

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Huddersfield		
Unit of Assessment: 32 Art and Design		
Title of case study: Extended Play: Enabling Transdisciplinary Dialogue between Art, Design and Architecture in Exhibitions and Publishing		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011 – Present		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Alex Coles	Professor of Transdisciplinary Studies	November 2011 - Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: October 2012 – July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>EP [3.1, 3.2.] is a collaboratively-formed book series offering a new and innovative approach to publishing and a platform for creative practices that fall between traditional understandings of art, design and architecture. By placing both leading and emerging practitioners, curators, and theorists from across art, design and architecture alongside each other, EP brings agents within the creative economy into contact for the first time, instigating new creative approaches. EP has specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefited curators and gallery audiences by impacting curatorial methods in museums, galleries and biennales – specifically the V&A with a 20% increase on projected visitor figures, and the Venice Biennale. Previously unimagined exhibitions have been generated that capture typically neglected subjects, resulting in engagement with a broader audience across all three disciplines. Benefited prominent arts publisher Sternberg Press by impacting their editorial approach. Following EP, the embrace of a transdisciplinary range of disciplines has increased their audience in quantity and broadened it in scope, resulting in 12,000 thousand additional readers per year. 		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The core of the research process is found in its transdisciplinary method, as seldom have art, design and architecture been brought together in creative dialogue. Traditionally boundaries between disciplines created limitations for curators, writers and practitioners in what they do, where they are able to share it, and how it is valued. Professor Alex Coles and his research team's audit of the most regularly referenced, benchmark publications, from widely-read, image-driven design magazines, to text-heavy, academic journals, identified how these publications have contributed significantly to the limiting way art, design and architecture is made, distributed and understood. As a result, there was a need to raise awareness amongst practitioners, publishers and curators, of the creative and economic potential of a new type of collaborative practice that falls between traditional disciplines.</p> <p>Further evidence of the need for investigation between the disciplines came via public discussions that Professor Coles was invited to participate in; Coles, potential collaborators and cultural producers alike, communicated a growing frustration with disciplinary limitations. These included: 'Blurred Boundaries: Where Does Art End and Architecture Begin?' at RIBA, London (2016). In response to them, it became even clearer how the established conventions of the reception of art, design and architecture needed to be challenged, and would benefit from the</p>		

development of an innovative book series with a transdisciplinary method at its core. EP marked the launch of a new genre, providing the first transdisciplinary publishing platform that fluidly moves between both practice and theory in art, design and architecture with **EP Vol. 1 The Italian Avant-Garde: 1968-1976** and **EP Vol. 2 Design Fiction** [3.1., 3.2.].

EP is a product of Professor Alex Coles' extensive research on the relationships between creative disciplines which began in 2005 with a focus on the interdisciplinary dialogue between two disciplines, in this case art and design (explored in the books *DesignArt*, Tate Publishing, 2005, and *Design and Art*, MIT Press, 2007). Since his appointment at the University of Huddersfield (UoH) in November 2011, Coles broadened this into a focus on the transdisciplinary dialogue between art, design and architecture. Boundaries between these three creative disciplines were dissolved by Coles, revealing how professionals from each of the three areas were already embedded in one another's studios, culminating in the publication of **The Transdisciplinary Studio** [3.5]. The research process was characterised by close dialogue with creative practitioners, editors and industry professionals, which led to the finding that transdisciplinary approaches are only possible through close collaboration, and that frequently this dialogue was already taking place, without the head of the studio being explicitly aware of it and factoring it into their concept of how the studio works. From this came EP, underpinned by a number of further writings on the significance of the transdisciplinary as method for engaging the disciplines of art, design and architecture simultaneously '**Beyond DesignArt/Towards The Transdisciplinary**', '**The Art/Architecture Ping-Pong**' and **The Transdisciplinary Studio** [3.4., 3.3., 3.5]. Transdisciplinary method involves investigating a given problem or subject from the perspective of each of the three disciplines in order to ascertain a richer response to it.

To this end, an advisory panel was assembled to steer EP, with members pooled from the non-academic beneficiary groups of EP from theory and practice across the disciplines of art, design and architecture, including designers Peter Saville and Konstantin Grcic, curator Marianne Goebel, artist Ryan Gander and commercial gallerist Tim Neuger.

Additionally, a five-stage development process was formed to produce each volume of EP. By example, with EP Vol 2 'Design Fiction' [3.2.], first there was a closed seminar at the Jan Van Eyck Academy, Maastricht – a post-academic institute for research and production across art, design and architecture - to identify the volume's subject matter [<https://www.facebook.com/events/jan-van-eyck-academie/seminar-alex-coles-introduction-to-ep/369880983124089/>]. This was followed by a more formal open seminar to establish an editorial team from their current residents. Then over the next six months, a series of three editorial meetings were held to further work through the volume's editorial premise and commission chapters. This process placed transdisciplinary conversation and partnerships at the heart of the publication, from conception to production, modelling new methods of producing written outputs that reflect, represent and forward innovation in art, design and architecture. It was this attitude, approach and valuing that had been lacking in contemporary discourse, and was now noted as the catalyst for new practices emerging in curating and editing as well as the shifting attitudes articulated by prominent publishers, such as Sternberg Press.

