

<b>Institution: university of Salford</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: D29 English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study: Writing and the small presses</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research in writing and the small presses at the University of Salford has directly impacted upon the creation of new contexts and networks for the development and showcasing of innovative writing. It has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed novel approaches to publishing poetry and influenced new publishing ventures;</li> <li>• Shaped new places and spaces for performance and inspired and supported new generations of poets in creating career paths in their field;</li> <li>• Diversified audiences through the creation of a lively alternative literary scene committed to experimental methodologies and defined by inclusive communities of expression and original forms of participation; and</li> <li>• Enabled the creation of an archive of performances, a unique resource for the experimental writing scene.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p><b>The key researchers and positions they held at the institution at the time of the research are as follows:</b> Dr Scott Thurston (from 2004), School of Arts and Media. This case study is underpinned by the following research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>2011:</b> <u>Talking Poetics: Dialogues in Innovative Poetry</u>. This AHRC funded research project, based on a series of interviews with four major innovative poets, focuses on the most important creative issues facing these poets, including their views on innovation, on literary theory and literary history, on teaching creative writing, politics, gender, aesthetics, performance and language. The research uses the interview format to co-create and present a unique series of complex statements about contemporary poetic practice in partnership with prominent practitioners, in a way accessible to a range of audiences.</li> <li>• <b>2010:</b> <u>Innovative Poetry in Britain Today</u> focuses on the transformation in how innovative poetry in Britain has been published and read in recent years. The research examined Richard Caddel and Peter Quartermain's 1998 introduction to their anthology <i>OTHER: British and Irish Poetry since 1970</i>, and extracted three key concepts from it: the poetics of displacement, the politics of identity, and the tradition of dissent. The research found that this set of concepts had explanatory power for dealing with the work of three contemporary poets active in the UK: Robert Sheppard, Caroline Bergvall and Andrea Brady.</li> <li>• <b>2007:</b> <u>'If poetry is private language aspiring to be public, how should one write?'</u> explores the relationship between innovative form and audience, and explores North American Language poet Barrett Watten's writing on the jazz musician Anthony Braxton, which identifies formal variety as progressive practice. The research analysed the work of contemporary innovative British poet Ira Lightman to examine how his formally diverse work was reaching a larger audience than is common for experimental writing in the UK, finding an analogy between Braxton's diverse musical practice and Lightman's mixture of avant-garde and populist strategies in his poetry. The piece argues for the value of these strategies as a way of extending the audience for challenging art.</li> <li>• As co founder and co-editor of the <i>Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry</i> (2008), editor of <i>The Radiator</i>, a journal of contemporary poetics (2002-), and editor of the first collection of critical essays on the poet Geraldine Monk for Salt Publishing's 'Companions' series (2007), Thurston has extended and enriched the critical reception of innovative poetry and enabled new audiences to develop their appreciation and understanding of the field.</li> </ul>

### 3. References to the research

#### Key outputs

1. Thurston, S. 2011, *Talking Poetics: Dialogues in Innovative Poetry with Karen Mac Cormack, Jennifer Moxley, Caroline Bergvall and Andrea Brady*, First Edition, Shearsman Books, Bristol, UK. ISBN: 9781848611917 (REF 2)
2. Thurston, S. 2011. 'States of Transformation: Maggie O'Sullivan's 'Busk, Pierce' and Excla' in *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing), pp. 179-202. ISBN 978 1 87685 773 8 (REF 2)
3. Thurston, S 2010, 'Innovative Poetry in Britain Today', *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 60 (April 2010), (Tenerife: Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Facultad de Filología, Universidad de La Laguna), 15-30. [URL](#) (REF 2)
4. Thurston, S 2007 'If poetry is private language aspiring to be public, how should one write?', in *Poetry and Public Language*, edited by Tony Lopez and Anthony Caeshu, Shearsman Books, Exeter, UK, pp.256-262. ISBN 9781905700646
5. Thurston, S. 2007, 'Audience and Representation: Method and Technique', *The Paper* 9 (September 2007), 39-53. [URL](#)
6. Thurston, S. and O'Sullivan, M. 2004. 'Maggie O'Sullivan: Substance and Transformation / Maggie O'Sullivan and Scott Thurston: An Interview', in *Poetry Salzburg Review* 6 (Summer 2004), 6-20. [URL](#)
7. Thurston, S. & Robert Sheppard 2004 'Trying Something Else: Writing Poetry', in *The Road to Somewhere: A Creative Writing Companion* ed. by Robert Graham et al, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK, pp.207-216. ISBN 1403916403

#### Poetry

8. Thurston, S. 2011, *Reverses Heart's Reassembly*, First Edition, Veer Books, London, UK.
9. Thurston, S. 2010, *Internal Rhyme*, First edition, Shearsman Books, Exeter, UK.
10. Thurston, S. 2010, *Of Being Circular*, First edition, The Knives Forks and Spoons Press, Newton-le-Willows, UK.
11. Thurston, S. 2008, *Momentum*, First Edition, Shearsman Books, Exeter, UK.
12. Thurston, S. 2006, *HOLD: Poems 1994-2004*, First Edition, Shearsman Books, Exeter, UK.

