

Institution: University of Southampton
Unit of Assessment: 32 Philosophy
Title of case study: 32-01 Aesthetics and its Modern History
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>For two decades, researchers at Southampton have played a leading role in demonstrating the value of bringing contemporary aesthetics into dialogue with its past. Through an extensive programme of public engagement activities, including talks, podcasts, videos, gallery events and 6th form conferences, we have brought our research on this theme to more than 200,000 people, stimulating them to think about unfamiliar topics, or about familiar topics in new and illuminating ways. These activities have enriched our interlocutors' intellectual and cultural lives, and, in some cases, have influenced their understanding of their own artistic practice.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Southampton has an established international reputation for its work in aesthetics. Several of our researchers are especially interested in considering contemporary issues in aesthetics in relation to themes and thinkers in its history; and it is our work in this area of the discipline that underpins the present case study. The research detailed here, undertaken by Professors Alex Neill (at Southampton since 1999) and Aaron Ridley (at Southampton since 1994), is animated by the conviction that contemporary aesthetics ignores its history at its peril. Again and again, a topical issue in the philosophy of art shows a new and richer side when brought into dialogue with the thought of earlier, sometimes quite unfashionable, philosophers. And it does so, moreover, in ways that have proved to be as stimulating to the non-academic publics with whom we have engaged as it is relevant to contemporary research in aesthetics.</p> <p>Neill and Ridley have argued, for example, that contemporary approaches to tragedy stand to gain from the insights of Hume and Nietzsche (outputs 2 and 5 at section 3); that recent accounts of artistic expression require correction in the light of R.G. Collingwood's writings (output 6); that current work on aesthetic experience needs to revisit its roots in the thought of Schopenhauer (output 1); that the 18th and 19th centuries had better and sharper things to say about beauty than have been said since (outputs 2 and 5); and that investigations into the nature of art and into the nature of music both took wrong turnings in the mid-1960s (outputs 3 and 4)]. Taken together, these conclusions bear out the larger contention that contemporary aesthetics can only benefit from entering into dialogue with its past – a dialogue that Neill and Ridley have sought to initiate in the outputs listed in section 3, and have extended through engagement with the publics detailed in section 4, below.</p> <p>The primary means through which this research programme has been conducted is individual scholarship and jointly-authored publications. But it has also benefitted from collaborative projects undertaken at Southampton, including the Southampton Aesthetics Seminar, at which recent speakers have included Catharine Abell, Allen Carlson, Stephen Davies, Berys Gaut, James Grant, Paul Guyer, John Hyman, Gary Iseminger, Matthew Kieran, Peter Kivy, Peter Lamarque, Jerry Levinson, Dom Lopes, Andy McGonigle, Jenefer Robinson, Ole Martin Skillias and Kathleen Stock; general conferences on aesthetics, such as 'Aesthetics and its History', held here in 2007; and a large international conference on 'Wittgenstein and Aesthetics', held here in 2010. These and similar events have given us the opportunity to try out and to sharpen our work in ways that have contributed, down the line, to our making it accessible and engaging to non-specialist audiences.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>1. Neill, A. (2007), 'Schopenhauer and the Foundations of Aesthetic Experience', in R. Schusterman and A. Tomlin (eds.), <i>Aesthetic Experience</i>, Routledge [returned to RAE08]</p>

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2. Neill, A. (1999), 'Hume's "Singular Phaenomenon"', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39(2): 112-125 [returned to RAE01]
3. Neill, A. and Ridley, A. (2012), 'Relational Theories of Art: the History of an Error', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 52(2): 141-151 [returned to REF 2014]
4. Ridley, A. (2013), 'Brilliant Performances', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 71 :209-228 [returned to REF 2014]
5. Ridley, A. (2007), *Nietzsche on Art*, Routledge [returned to RAE08]
6. Ridley, A. (1997), 'Not Ideal: Collingwood's Expression Theory', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55(3): 263-272 [returned to RAE01]

4. Details of the impact

We have brought our work on aesthetics and its modern history to a wider audience through a diverse programme of public engagement activities, including gallery events, 'Cultural Days' and 6th form conferences and workshops. Feedback indicates that these events have enriched the cultural and intellectual lives of their participants, and have led some to reflect in new and rewarding ways on their own artistic practice. Podcasts and videos continue to make much material available to national and international audiences.