3. References to the research

3.1. Coles, A, Rossi C, (eds.) EP Vol. 1 'The Italian Avant-Garde 1968-1976', Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2013 (co-edited book). ISBN: 9783943365498 <https://www.sternberg-press.com/product/ep-vol-1-the-italian-avant-garde-1968-1976/> [can be supplied on request]

3.2. Coles, A (ed.) EP Vol. 2 'Design Fiction' Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2016 (edited book). ISBN: 9783956790485 <https://www.sternberg-press.com/product/ep-vol-2-design-fiction/> [can be supplied on request]

3.3. Coles, A 'The Art/Architecture Ping-Pong', *Unspoken Places: Studio Olafur Eliasson*, Thames & Hudson, London, pp. 128-131, 2015 (authored chapter in book). ISBN:

9780500343135 <https://thamesandhudson.com/unspoken-spaces-9780500343135> [can be supplied on request]

3.4. Coles, A, *The Transdisciplinary Studio*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2012 (authored book). ISBN: 9781934105962 <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/transdisciplinary-studio> [can be supplied on request]

3.5. Coles, A 'Beyond DesignArt/Towards The Transdisciplinary', *Art and/or Design*, ed. Annett Zinsmeister, JOVIS, Berlin, 2014, bilingual (conference paper/authored chapter). ISBN: 9783868592559 <https://www.jovis.de/en/books/details/product/kunst-und-oder-design-br-ein-grenzgang.html> [can be supplied on request]

Both 3.1 and 3.2 are published volumes of EP that have been extensively reviewed in academic and non-academic publications (see Sources to Corroborate Impact 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8).

3.3 refers to a book on the transdisciplinary practitioner Olafur Eliasson published by leading arts publisher Thames & Hudson. Coles' writing on Eliasson was reviewed in *Art Monthly*, Issue 365, April 2013. <http://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/issue/april-2013>

In the case of 3.5, a committee at a world leading university in Stuttgart was responsible for selecting and inviting speakers, including Professor Coles, to the conferences based on a peer review process. Coles' writing on the transdisciplinary has been widely cited. See Leah Armstrong, 'Studio Studies', *West 86th*, Volume 24, no. 1, Spring-Summer, 2017, p. 123, 124, 125, 126, 127. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/693804>

3.4. and 3.5. demonstrate an argument for the pedagogic merits of transdisciplinarity and the development of a new type of role for the visual/textual director that incorporates aspects of the traditional role of the textual editor and the visual graphic designer. 3.4 was reviewed in *Art Monthly*, Issue 365, April 2013. <http://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/issue/april-2013>

4. Details of the impact

By placing both leading and emerging practitioners, curators, and theorists from across art, design and architecture alongside each other, EP [3.1, 3.2.] brought agents within the creative economy into contact for the first time, instigating new creative approaches. The EP series demonstrated a new awareness of the potential of the transdisciplinary and support of practices that did not entirely fit previous understandings of disciplines as singular. Prior to EP, when reading about their subject, creative practitioners read mostly image driven, discipline-specific publications; while academics adhered to text driven journals and books. EP changed this by providing a common ground in publishing for creative practitioners, curators, researchers and the spectrum of practices in between. In so doing, the publication of EP Vol 1 in 2013 [3.1.] facilitated a fertile space for new collaborations and an opportunity to challenge existing limitations that maintained strict disciplinary boundaries. As stakeholders, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Venice Biennale, Harvard Design Magazine and Sternberg Press were all able to utilise the findings of EP to bring further benefits for their audiences and networks.

Instigating A Positive Shift in the Creative Economy: Curating

The impact of EP was immediately felt following the publication of Vol. 1, as it provided inspiration for the development of a new design exhibition. In 2014, after reading EP Vol. 1 'The Italian Avant-Garde: 1968-1976', the Chief Curator of the Venice Architecture Biennale, invited Coles' co-editor, Associate Professor in Design History, Kingston University, to curate a portion of the biennale based on the premise of EP Vol. 1 – a transdisciplinary examination of Italian art, design and architecture - that Coles had shaped. This went on to alter Coles' co-editor's approach to curation and editorial projects, as she reflects, "Co-editing the Italian Avant-Garde was a valuable experience, that informed my subsequent participation in the 2014 **Venice Architecture Biennale**, where I curated an installation on Space Electronic. It was the Chief

Curator of the Venice Architecture Biennale's awareness of the EP book - specifically the chapter on Space Electronic - that led to the invitation to propose an installation for the Biennale 'in the first place' [5.1]. The 2014 Biennale included sixty-five participating nations and attracted 228,000 visitors and the Space Electronic section contributed to the way the biennale broadened the discussion of architecture to include previously neglected social spaces within architectural discourse, such as nightclubs. Coles' co-editor's chapter in Vol. 1 then became the premise of an entire exhibition she developed with **Vitra Design Museum** in 2018 devoted to nightclub design, a previously unexplored area in a gallery setting, titled 'Night Fever: Designing Club Culture – 1960 To Today'.

