

David Berridge Interview with if p then q September 2013

if p then q: What is *Bring the Thing* about, what are some of the areas you are hoping to address or explore?

David Berridge: I wanted to explore a notational, diary-like writing, closely connected to daily events, thoughts, and conversations. I was interested in a minimal page-based poetry, whose form and structure came from the shifting visual, oral and denotative properties of its words, letters, and syllables. I wanted to bring these two interests together, see how they connected and contradicted each other.

Related to this I was interested in live writing, that takes places in specific locations and times. Often, in my writing, that liveness has been something constructed through many drafts and over a long period of time (BLACK GARDENS, for example, was an act of writing in the moment that then took 18 months to finish). As *Bring the Thing* developed, it became a way to work between these two senses of time, how writing inhabits and moves between them.

Bring the Thing connected in my mind to that “first thought, best thought” (of Allen Ginsberg and Bernadette Mayer) and also the “my condensery” (of Lorine Niedecker). I thought (as Mayer says somewhere of *Midwinter Day*) that I might be getting the mind prepared for a response in the moment. More likely I think the space I work in is one of lags, delays, reconstruction, fiction, proposition, and time travel in all directions.

if p then q: Can you explain the choice of form for the book, 100 days?

David Berridge: I read the book whole for Footsy Index in Camberwell in June, and Jeff Hilson, who was also reading, asked me if I had written it in 100 days. And I said no, but then afterwards I thought, maybe it was 100 days. The main period of writing would have been about that duration. Maybe exactly that duration.

I think early on I had some of the fragments and sequence in place, but without the framing of days. I also probably expected that one per page would work well. But that didn't seem to have the right shape or rhythm, create the right experience in the page or book space.

The framework of 100 days seemed to create that, and prompted the writing and shaping of the rest of the sequence, as well as the arrangement of days on the page. It wasn't a constraint that determined the writing from the beginning, but it was one that shaped and edited, that emerged out of the writing itself and questions about what kind of architecture it required.

if p then q: I initially suggested laying *Bring the Thing* out as one day per page. Why did you not want to do that?

David Berridge: It interests me this architecture of minimalism (or any writing). To list again some of the examples we have talked about before: the single word on the page that we find in Saroyan's *Coffee Coffee*, the instructional language (also one per page) of Lawrence Weiner's *Statements*, the freedom to have titles of any length in Ian Hamilton Finlay's one word poem issue of *poor.old.tired.horse*.

All these inform a more a more general sense of framing and context, space and presentation. How important, and in what way, is lots of white space or its absence? Does it ever mean the same for a reader as it does for the author? At Yoko Ono's Serpentine Gallery show in 2012 I thought the casualness of her instructional scores was not brought out by an attempted casualness of

presentation: slips of paper dropped on the floor, handwritten texts on the wall. Something more contrary and oppositional was needed.

I have also thought about this in relation to some of the *if p then q* books. Each of Tim Atkins' *1000 Sonnets* need a page (inside the vast potential frame of the title), but Tom Jenks' *Items*, and Geof Huth's *ntst* both fill the page. Both of these decisions about space feel completely right for the contents... And today, James, unpacking your own book-in-a-box *A dog*. from zimZalla, the blast of yellow color, still the smell of paint on the box...

So, in *Bring The Thing*, some days are more important than others, some naturally group with other days. There's a pattern and rhythm made within this period of time. There's also a fast pace I think, a rhythm for a voice that goes through all these days, so very much not a set of poems arrayed for contemplation. It's too restless.

if p then q: Where does this book fit in to the many books you've already had published?

David Berridge: One good thing about seeing different projects take shape as books - beginning with *The Moth is Moth This Money Night Moth* - is hopefully getting some idea of these ongoing, disruptive and continuing dialogues that run through different aspects of my writing.

Sometimes I think there is a distinct set of concerns around minimalism, aspects of *The Moth Is Moth This Money Night Moth* that I wanted to continue to explore in *Bring the Thing*, and that in some ways had been left hanging after that earlier book. Notions of density, embodiment, a private language, how to work within a set of materials that are (made) opaque and object like.

At the same time, *Bring the Thing* seems discursive, speech-based, close to *The Poet is Working* or even *The Fluxus President*, a novella. In the personal library of my mind *Bring the Thing* is having a conversation with Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* and Joe Brainard's *I Remember*. It even seems possible to view *Bring the Thing* as a novella of sorts.

if p then q: Are such labels and categories important?

David Berridge: I like these labels, genres, because they do suggest different work spaces, different histories and potentials. Perhaps the link across all of these writings is some sense of project and response that is tied to the form of the book.

In *Turf*, for example, that sense of project comes through quite literally as a set of materials in a box - including essay, several chapbooks of poems, and other small pamphlets of supporting notes and images.

In *Bring the Thing* it feels like all these different spaces and forms of language are absorbed into the structure of the book and the quite particular language that unfolds for talking about things (about everything).

Thinking about it now, perhaps the architectures of both books - different genres in *Turf* and that patterning of days and lexicon in *Bring the Thing* - are both containers that allow a sense of movement: going outside, returning, inbetween, inside, different registers, pitches, moods, places, and times.

if p then q: Who are you reading at the moment?

David Berridge: Over the last few months I've been reading lots of essays which grapple with these ideas of now-ness and response, and what form that should take on the page, including Masha Tupitsyn (*Laconia: 1200 Tweets on Film and Love Dog*), Etel Adnan (*Paris, When It's Naked*), Brandon La Belle (*Diary of an Imaginary Egyptian*), and Viktor Shklovsky (*A Hunt for Optimism*).

Moving to Hastings seems to have brought out a love of Southern Gothic, so I've got into the horror of Flannery O'Connor. Poetry-wise, some of what I've been enjoying and exploring emerges in the configuration of Tom Jenks' *Items, I Live I See: Selected Poems by Vsevolod Nekrasov*, Lucy Harvest Clarke's *Baba*, Andy Spragg's *To Blart & Kid* and (moving into the interzone of fiction and poetry, with a strong focus on the tactility of the book form itself), *Anytime Return* by T.A. Wingfield.

I've also been editing and publishing books under the VerySmallKitchen imprint and I enjoy the particular relation that unfolds in "reading" a text through the process of making a published book, this last month with titles by Nikolai Duffy and Ohad Ben Shimon.

if p then q: What's next for David Berridge?

David Berridge: I am working on a number of collaborative publications with Mary Paterson, S J Fowler, James Wilkes, and seekers of lice. Each of these projects has enabled spaces of writing which seemed impossible before - like writing distinct poems in response to another poem, maybe labelled with date and time of making.

It has been/is a challenge to construct a dialogue like that, piece by piece, trusting that, rather than, as I often do, gathering a large assemblage of material, then editing and finding the shape within that over a longer and often self-determined period of time.

I'm working on some book length projects in poetry and fiction, and perhaps one thing that links them, in addition to those themes of notation and response, is an interest in the shape of writing, quite literally its shape on the page, how that relates to an incessant activity of thoughts, bodies, and speech being made, lost, remembered, forgotten, invented, and mistaken.

I'm also at the beginning of a research project on the 100 page book as this site where poetry, fiction, essay, literature and art practice have traditionally met. It's a hugely general category in some ways, but I do think there is a particular space of thought and writing that is there in the books I'm thinking of, and which I want to unfold some more, into another 100 page book.