ADZ4999 Level 4 Constellation option brief 2017–18

The Philosophy of Art and Design: An Introduction

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Lecture-seminars: Thursdays, 9.00 – 11.00 a.m., room A0.17.
Tutorials: Thursdays, 11.10 a.m. – 12.00 p.m., room A0.17.
Reading/writing seminar: Thursdays, 1.00 – 2.00 p.m., room A0.17.

Term 1: 12 October – 30 November 2017 (8 weeks).

Formative assessment: 2,000 word essay and 1,000 word learning journal entry (copied and pasted from your online journal), submitted as one Word document through Turnitin, Thursday 14 December 2017.

Summative assessment: 3,000 word essay and 1,000 word learning journal entry (copied and pasted from your online journal), submitted as one Word document through Turnitin, Thursday 3 May 2018.

Introduction
This is an introduction to the philosophy of art and design; no prior knowledge of philosophy is assumed. Philosophy is a subject which looks at the big ideas that shape our lives – like truth, existence, meaning, right and wrong, good and bad – and at the way we think, how we move from one idea to another. In this option, we study some of the big ideas that shape our understanding of art and design, read extracts from some of the most important thinkers in the history of western philosophy, and look at the reasons we have for holding particular views. We concentrate upon four topics:

1. What is art? What is design? The ‘what is’ question is fundamental to philosophy: an attempt to find out what something is in essence. In relation to art and design, the question is particularly pressing because, with art, since Duchamp and the readymade, art can in principle be
anything and, with design, the concept has so many meanings and applications, it is difficult to find any single definition. How should we as practitioners deal with these uncertainties?

2. **What is the relationship between theory and practice?** What is the relationship between the ideas you study in Constellation and what you make in the studio? Is there a gap between language and experience that means discussion can never capture the essence of the work you produce? Is there a danger that too much theorization might stifle your creativity in the studio? We look at how theory and practice represent different kinds of knowledge and how they might intersect.

3. **What is technology?** Is it something that enacts my will or something that acts on me, shaping what is possible for me? Does it co-create ‘my’ being and what is possible in the world? To what extent does my phone define my being? Am I a phone-being? We consider different meanings of ‘technology’ and look at the implications they have for personal identity, society, and studio practice.

4. **What is the self?** Following the changes in personal identity raised in our discussion of technology, we look at the notion of the self. Do we have essential selves or are we always in a relationship with things around us and, therefore, always defined by others? Is it correct to say that there is no essential me but that I am shaped and constituted by the objects, screens and other phone-beings around me?

In addressing these questions, we won’t arrive at final, ultimate answers but will identify the thinkers and the concepts that help us to come to a more informed and detailed understanding of the territory. This lack of final answer should not be seen as a failure, because of the nature of knowledge, as will be explained. Anyway, if someone did offer a final answer, all that would happen is that someone else would come along and challenge it.

Sessions will mainly take the form of seminars. There will be some lecture delivery, explaining key ideas and debates, but the emphasis will be on group discussion, and group responses to questions, illustrations and texts. Particular attention will be paid to:

- critical and analytical reading
- critical and reflective writing
- critical thinking
- citing sources, referencing, and manuscript presentation.

As a result of the option, you will have:

- become familiar with different meanings of art, design, theory, practice, knowledge, technology, and the self;
• gained an initial understanding of philosophy, including some of its central concepts, and how it can be used to create different perspectives on subjects and to test the strength of ideas; and
• gained experience in applying these debates to your studio practice, and in the various ways they can be explored and expressed in writing;
• gained experience in critical thinking, critical and analytical reading, critical and reflective writing, and manuscript presentation.

Coursework
Brief details of your coursework requirements and deadlines are given on the first page of this document. For full details, see the Constellation Level 4 Handbook on Moodle.

Assessment Criteria and Learning Outcomes
Your performance in Constellation is assessed against the criteria of Skills, Context and Ideas, defined and explained in the table below. They correspond to the module’s learning outcomes listed in the Constellation Level 4 Handbook.

