CMS.405 (Fall 2021):

Visual Design

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

Instructor: Kurt Fendt, office hour Monday, 2:00 - 3:00 pm, or by appointment,
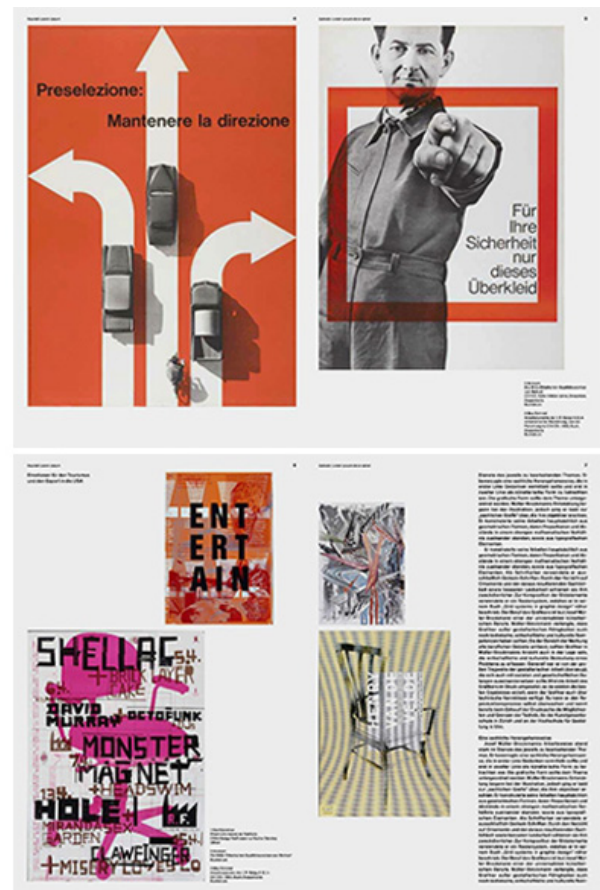office: room 14N-421, email: **fendt@mit.edu**

Stellar/LMOD Site:
https://learning-modules.mit.edu/class/index.html?uuid=/course/CMS/fa21/CMS.405#info

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:

- 20% Class participation
- 15% Exercises
- 65% Assignments

Class attendance is required. Unexcused absences result in a lower grade. There will be no final exam in the class.

Coursework

Course work will consist of exercises, assignments, and a final project. Exercises are of a smaller scale than assignments, which are smaller than the final project.

This semester, the class will be conducted as a mix of face-to-face class sessions and asynchronous online work. 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 2, 2021)

Week	Topics, Readings, Assignments
Week 1 September 8	**Introduction to Visual Design** Introductions, Syllabus, In-class Activity *Assignment*: Exercise 1 given
Week 2 September 13	**Elements of Visual Design I** *Readings*: D. Dondis: A Primer of Visual Literacy, Chapter 3 *Assignment:* Exercise 1 due, Assignment 1 given
September 15	**Elements of Visual Design II** *Readings*: S. McCloud: Understanding Comics, Chapter 2 & 5 *Assignment*: Assignment 1 in-progress critique
Week 3 September 20	**Semiotics I** *Readings:* D. Dondis: A Primer of Visual Literacy, Chapter 6 *Assignment:* Assignment 1 in-progress critique (cont.}
September 22	**Semiotics II** *Readings*: F. Harrell: Phantasmal Media, Chapter 4: Sections Brawn at the Bazaar and Basics of Semiotics, pp. 118-130
Week 4 September 27	**Psychology, Science, and Images I** (Cognition, Creativity, and Design) *Readings*: Gestalt Psychology (website by Allman and Fultz) *Assignments*: Assignment 1 due
September 29	**Psychology, Science, and Images II** (Cognition, Creativity, and Design) *Readings:* The Science of Art (Ramachandran and Hirstein - Website) *Assignment:* Assignment 2 given
Week 5 October 4	**Blending and Design I** (Cognition, Creativity, and Design) *Readings.* "A Force of Change: The Semantics of *Chicago Tribune* Advertisements," (Cohn) *Assignment:* Assignment 2 in-progress critique

Week	Topics, Readings, Assignments
October 6	**Blending and Design II** (Cognition, Creativity, and Design) *Readings*: excerpt from The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language (Turner)
Week 6 October 11	**No Class - Indigenous Peoples Day** (formerly: Columbus Day)
October 13	**Typography I** (Textual Design) *Readings:* Stop Stealing Sheep (Spiekermann and Ginger), Chapter 3 *Assignment:* Assignment 2 due, Assignment 3 given
Week 7 October 18	**Typography II - Work on Assignments** *Readings:* Understanding Comics (McCloud), Chapter 6 *Assignment:* Assignment 3 in-progress critique
October 20	**Text and Image** *Readings:* Explore the works of the artist Jochen Gerz
Week 8 October 25	**Dynamic/Kinetic Typography I** *Readings:* TBD *Assignment:* 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/
October 27	**Dynamic/Kinetic Typography II** *Assignment:* Assignment 3 due, Assignment 4 given
Week 9 November 1	**Information Design: Introduction** *Readings:* Envisioning Information (Tufte), Chapter 1
November 3	**Information Design: Introduction (cont.}** *Readings:* Stephen Few: The Chartjunk Debate *Assignment:* Assignment 4 group formation & concept pitches
Week 10 November 8	**Information Design - Data Visualization** *Readings*: TBD
November 10	**Information Design II: Color and Information** *Assignment:* Assignment 4: Data Collected and Structured, Low Fidelity Prototype
Week 11 November 15	**Information Design II: Color and Information (cont.)** *Readings:* Envisioning Information (Tufte), Chapter 5
November 17	**Final Project Work** *Assignment*: Assignment 4: In-Progress Digital Prototype and First Individual Maps
Week 12 November 22	**Information Design III: Spatial Information Design** *Readings*: Envisioning Information (Tufte), Chapter 6
November 24	**Final Project Work** *Assignment*: Assignment 4: Critique of in-Progress Digital Prototype
Week 13 November 29	**Final Project - Presentation of beta-versions** *Readings*: Envisioning Information (Tufte), Chapter 2
December 1	*Assignment:* Discussion and revision of final projects
Week 14 December 6	**Final Project Presentations** Dry-run of final project presentations
December 8	**Final Project Presentations** Final version of Assignment 4 and Design Paper due