#### Key grants

13. Talking Poetics: Dialogues in Innovative Poetry, 2009 AHRC, £16,240.00. Principal Investigator: S. Thurston.

### 4. Details of the impact

Thurston's research as both critic and practitioner in the context of innovative poetry and the UK small press scene has developed a focus on the relationship between innovative form, publication, professionalisation, performance and audience engagement. The impact of this research is as follows:

- The research has informed a practice methodology which has directly influenced the creative choices of new professional writers. It has enabled them to: place their work in an alternative context and to participate in a lively literary scene; to publish their work in magazines, chapbooks and anthologies; to start their own publishing initiatives; and to participate in the live context for literature established by Thurston's research practice by performing their work and setting up events. The success of a number of these ventures has developed the profile of alternative literary practice and brought it to wider national attention in the context of publishing and awards.
- As an example of this, Salford graduate Alec Newman set up his own small poetry press called The Knives Forks and Spoons Press (KFS), which over the last three years has blossomed into one of the most dynamic and exciting small press poetry publishers in the UK, with an expanding list of over 100 authors. The press was shortlisted for two years running for the Michael Marks Award for Best Publisher of Poetry in Pamphlet Form, and one of the press' authors has been shortlisted for the Michael Marks Best Pamphlet Award. As Newman states:

- *“KFS is committed to promoting new generations of poets working in an alternative literary tradition, and our poets’ careers are flourishing. Scott Thurston’s continuing support as an academic at Salford is essential to the success of this endeavour. His academic writing and his academic publications, such as the Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry, and his active role in The Other Room, where many KFS poets have performed, give critical validation to individual poets and to schools of poetry. By working together – as publisher and academic – with the universal goal of elevating the profile of alternative literary practice we have succeeded where previous generations have failed: we have brought alternative literature to the attention of mainstream publishers and event organisers.”*
- This year nine of the poets discovered by KFS were published by Bloodaxe, one of the three major poetry publishers in the UK, in a major new anthology called *Dear World and Everyone in It*. This has created a broad range of financially beneficial opportunities for young innovative writers that simply did not exist before. The press has also hosted four student interns from the research-led undergraduate and postgraduate creative writing programmes. Two of these students have subsequently gained full employment with publishing houses Electric Word (Birmingham) and Elektra Media (Manchester).
- Thurston’s commitment in bringing innovative poetry to new audiences led him to co-found The Other Room, a reading series devoted to innovative poetry and based in Manchester. Based on Thurston’s knowledge of contemporary poetry and contacts in the field, The Other Room has also had a significant impact on local literary culture, attracting a large number of internationally significant figures to Manchester to perform at the event. The series is therefore very closely informed by the knowledge and contacts Thurston has built up through his research as a writer, editor and interviewer. Developed in 2008, The Other Room is a free to attend, open to all, reading series, presenting experimental writers. So far it has entertained more than 1000 audience members who have seen over 100 performers. All performances are recorded and archived on the series website, constructing a rich open resource.
- The Other Room project website acts as a route to existing and further research and a community resource. It includes links to important resources for innovative poetry hosted by academic institutions, supports the development and sale of publications via the many small presses which produce them, and links wider communities to poetic practice and the growing community of poets it supports. The website has had 132,564 hits since January 2009 and currently receives an average of 130 hits per day. It contains around 40 hours of video recordings of performances and interviews with poets.
- As our users note:
  - *“I have to confess that The Other Room is a kind of lifeline for me: in a city that seems at times to be dominated by performance poetry evenings, it’s a real pleasure to go somewhere where the art of the bleeding obvious isn’t constantly on display.”*  
<http://otherroom.org/history/16-2/>
  - *“I couldn’t help but imagine all the future work last night’s attendees might go on to produce and the undoubtedly huge number of those attendees who’d look back and remember The Other Room nights as being key to their poetic development...”*  
<http://otherroom.org/history/06-08-2008-stuart-calton-maggie-o%e2%80%99sullivan/>
- Three significant local poets who have attended the Other Room regularly since its inception – Nigel Wood, Stephen Emmerson and Richard Barrett – have themselves begun their own publishing enterprises, events and magazines (Sunfish magazine, Department magazine and small press, the Counting Backwards reading series and the Writers Forum North creative writing workshop). All these writers subsequently studied at Salford on the MA Creative Writing: Innovation and Experiment, and Barrett is currently preparing a PhD proposal.
- The annual Other Room anthology has sold around 120 copies and is collected internationally by a number of important public archives such as the Poetry Collection at SUNY Buffalo, the Sackner Archive in Miami, Florida, the University of Wisconsin, Madison and the Poetry Library in London.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- Corroboration of influence on practice and publishing: Editor of Sunfish Magazine  
<http://sunfishpoetry.wordpress.com/>
- Corroboration of influence on new generations of poets and their careers: Managing Director of The Knives Forks and Spoons Press  
<http://www.knivesforksandspoonspress.co.uk/>
- Corroboration of the Other Room on writing and editing practice: Department Press editor  
<http://holdfirepress.wordpress.com/2012/08/06/four-poems-by-richard-barrett-4/>,
- Corroboration of the importance of Other Room to contemporary poetry: Department Press co-editor <http://stephenemerson.wordpress.com/poetry/>