

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Kingston University		
Unit of Assessment: 30 – Philosophy		
Title of case study: Understanding Contemporary Art: The Impact of a Philosophy of Contemporary Art on Postgraduate, Professional and Public Art Education		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name: Peter Osborne	Role: Professor of Modern European Philosophy	Period employed by submitting HEI: July 2010 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Aug 2013 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

Professor Osborne's research into the postconceptual character of contemporary art at Kingston University's Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) has challenged conventional wisdom in the subject. It has stimulated debate among art educators and professionals and has been a driver of change in the way postgraduate education in art is understood and delivered internationally; offering an alternative to the model of 'practice as research' that encourages students to utilise philosophical materials in the production of new work. Through a series of collaborations with major global art institutions in Sweden, the United States, Brazil, Russia and Mexico, he has enhanced wider cultural understanding and awareness of contemporary art that has informed public attitudes on the subject.

2. Underpinning research

Osborne's research represents the first attempt at a systematic philosophical construction of a critical concept of contemporary art as part of a historical ontology of art. This construction has three main theoretical features: (i) an elaboration of the distinctive temporality of the contemporary as a form of historical time [R1]; (ii) an account of the historical-ontological structure of contemporary art (critically construed) as distinctively 'postconceptual' (understood as a reflective mediation of conceptual and aesthetics aspects) [R2]; (iii) the use of a transdisciplinary method of concept construction that critically mediates art-historical, sociological and philosophical concepts [R3].

The research into the specifically postconceptual character and distinctively discursive coding of critically validated contemporary art led to two experiments in teaching philosophy to artists, as part of the constitutive 'context of art', in postgraduate fine art education; the purpose of this was to conduct experimentation in the transformation of philosophical materials into artistic materials.

The research was conducted at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) at Kingston University between 2010 and 2019. It led to 38 visits by Osborne to international art schools and museums (Jan 2014 – Dec 2019), where he gave lectures and took part in public conversations. In this process, the dissemination and public engagements associated with the research itself became part of the research process, with respect to knowledge of institutions and different public artistic cultures, which fed back into the research outputs themselves. The standpoint of the institutions' interests became part of the empirical materials used to construct the concept of contemporary art. This produced impact grounded on the orientation of research towards questions posed by the standpoints of those institutions.

The research developed from more strictly philosophical questions about the historical ontology of contemporary art, via reflections on cultural and institutional forms, to interpretations of particular artworks, in an ongoing construction of mediations through which the philosophical categories acquire ever-greater historical determinacy.

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Within the submitting unit the context of the research was an ongoing collaboration with Éric Alliez (0.2 FTE at KU) and the research group he organizes at the University of Paris-8, Groupe Européen de recherches Philosophiques Transdisciplinaires (GERPT), where he also works. This collaboration had three main parts:

(i) Autumn 2010 – Summer 2012: the co-editing of the collection *Spheres of Action: Art and Politics*, for Tate Publishing, about the internationalization of the discourses about art in France, Italy and Germany since the 1970s [R4].

(ii) September 2011 – August 2013: the period of the £160,000 AHRC Speculative Project Grant, *Transdisciplinarity and the Humanities* for which Osborne was PI and Alliez one of the CIs. The main output was a special double issue of *Theory, Culture & Society* 'Transdisciplinary Problematics', for which Osborne wrote the theoretical overview [R3].

(iii) 2014 – 2016: a series of three International Symposia co-organized by Osborne for CRMEP with Alliez for GERPT, at the University of Paris-8, in Paris, on 'The Postconceptual Condition of Art', in December 2014, 2015 and 2016. CRMEP PhD students participated in these events. Revised versions of Osborne's papers to those symposia appear in [R2].

3. References to the research

R1 – Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London and New York, 2013, vi + 282 pp. and 24 b&w images. ISBN: 978-1-78168-094-0

R2 – Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays*, Verso, London and New York, 2018, xi + 224 pp. and 24 b&w images. ISBN: 978-1-78663-420-7 REF2ID: 30-11-1311

R3 – Peter Osborne, 'Problematizing Disciplinarity, Transdisciplinary Problematics', *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 32, nos 5–6 (Sept.–Nov. 2015), special double issue, Transdisciplinary Problematics, 3–35. DOI: [10.1177/0263276415592245](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276415592245) REF2ID: 30-12-1312

R4 – Peter Osborne (with Éric Alliez), 'Introduction', in *Spheres of Action: Art and Politics*, Tate Publishing, London/MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2013, pp. 7–17

Evidence of the quality of the underpinning research

R4 is an overview of the conceptual framework behind the commissioning of contributions to the collection *Spheres of Action*; it is co-published by two major art publishers. R1 was entered as Osborne's output 1 in REF 2014. It won the 2014 Annual Book Prize of the (USA) Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present.

