrose," in *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry*, ed. Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 33–56.
43. In this way they are an anticipation of the temporality of the unbuilt that Ashley Carse and David Kneas find in contemporary global modernization projects. See Ashley Carse and David Kneas, "Unbuilt and Unfinished: The Temporalities of Infrastructure," *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 10, no. 1 (2019): 9–28.
44. Like Sinfield, Simon Jarvis pointedly notes that Fisher's cities link the affects of British social democracy with the ideologies against which it is putatively opposed ("A Burning Monochrome: Fisher's Block," in *The Thing About Roy Fisher: Critical Studies*, ed. John Kerrigan and Peter Robinson [Liverpool University Press, 2000], 173–92, 178, 177).
45. Ian Gregson, *Contemporary Poetry and Postmodernism: Dialogue and Estrangement* (Macmillan Press, 1996), 191.
46. Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 1972), 168.
47. Brutalist buildings were meant to evince their connection with the local site through natural weathering. The buildings have become only more dismal in Britain, however, due to the fact that concrete does not respond well to rain. Barry referring to *City*, notes the "sharp contrast . . . between the massive funereal pomp of blackened Victorian public buildings and utilities and the contemporary greyish-white concrete buildings, which don't weather but merely turn vaguely shabby" (Barry, "Language and the City," 244).
48. Clive Bush, "In Sight and Time: Some Patterns of Appearance in Roy Fisher's Poetry," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 1 (2000): 107–28, 107–8.
49. Bassel Almasalmeh, "Transcending Boundaries: Modern Poetic Responses to the City" (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2007), 108.
50. Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism, and the Postcolonial* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 67.