

Note on the Contemporary Writing Environments Conference

On 8-10 July 2004, Brunel University in west London hosted an international conference on 'Contemporary Writing Environments'. The title was designed to include a wide range of ethical, cognitive, social and material environments for writing. The diversity of responses to the call for papers led to the organisation of panels on 'Margins, Minorities and "Minor" Literatures'; 'London, England, Great Britain, Europe, The World!'; 'Critical Fictions'; 'Location Location Location'; 'Poetry Language Theory'; 'Postcolonial Spaces'; 'The Place of Poetry'; 'Creative Environments'; 'New Media'; and 'Inside(rs)/Outside(rs)'. In addition to papers on Arab women writers, the Postfeminist novel, Aboriginal poetics, rural and urban contexts, ecopoetics, and digital spaces, a number of papers addressed the work of specific authors including Doris Lessing, Iain Sinclair, Julian Barnes, Zadie Smith, Paul Auster, Jeanette Winterston, Jack Spicer, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Madeleine Gins, Rae Armantrout, James Kelman and Sarah Waters. Provocative plenary addresses by Andrew Gibson, Thomas Docherty, and Charles Bernstein focussed on the theoretical and institutional contexts for contemporary writing. The conference was also designed to support a dialogue between critics and practitioners, as well as between genres (poetry, prose, digital writing and other mixed media formats). A highlight of the conference was two sets of readings by Kate Fagan, Adeena Karasick, Peter Minter, Hazel Smith, Miles Champion, Kristin Kreider and Peter Manson. The conference was convened by Stephen Benson and William Watkin, and the readings by Andrea Brady. Discussions regarding a published volume of papers from the conference are currently underway.

The Contemporary Writing Environments conference was the first of a biennial series of events and international gatherings organised through **Brunel's Centre for Contemporary Literature**. [<http://www.brunel.ac.uk/depts/eng/bccl.htm>] BCCL was recently founded to support a major research group on contemporary (in particular experimental) writing at Brunel University, and the well-established programme in Creative Writing run by the English Department. As a national centre of excellence in this rapidly expanding research field, BCCL has hosted talks by major authors from the UK and US, and collaborates with the University of Southampton and Birkbeck College, University of London in the development of web-based resources. One of the most exciting recent developments at BCCL has been the establishment of the Brunel Archive of Contemporary Experimental Writing. This archive collects work by innovative British writers, seeking especially to protect ephemeral

publications such as chapbooks and self-published material for future generations of scholars. The archive subscribes to many of the UK's most important small presses and little magazines, and will soon be expanding to incorporate authors' manuscripts, correspondence, Web logs and Web-based writing. We are also building up a substantial collection of recordings of performances in the UK by poets, fiction writers and critics. Our effort to make these recordings available via the internet has been substantially aided by the advice of Charles Bernstein and his group at **PennSounds** [<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound>], the archive hosted by the University of Pennsylvania. This archive will augment the collection of web-based writing at Nottingham Trent University's **trAce centre** [<http://trace.ntu.ac.uk>], and the collection of primary material at the **Poetry Library** on the South Bank [<http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk>], which also focuses on more mainstream writers and publishers. For more information on the archive, or the programme of the BCCL, please contact Dr Stephen Benson at stephen.benson@brunel.ac.uk.

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