

Concerning Roundabouts

Conception notes

concerning roundabouts is an experimental, process-led exploration of methods that interweave material, embodied knowledge and language. The primary output is an uncreative visual poem, constructed from five textual sources:

1. Highway code: Rule 184 – 190 Roundabouts.
2. *Wood Engraving*, by George E. Mackley, London: The National Magazine Company, 1948.
3. Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. By R. E. Latham, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951, pp. 66-68.
4. 'My Chances / *Mes Chances*. A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies' by Jacques Derrida, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, pp. 348-349.
5. Road names (Street signs / Google Maps).

The poem is a response to a call from Brad Freeman for an Artist Book insert for the Journal of Artists Books 45 (JAB 45) and involved the transposition of a seven mile stretch of my commute between Bristol and Bath, on the A420, to the space of a sixteen-page, offset litho-printed booklet.

The project sets up a play between word and image, screen and paper; between digital and analogue making processes. Driving (highly skilled) is contrasted with woodblock cutting (relatively unskilled). The double mini roundabout requires maximum concentration and can be read as pause, as choice, as node, as nexus, as aporia. The Epicurean clinamen (swerve) is introduced to, and possibly fucks up, the space of the book. The swerve suggests possibilities for a change of direction, a change of mind, a veering off course.

The booklet is designed for eye and hand. On paper, the poem reads left to right (west to east) and, turned, right to left (east to west). Atomic and aporetic texts run perpendicular to the road and read north to south, or south to north. On screen, the poem reads only from left to right, with neck craning necessary.

the technical / instructional language of a manual on wood engraving and the Highway Code rules for roundabouts

A play between the profusion and fluidity of everyday experience and the distillations of art; a play between thought and writing.

Journey – Google Maps – Photoshop – Illustrator – print – collage – linocut – woodcut (plum wood from garden) – scanner – InDesign – offset litho print.

As you move through time-space, words flow in and out of your consciousness. Each mode of travel generates its own mode of word-flow. Driving is a skilled activity that requires different levels of concentration over the course of any journey. You come to a double mini-roundabout.

The roundabout, in the context of the whole journey, is a metaphor for the writing of a poem. The road is the everyday; the roundabout is a moment of heightened concentration, where a series of decisions is made – right, left, straight on. Stop, start, slow, fast – the avoidance of other vehicles. The writing of a poem is an interruption in the normal flow of words; a ganglion, a nexus of decisions regarding the sound, shape, space, meaning of word forms.

But it is a double metaphor - the roundabout is a wordless zone, as the totality of the body-mind is required to traverse safely from one side to the other. The roundabout might also induce doubt, prompt decisions that cannot be made. Nothing is left, but a wrong, or a right direction taken. A passage made, or a passage blocked.

Aporetic / To make a decision, or to be at a loss

Valiur Rahaman, in his book *Interpretations: Essays in Literary Theory* (2011), explained aporia as a creative force in both the artist and their art; it is, for the artist, an edgeless edge of the text or a work of art.

or to raise objections.

Jacques Derrida employed the term to "indicate a point of undecidability, which locates the site at which the text most obviously undermines its own rhetorical structure, dismantles, or deconstructs itself"