

CMS.405 (Fall 2022):

Visual Design

Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays, 11:00 am -12:30 pm, Room: 4-144

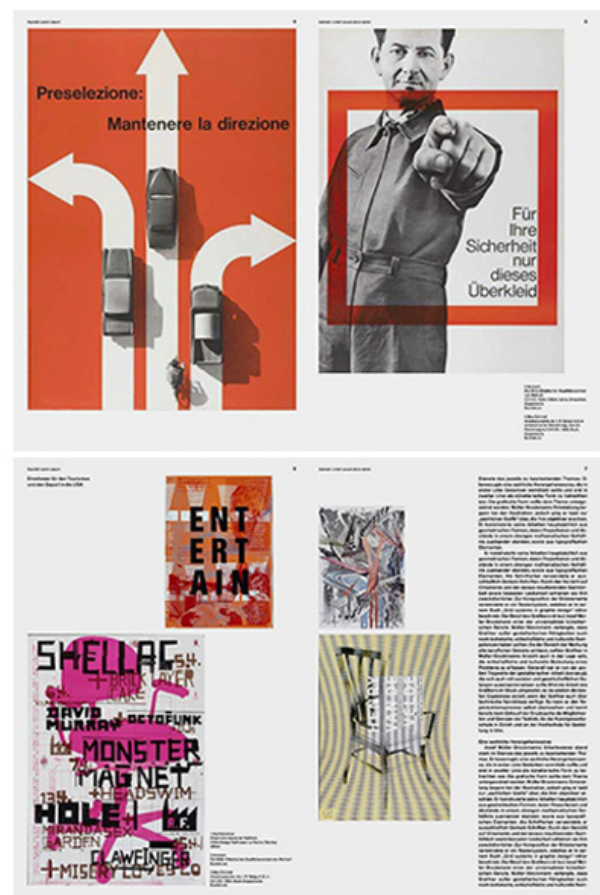
Instructor: Kurt Fendt, office hour Mondays, 2:00 - 3:00 pm, or by appointment (also via Zoom)
office: room 14N-421, email: fendt@mit.edu

Canvas Site: <https://canvas.mit.edu/courses/16836>

Github Site: <https://cms405.github.io>

Slack Channel: mit-cms405.slack.com

Annotation Studio: <https://app.annotation.studio>



Students create digital visual images and analyze designs from historical and theoretical perspectives with an emphasis on art and design. Students will examine visual experience in broad terms, from the perspectives of creators and viewers. The course will address a number of key topics including: image-making as a cognitive and perceptual practice, production of visual significance and meaning, and the role of technology in creating and understanding digitally-produced images. Students will be given design problems growing out of their reading and present solutions using technologies such as the Adobe Creative Suite and/or similar applications.

Learning objectives

After taking this course you should be able to:

- Create more compelling visual compositions for digital media, informed by a working knowledge of the basic elements and structures of visual design
- Use the theories and works presented in this course to frame and support discussions and critiques of contemporary visual design particularly objects of digital media

Put another way, you should be able to “create” and “think about” visual designs in a more skilled, knowledgeable and critical manner, and this should further your capabilities as both digital media producers and scholars.

Two themes will be woven through the course. These are: (1) the aesthetics of ambiguity vs. clarity and (2) social aspects of design including the role of the author/reader nexus and the social impact of design. Bear these in mind during all critiques.

Grades will be based on the following criteria:

- 15% Class participation
- 15% Design exercises
- 35% Design assignments
- 35% Final project

Class attendance is required as class discussions are a core component of CMS.405. Unexcused absences result in a lower grade. Please contact me via email (fendt@mit.edu) or our Slack workspace before class if you have an emergency that prevents you from attending the class session. There will be no final exam in this class.

Coursework

Course work will consist of smaller design exercises, multi-step design assignments, and a final group project., i.e. exercises are of a smaller scale than assignments, which are smaller than the final project.

You are expected to attend class meetings on Mondays and Wednesdays regularly and on time, to complete assignments before class (post your reading comments, project updates, exercises, and other assignments typically by 10:00 AM on Mondays and Wednesdays), and to contribute actively and thoughtfully in class discussions. If, for some reason, you are unable to attend a class session, please contact me *beforehand* so that we can make arrangements accordingly.

Production Note

You will not be taught specific software in this course such as Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator. The assumption is that, as MIT students, you can learn to use such applications through the execution of projects. This allows us to focus on design concepts and practice. However, I am more than happy to connect you to online resources such as MIT's "[LinkedIn Learning](#)" to assist you with this.

Attendance & Participation

Class attendance and participation are required. Participation in class discussion is important because it allows you to explore the texts and themes collaboratively, and in the process, discover meanings and issues that you probably would not discover on your own. Participation in class also challenges you to continuously question, refine and articulate your own ideas and interpretations.

In addition, much of this class is based on critiques, which require full participation and cannot be replicated outside of class. Critiques are a central aspect of a studio culture. Extensive teaching and learning occur through critiques: it is through critiques that you will develop your skills for both creating and discussing designs.

Missing more than three classes (unexcused) will result in a loss of one letter grade.

Avoid *plagiarizing*. **Plagiarism** is the use of another's intellectual work without acknowledgment. Full acknowledgment for all information obtained from sources outside the classroom must be clearly stated in all written work submitted. All ideas, arguments, and direct phrasings taken from someone else's work must be identified and properly footnoted. Use quotation marks to identify all sources of wording that are not yours. Identify sources of ideas with appropriate footnoting. Plagiarism receives an F in the subject, the instructor is required to forward the case to the Committee on Discipline. See <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center/avoiding-plagiarism/> for more information.