4. Details of the impact

Osborne's research has had multiple impacts across the general area of understanding and learning. Two key impacts stand out; (i) Osborne's work has influenced the design and delivery of new curricula in postgraduate education of artists adopted by major global art-educational institutions; and (ii) he has challenged conventional wisdom around conceptions of contemporary art, stimulating debate about the concept of contemporary art among art professionals and publics alike. Osborne's research at CRMEP has had international recognition and his participatory engagement with stakeholders to his research (educators, professionals, public) has resulted in significant engagement and uptake.

The impact is of two main types within the general area of understanding and learning: (i) on the design and delivery of new curricula in two major international art-educational institutions; and (ii) in influencing leading fine art museums to transform and innovate their practices.

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(i) Postgraduate education of artists

This impact took place via two collaborations: each was based on exploring the consequences for curriculum design and delivery of postgraduate-level art education for artists of the conception of contemporary art as a postconceptual art elaborated in the underpinning research. The impact on educators and curricula occurred through Osborne's collaborations with the Royal Institute of Art (RIA) in Stockholm (Sweden) and Yale University School of Art (USA).

(a) Royal Institute of Art (RIA), Stockholm

Osborne was invited to design an experimental pilot in postgraduate art education, 2015 – 2017, 'Philosophy in the Context of Art' at RIA, which was then integrated into a broader collaboration with the CRMEP at Kingston; involving staff secondments to a Visiting International chair at RIA [S1]. This offered an alternative to the established art-research model of 'practice as research' (which attempts to recover an immanent 'research content' from art practices via existing academic discourses), encouraging artists to use philosophical materials as critical and artistic materials, reflectively, in the production of new work and writings.

Osborne was seconded to the RIA for six months (1 Aug 2015 – 31 Jan 2016). The collaboration comprised: (i) twice-yearly workshops, one in Stockholm, one in London, for 6 PhD students from each institution (Philosophy and Fine Art Practice students, respectively) in which they discussed new ways of thinking about the relations between their different disciplinary projects; (ii) an annual 'freestanding' Masters-level course, text- and project-based, 'Philosophy in the Context of Art', attracting artists and art students from Sweden and other European countries to the RIA; (iii) an end-of-semester-exhibition of the project artwork produced by the art students; (iv) an international conference, organised by Osborne, 'Useless Uses: Use and Uselessness in Contemporary Art' – supported by a grant of €20,000 to RIA from the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond [S2].

This proved highly successful, resulting in a commitment by the Rector of the institution to commit to institutional change: 'the RIA proceeded to hire faculty that were focused on research-based practices and to evolve a PhD Artist Practice degree' as a result of Osborne's research and engagement [S3]. This is supplemented by pedagogical benefits for the pilot group of 25 international artists on the 'Philosophy in The Context of Art' programme, taught by Osborne in 2015 – 2016, as well as subsequent artists taught within the programme.

(b) Yale University School of Art

The collaboration and impact at Yale University School of Art (YUSA) extended the idea behind the Stockholm pilot to inform the introduction a new Critical Studies postgraduate course within the MFA at YUSA in autumn 2016: 'Diving into the Wreck: Rethinking Critical Practice'. This was the first formal provision at YUSA (est. 1867) outside of the traditional craft-based programmes of Painting & Printmaking, Sculpture, Graphics, and Photography. It involved annual visits by Osborne: 2016 (3 days + Public Lecture), 2017 (4 weeks as a Visiting Professor and Critic), 2018 & 2019 (a week each time as a Hayden Distinguished Fellow and Professor, respectively); along with workshop participation in the 2019 Yale Summer School for Fine Art and Art History students held at the Paul Mellon Centre, London.

The visits included meeting all new MFA students, in small groups, near the start of their programmes, along with the Dean and her TA, to discuss the critical and conceptual aspects of their individual artistic practices. The Yale School of Art benefited institutionally regarding curriculum development, pedagogic practice and intellectual culture. As with the RIA in Stockholm, the collaboration '*generated a long-term commitment to institutional change, locating critical studies with respect to artist practice*' [S3]. The direct pedagogical beneficiaries of the research were the 240 MFA student-artists at Yale attending the Critical Studies course (60 per year for 4 years, 2016–20); however, impact transcends curriculum development alone and has resulted in closer discussions and exchange of ideas between faculty and students. In testimony to the ongoing impact of Osborne's research on artistic practice at Yale, the Dean writes that '*the students have asked for closer cooperation with other departments within the University in the hope of holding a university-wide conference dedicated to Adorno's Aesthetic Theory – a text used by Osborne in his lectures at Yale*' [S3].