Director of Programs at the **Victoria & Albert Museum**, the world's largest museum of design and the decorative arts, Sophie McKinlay, attests to how "EP as a publication has led by example. V&A Dundee has used this publication in reading groups and to develop a more transdisciplinary programme which broadens the definition of design. Where in the past the V&A isolated design from art and architecture, it now endeavours to link them together, with a view to enhancing their creative possibilities. This represents a major epistemological shift in strategy for us, to a point whereby curatorially we now approach subjects and themes from a transdisciplinary perspective. EP has triggered a shift to a more expansive definition of design and as a result we have programmed exhibitions such as *Hello, Robot: Design Between Human and Machine* (November 2019-February 2020) which investigated the subject of robotic technology from multiple perspectives employing art, design and architecture." McKinlay concludes: "This perspective has meant that in 2019 we attracted over 350,000 visitors to the museum as a result of this type of programming, an increase of 20% over projected figures." [5.2].

Transforming Approaches in the Commercial Economy for the Better: Editing and Publishing

EP's distinctive approach led to the in-house editor at Sternberg Press, to subsequently redevelop the independent publication **Harvard Design Magazine**. When it was relaunched in 2014, the publication was transformed from being a text driven, academic journal exclusively devoted to design, to an award-winning magazine, which balances image and text to address a range of transdisciplinary topics. This approach of balancing image and text, drew in non-academic readers who would not have engaged previously with a text heavy publication. The editor of Harvard Design Magazine refers to how, "We completely reimagined the editorial purview and design direction of the magazine. EP was, and remains, a critical touchstone for how I approached the redesign process and all future issues of the magazine. It [the changes made after reading EP] had a massive effect on readership and reach, which increased from 10,000 copies per issue to 14,000" [5.3].

Prior to 2016, the Berlin based publisher of EP, **Sternberg Press**, founded in 1999 by Caroline Schneider, focused exclusively on art theory and practice, but since the success of the first two volumes of EP they have expanded this area of their publishing portfolio. "Prior to working on EP," comments Schneider, "our catalogue focused on art and its theorization. In 2013, we began incorporating aspects of both design and architecture, and since 2016 have commissioned accumulatively more titles that examine themes and trends common to art, architecture and design. Titles like 'Design by Accident' (2019) and 'Materialisation in Art & Design' (2019) have brought in the region of 1000 new readers to Sternberg Press per design themed title. With one new design title published every month, this means 12,000 new readers each year" [5.4]. This illustrates the key role EP has played in leading a new way for knowledge to be gathered in publication format, set to continue with the publication of EP Vol. 3 'Post-Craft', in April 2021.

Impact on Awareness and Understanding

Over 10,000 copies of EP have to date been printed and sold across Europe, the Americas and Asia by Sternberg Press' distributor MIT Press. It is sold in museums and galleries of international renown including Tate Modern (London), MoMA (New York), Pompidou (Paris), Moderna Museet (Stockholm), LACMA (Los Angeles), the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), and the New National Gallery (Berlin).

This impact on awareness and understanding has been demonstrated in the positive reviews EP1 received. The world-leading **New York Times** design critic, Alice Rawsthorn, commented in the 26.05.2013 issue of the newspaper that EP “reminds us of the movement’s prescience in championing design’s social and ecological responsibilities, the importance of collaboration and self-expression, and other burning issues for designers today” [5.5.]. The **Times Literary Supplement** critic John Foot commented in the 21.06.2013 issue of paper that “The images and the range of work presented [in EP1] are fascinating and stimulating, and provide a strong basis for future editions of this enterprising journal-book series.” [5.6] Further reviews appeared in **Icon** magazine: “All this, and more, is covered in this quaffable first volume of the new series EP (Extended Play). It’s more an introductory text than deep analysis, but as there is surprisingly little published in English on this period...it hits a sweet spot.” [5.7.] and **The Design Journal** [5.8].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1. Supporting statement from Associate Professor of Design History, Kingston University, (curator)

5.2. Supporting statement from Sophie McKinlay (Director of Programmes, V&A)

5.3. Supporting statement from the Editor of Harvard Design Magazine

5.4. Supporting statement from Caroline Schneider (Director of Sternberg Press)

5.5. Alice Rawsthorn, ‘Political Unrest of ‘68 Still Reverberates’, New York Times, May 26, 2013. Print and online editions. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/27/arts/27iht-design27.html>

5.6. John Foot, ‘The Italian Avant-Garde’, June 21, 2013. Print and online editions

5.7. Steve Parnell, ‘Review of EP Vol. 1’, Icon, 01.08.2013. Print and online editions. <https://www.iconeye.com/opinion/review/the-italian-avant-garde>

5.8. Grace Lees-Maffei, ‘Review of EP Vol. 1’, The Design Journal, Vol. 17, issue no. 3, 2015. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2752/175630614X13982745783163>