The WCC at MIT (**Writing and Communication Center**) offers *free* one-on-one professional advice from communication experts with advanced degrees and publishing experience. The WCC can help you further develop your oral communication skills and learn about all types of academic and professional writing. You can learn more about WCC consultations at <http://cmsw.mit.edu/writing-and-communication-center> and register with the online scheduler to make appointments through <https://mit.mywconline.com>. Please note that the WCC hours are offered Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., and fill up fast.

Syllabus (Version 1 - September 5, 2022)

Week	Topics, Readings, Assignments
Week 1 September 7	Introduction to Visual Design Introductions, Syllabus, In-class Activity <i>Assignment:</i> Exercise 1 given
Week 2 September 12	Elements of Visual Design I <i>Readings:</i> D. Dondis: A Primer of Visual Literacy, Chapter 3 <i>Assignment:</i> Exercise 1 due, Design Assignment 1 given
September 14	Elements of Visual Design II <i>Readings:</i> S. McCloud: Understanding Comics, Chapter 2 & 5 Jason Farago: "Seeing Our Own Reflection in the Birth of the Self-Portrait", in: The New York Times, September 25, 2020
Week 3 September 19	Semiotics I <i>Readings:</i> D. Dondis: A Primer of Visual Literacy, Chapter 6 <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 1 in-progress critique
September 21	Semiotics II <i>Readings:</i> F. Harrell: Phantasmal Media, Chapter 4: Sections Brawn at the Bazaar and Basics of Semiotics, pp. 118-130 <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 1 in-progress critique (cont.)
Week 4 September 26	Psychology, Science, and Images I (Cognition, Creativity, and Design) <i>Readings:</i> Gestalt Psychology (website by Allman and Fultz) <i>Assignments:</i> Assignment 1 due
September 28	Psychology, Science, and Images II (Cognition, Creativity, and Design) <i>Readings:</i> The Science of Art (Ramachandran and Hirstein - Website) <i>Assignment:</i> Assignment 2 given

Week	Topics, Readings, Assignments
Week 5 October 3	Blending and Design I (Cognition, Creativity, and Design) <i>Readings:</i> "A Force of Change: The Semantics of <i>Chicago Tribune</i> Advertisements," (Cohn) <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 2 in-progress critique
October 5	The Photographic Image I <i>Readings:</i> excerpt from Roland Barthes <i>Camera Lucida</i> , chapters 1-4 <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 2 in-progress critique (cont.)
Week 6 October 10	No Class - Indigenous Peoples Day (formerly: Columbus Day)
October 12	Typography I (Textual Design) <i>Readings:</i> Stop Stealing Sheep (Spiekermann and Ginger), Chapter 3 <i>Assignment:</i> Assignment 2 due, Assignment 3 given
Week 7 October 17	The Photographic Image II & Work on Design Assignment 3 <i>Readings:</i> Roland Barthes <i>Camera Lucida</i> , chapters 5-10, Graduate Students: Susan Sontag <i>The Image World</i> <i>Assignment:</i> Explore the works of the artist Jochen Gerz
October 19	Text and Image <i>Readings:</i> Understanding Comics (McCloud), Chapter 6 <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 3 in-progress critique
Week 8 October 24	Text and Image II <i>Readings:</i> Discussion of McCloud, Barthes, Sontag <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 3 in-progress critique (cont.)
October 26	Dynamic/Kinetic Typography I <i>Readings:</i> Th. van Leeuwena, E. Djonov <i>Notes towards a semiotics of kinetic typography</i> , research paper <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 3 in-progress critique (cont.) Find a movie title sequence that you feel uses moving text in an effective way. Bring a url or example (you might consider using this site): http://www.artofthetitle.com/
Week 9 October 31	Dynamic/Kinetic Typography III <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 3 due, Design Assignment 4 given
November 2	Information Design: Introduction <i>Readings:</i> Envisioning Information (Tufte), Chapter 1
Week 10 November 7	Information Design: Introduction (cont.) <i>Readings:</i> Stephen Few: The Chartjunk Debate <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 4 group formation & concept pitches
November 9	Information Design II: Color and Information <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 4: Low Fidelity Prototype
Week 11 November 14	Information Design II: Color and Information (cont.) <i>Readings:</i> Envisioning Information (Tufte), Chapter 5
November 16	Final Project Work <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 4: In-Progress Digital Prototype
Week 12 November 21	Information Design III: Spatial Information Design <i>Readings:</i> Envisioning Information (Tufte), Chapter 6
November 23	Final Project Work <i>Assignment:</i> Design Assignment 4: Critique of in-Progress Digital Prototype

Week	Topics, Readings, Assignments
Week 13 November 28	Final Project - Presentation of beta-versions <i>Readings:</i> Envisioning Information (Tufte), Chapter 2
November 30	Final Project - Presentation of beta-versions <i>Assignment:</i> Discussion and revision of final projects
Week 14 December 5	Final Project Work <i>Readings:</i> Envisioning Information (Tufte), Chapter 2 <i>Assignment:</i> Discussion and revision of final projects
December 7	Final Project Work <i>Assignment:</i> Discussion and revision of final projects
Week 15 December 12	Final Project Presentations Dry-run of final project presentations
December 14	Final Project Presentations Final version of Design Assignment 4 and Design Paper due