(ii) Professionals and publics in art museums and international arts organizations

Osborne's research led to invited public lectures at 19 major art museums internationally (2014–19), in which the perspective and arguments of a transdisciplinary approach to the critical philosophical interpretation of contemporary art were introduced to non-academic audiences of art professionals and publics. This challenged conventional comprehension of contemporary art, contributing to wider institutional and public understanding of the philosophical aspects of contemporary art. This impact is exemplified by three high-profile events: in Sao Paulo, Moscow and Mexico City. Each presentation drew on the underpinning research to address a topic specific to the occasion, its institutional context, and its audience.

a) São Paulo 2014 – Opening Keynote at the 2nd World Biennale Forum,

Delivering the opening keynote lecture at the 2nd World Biennale Forum in São Paulo, Osborne's talk 'Contemporaneity, Biennials and Social Form' (sponsored by the British Council) attracted an audience of c. 800 international and local artworld professionals. Live-streamed online, it was subsequently published [S4]. The opening lecture was followed by participation in a workshop for art professionals, with 50 participants. A co-director of the event (and co-curator of the São Paulo Biennale 2014) writes that the Forum was '*a landmark for the professional art field in Brazil. Osborne's keynote, on the first day of the event, filled the auditorium to capacity, and defined the concepts, questions and narratives for the rest of the event, and subsequently for the discussion in the professional and academic field.*' [S5]

b) Moscow 2018 – Opening Plenary at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts

Osborne was invited to give the opening plenary at the XLIVth Vipper conference in February 2018. Also sponsored by the British Council, the talk was a direct engagement with the museum's theorization of its new institutional project, 'Pushkin XXI', and was attended by 120 international and local art world professionals. The lecture was subsequently published by the museum in both Russian and English [S6]. The talk was referred to in the report on the event in the influential Russian newspaper *Kommersant* [S7].

The curatorial team that organized the event subsequently wrote that '*... your [Osborne's] contribution to the Conference was inestimable. We believe that together we have created the new theoretical basis and new perspectives for the dialogue of contemporary and classic art... it would have been impossible to do without you. We hope that it is just the beginning of our way towards the cross-cultural and international projects that will expand our perception of the classics and contemporary. We do hope that we could continue to follow this way together finding the new formats and ideas for collaboration.*' [S8]

The visit also included a public lecture at The Philosophical Club, Winzavod Center for Contemporary Art, Moscow (1 March 2018), attended by around 100 younger artists and art professionals [S9].

The translation of four chapters of *The Postconceptual Condition* [R1] into Russian in *Moscow Art Magazine*, 2015–2019 (issues 96, 98, 104, 109), laid the foundations for the reception of the Pushkin talk, as part of a participatory approach that has driven discussion around postconceptual art, allowing to Osborne to reach wider professional and public audiences.

c) Mexico City 2019 – Opening Keynote at the XIVth International Symposium for Theory of Contemporary Art (SITAC)

Lecture title, 'Historical Ontology of Art' – visit sponsored by Patronato de Arte Contemporáneo (PAC), a Mexican non-profit private arts foundation. The talk was attended by around 400 artists, art students and museum professionals, and is available on YouTube where it has received c. 2000 views [S10]. It was reported, with a photograph of Osborne delivering his lecture, on the back page of the main national newspaper, *La Reforma* [S11]. SITAC has played a crucial role in maintaining connections between international critical-academic discourses on art, the Mexican art world and younger artists, for whom it funds residencies.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1 – Art & Education [announcement](#) of Royal Institute of Art (RIA): Stockholm collaboration with CRMEP

S2 – [‘Useless Uses: Use and Uselessness in Contemporary Art’](#) conference materials

S3 – Testimonial by the Rector of the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm (2014 – 2016) and then Dean of the Yale University School of Art (2016 – 2020)

S4 – Lecture published in *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum No. 2*, Biennial Foundation/ Fundação Bienal de São Paulo/ Instituto de Cultura Contemporânea (ICCo), São Paulo, 2015, 15–27

S5 – Testimonial by the Co-Director of the World Biennial Forum and Co-Curator of the 2014 São Paulo Biennale

S6 – Lecture published as ‘Contemporizing the Classical/Classicizing the Contemporary’, in [Classics and Contemporary: Reflections](#). *Proceedings of the XLIXth Vipper Conference*, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, pp. 18–23 [in Russian and English]
<http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/id/eprint/44124/>

S7 – Report in Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3565373> – accessed 7 March 2018: circulation: over 120,000

S8 – Email from the Pushkin Museum Moscow curators’ team, 7 March 2018. This email includes translation of a quotation from the article in *Kommersant*.

S9 – [Philosophical Club](#), Winzavod Center for Contemporary Art, Moscow, (1 March 2018)

S10 – Mexico City lecture <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5u8TYMI3f7Q> 1.08–2.27 mins, with 1,953 views as of 30 November 2020

S11 – *La Reforma*, Mexico City, 19 January 2019, back page. Mexico City’s main broadsheet; circulation: over 400,000.