In your formative and summative coursework, we are looking for how you fulfil the criteria in relation to topics from either this or another study group option. As we shall see over the coming weeks, study tends to open things up, to make one thing appear as ten things, a hundred things, and so on. It is this sense of enquiry we want to see, including the comparison and analysis of what you think are the more valuable or compelling ‘things’ or ideas that emerge.

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<th>Skills</th>
<th>What tutors will be looking for in practice:</th>
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<td>Your ability to research, critically analyse and present coherent academic outcomes. Your ability to identify areas of personal interest and work independently and within groups.</td>
<td>You have read academic texts, i.e. books, journal articles (which might be online), around the subject. These will be set texts and sources you’ve found. You assess, select, and shape this material towards a focused discussion. Some ideas might have been drawn from group discussion, and then developed in your own words on the page.</td>
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<th>Context</th>
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<td>Your ability to present coherent and relevant information and argument. Your ability to develop an understanding of how theory can inform and illuminate historical and contemporary practice in art and design.</td>
<td>You draw upon, explain and assess other authors’ ideas. How do they compare? How do they compare with your ideas? Identify agreement and disagreement, and explain differences. Apply the ideas to artworks or artefacts or situations. Don’t just state ideas. Support them and question them. Maybe they need to be adapted or altered.</td>
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<th>Ideas</th>
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<td>Your ability to demonstrate a questioning and curious attitude in relation to your own position and practice.</td>
<td>You’re not just offering a series of statements or comments. The question is something you want to explore, to open up, to dig deep into. Claims and concepts from other authors are compared</td>
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Your ability to begin to identify, select and draw on a range of theoretical and historical concepts. and contrasted. Exploration will make things more complex. Constellation is about growing your vocabulary, learning new concepts. Which ones are new for you? Have you explained, applied and questioned them?

**Suggested essay titles**
You might like to base your coursework on one of the following questions, but you are also free to devise your own, provided it is a question that is appropriate to the option and has been agreed by me beforehand.

1. Art can now be anything. Discuss, and consider how the claim might affect the artwork produced by a contemporary artist.
2. The word ‘design’ has many meanings. Say whether you think this is a good or a bad thing for the contemporary designer, and give your reasons.
3. Design is knowledge, but art is deception. Why does Plato think this? Is he right?
4. Art or design theory hampers art or design practice. Discuss.
5. Writing and making contribute to one another. Explain, give examples, and identify the philosophical theories which support the idea.
6. What is technology? Are you in charge? Is it in charge? Or is the situation more complex? If so, explain and assess the complexity.
7. I am a cyborg. Discuss.
8. What is the self? Give an account with reference to at least two philosophers from this option.

**Programme**
Preparatory study or reading is required for each seminar, so that you come to the seminar equipped with ideas and questions to stimulate discussion. Please prepare comments and questions on some of the points and questions listed for each session *in advance*, either individually or in groups to help generate discussion.

For most seminars, a study pack or a set text is given as a PDF file on Moodle. Please make sure you have access to this – either as a printout (recommended) or on-screen – during the seminar. Recommended readings are given at the end of the brief and in the Option Book on Moodle.

**Seminar 1** 12 October
**Seminar 1** 25 January

*Introduction to the option. What is art?*
An introduction to the option and the nature of philosophy; an exploration of what we expect from each other; and discussion of the question: what is art?

Seminar 2
19 October, 1 February
What is design?
An exploration of how we can come to an understanding of a word that has so many different meanings, and the implications which such an understanding might have for being a designer.


Seminar 3
26 October, 8 February
Theory v. practice: it’s better not to talk
On the idea that theorization and conceptual analysis are opposed to making, and the theories of knowledge that are responsible.


Seminar 4
2 November, 15 February
Theory and practice: a productive relationship
On the idea that theorization and conceptual analysis can operate alongside making, with each element contributing to the others in the creative process, and the theories of knowledge that are responsible.