Since 2010, we have held monthly 'Philosophy Cafés' [5.1] at the University's John Hansard Gallery. These popular talk-plus-discussion events are free and open to all, bringing together a wide range of people with an interest in philosophy. Neill led a discussion at a session on 10/02/11 (outputs 1 and 2), and Ridley did likewise on 01/12/11 (output 6), each event attracting ~40 participants. The December session was recorded and made available as a podcast; it was also surveyed, with 96% of respondents saying that the event had made them reflect upon fresh questions, or upon familiar questions in fresh ways: 'Brilliant delivery, and fascinating question session'; 'Wish I'd had teachers like this when I was at Uni'; 'There are ideas here that I'll take to my art classes'; 'Thank you so much! Completely brilliant!'

We have also worked with the Southampton City Art Gallery [5.2] to organise several public discussion series devoted to themes emerging from our work. Between February 2011 and March 2012 Neill and Ridley each led two sessions, each attracting 60+ participants (outputs 1, 2, 3 and 6). Liza Morgan, the City Council's Lead Learning Projects Officer, reports that these events 'have been the most consistently well attended ... that we have run at the gallery in the 9 years' she has been in post, and, 'in addition to the benefit of increased visitor figures', that 'the series has also led to the development of a sustained relationship between the [Council's] Art and Heritage Learning Department and other faculties within the University'. Participants in the March 2012 session were surveyed: 93% of respondents reported that the event had prompted them to consider new issues, or familiar issues from unfamiliar angles. Comments included: 'I am inspired by this'; 'I shall go back to my studio clearer about my task'; 'Great topic, great talk'; 'The most brilliant instalment of a brilliant series'; 'Engaging and fascinating: better than Melvyn Bragg'.

As a result of the Gallery series, we have been invited to discuss our work at greater length with the Romsey U3A (University of the Third Age) Philosophy Group. Ridley led a discussion with 15 participants on 29/06/12 (output 4). The U3A convenor described the event as 'fascinating', allowing the group 'to experience [the] analysis in all its depth and detail. An interesting result, too' [5.5].

Our work has also been brought to a wider public through a 'Cultural Day' organised in partnership with the Faculty's Lifelong Learning team (27/04/13). Devoted to 'The Decline of Beauty', it included contributions from Neill (outputs 1 and 3) and Ridley (output 5), and attracted 65 participants (at £30 per head). They rated the day 4.7 out of 5.0, with 92% concluding that they were 'likely to use the ideas that they had heard about in future', in contexts including 'my own

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teaching', the development of 'an art and design website focusing on beauty', and 'help[ing] me fend off accusations that my art isn't beautiful enough': 'Stimulating, thoughtful, wonderfully paced and ever provocative'; 'Great – just more, please!'

On 20/08/08, Neill and Ridley each recorded a 'Philosophy Bite' (podcasts of philosophers discussing their research for the benefit of a lay audience) (outputs 2 and 5), which, together, have had 199,834 downloads (as at 17/09/13) [5.3]. A presentation of their paper 'Relational Theories of Art: the History of an Error' (output 3) was filmed on 29/06/10 by the British Wittgenstein Society, and made available on-line; while on 30/11/10, Ridley gave a public lecture to the Royal Institute of Philosophy (output 4), which was recorded and made available as a podcast (download figures unavailable).

Throughout the period, both Neill and Ridley have given talks on relevant aspects of their research to many hundreds of 6th form students and their teachers, from schools throughout the south of England. Participants in 6th form conferences held at Southampton on 17/12/12 and 22/03/13 were surveyed: 100% reported that the event had moved them to 'think about unfamiliar topics, or about familiar topics in new ways'. Comments included: 'extremely informative'; 'extremely interesting and impressive'; 'an amazing event'; 'I have learned a lot and been inspired' [5.4].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact**Users/beneficiaries***5.1 For corroboration of claims relating to Philosophy Cafés:*

Head of Communications, John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton

5.2 For corroboration of claims concerning the Southampton City Gallery events:

Lead Learning Projects Officer, Arts and Heritage Learning Department, Southampton City Council

5.3 For corroboration of downloads of 'Philosophy Bites':

Philosophy Bites: email address provided

5.4 For corroboration of claims concerning (some) 6th form events:

Head of Philosophy, Esher College, Thames Ditton

*5.5 Romsey U3A philosophy Group: chrisamery@ntlworld.com***Links***5.6 Details of many of the events referred to above, including Cafés, City Gallery events and Cultural Days, can be accessed here:*

<http://www.southampton.ac.uk/philosophy/news/events/archive.page?>