Clive Cazeaux, V3, 29 November 2017
Seminar 5  9 November, 22 February  On being with technology
Technology – whether a phone or a stick of charcoal – is commonly seen as a tool that does our bidding, but in this seminar a rival thesis is presented: technology shapes us and what is possible for us. How has technology been active in determining your understanding in this session? We consider the idea that we, in Haraway’s words, are ‘cyborgs’.

Reading:

Seminar 6  16 November, 1 March Greetings, phone-beings. Arguing with cyborgs
We continue to explore the thesis that technology determines our being, and to consider the metaphysical and political implications of the idea that we, in Haraway’s words, are ‘cyborgs’. In small groups, we shall be writing a paragraph that defends or challenges the claim ‘I am a cyborg’.

Reading:

Seminar 7  23 November, 8 March Knowledge, the self and PDPs (reflective blogs)
This session explores how questions regarding the nature of knowledge are linked to questions regarding the nature of the self. We consider whether knowledge can ever be formed in purely individual or personal terms, or whether it always requires some connections with the views of others. What is the self? Is there an essence or soul and, if so, is it a single, isolated being or a principle of connection? How can your PDP help? We shall work in groups to write a PDP entry on-screen for one or more group members that identifies and reflects upon a key change or difficulty that has occurred for them during this option.


Seminar 8

30 November, 15 March

Text-hibition: a workshop on being with another and for another

This is a workshop in preparation for your coursework submission. It looks at the importance of who or what you are with when you are writing, and for whom you are writing. Based on the items you prepare, we shall discuss and start to draft some paragraphs in response to the option’s essay titles. We shall also be covering bibliographic conventions and manuscript presentation. In preparing the items below, you are welcome to work individually or in groups of two or three:

Preparation:

1. Read and print (recommended) or have on-screen the Manuscript Presentation Guide available in the Seminar Handbook on Moodle.

2. Select an essay question from one of the following: (i) your autumn study group; (ii) the list on p. 3 in this document; or (iii) devise a question of your own that relates to the philosophy of art and design (check it with me at a tutorial beforehand) and

3. Bring with you as hard copy two pages (which don’t have to be from the same text) and an illustration or artefact that help you to address the question. Also, have the pages (as photographs or pdf scans) and the illustration already posted on your blog for on-screen projection.

Further reading

The following are suggested sources for further reading in addition to the weekly set texts. You should also be searching out material to read independently, with an emphasis on academic texts, e.g. from university presses or books with bibliographies and references, and journal articles, including on-line journals.
Metsearch, the university’s electronic library, is an excellent resource, and you should be using it on a regular basis.

What is art? What is design?

Theory and practice


**Philosophy of technology**


**Philosophies relevant to discussions of the self**


**On writing, including writing philosophy**


**Philosophy on the web**

Some recommended online philosophy resources:

British Society of Aesthetics. A good access point for the philosophy of art and design on the web: http://www.british-aesthetics.org/links.aspx
Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. An excellent source of peer-reviewed short, introductory articles: http://www.iep.utm.edu/
Intute online academic resource guide. Useful headings to browse are: aesthetics; analytical philosophy, contemporary philosophy, continental philosophy; existentialism and phenomenology; introduction to philosophy; ethics of technology. http://www.intute.ac.uk/philosophy/
Open Access Journals. A comprehensive list of peer-reviewed, open-access on-line journals in philosophy, with an excellent search facility that allows you to search them all by key terms. http://oajournals.blogspot.co.uk/
Phil Papers: Online Research in Philosophy. A comprehensive index and bibliography, with open access archives and personal pages for articles by academic philosophers: http://philpapers.org/

On Wikipedia
The online encyclopaedia Wikipedia is fine as a starting point, as something which directs you towards more authoritative sources. However, it cannot be cited as a source in itself because it is not peer-reviewed, that is to say, the material published on the site has not been subject to critical, academic review. Citing it as a reference in your essay effectively tells us that you haven't looked very hard or done much reading around the topic. Points will be deducted from your grade on the grounds of insufficient study.