4.053 Visual Communication Fundamentals (FA2022)

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TA Lauren Gideonse (gideonse@mit.edu)
Writing Advisor Andreas Karatsolis (karatsol@mit.edu)

Time Tuesdays 9AM–12PM (in-person N52-399),
Thursdays 7PM–10PM (remote)
Office hours By appt

Zoom ID https://mit.zoom.us/my/fundamentals
Slack http://mit-4-053-2022fa.slack.com

Course Description
This studio course provides an introduction to visual communication. Through readings, screenings, history lectures, assignments, and short exercises that draw from semiotic theory and practice, students will become familiar with the basic building blocks of visual communication—image and text—and the various ways they come together to make meaning. Students will learn and engage with various modes of representation in visual and written form, becoming familiar with core techniques and strategies in both. By the end of the class, students should have developed confidence in being clearer and more effective visual communicators, understanding how to generate and manipulate images and text to express their own ideas with confidence, clarity, and precision.

This is a CI-H class and features extensive writing as a core part of the curriculum. Students should expect to write up to a cumulative total of 5000 words over the course of the semester, with a significant portion of that dedicated to the curation, editing, and publication of the final assignment: a speculative exhibition that includes a poster and catalog with a curator’s note and project descriptions. The rest of the word count will be filled with weekly reading responses and writing exercises to be performed in-class including but not limited to: close analyses and deconstructions, ekphrasis, and free-writing.

The writing count breakdown is as follows:

- 6 reading responses (400 words ea) = 2400 words
- 3 free-writing exercises (750 words ea) = 2250 words
- 1 writing exercise (300 words ea) = 300 words

Catalog + Poster Word Count
= min 50 words total

TOTAL = 5000+ words

Course Objectives
1. To gain an understanding of how we read, process, and use visual communication forms.
2. To gain familiarity and ease with different techniques that can create meaningful visual messages.
3. To recognize type as form.
4. To decode and utilize images.
5. To begin building a personal visual vocabulary.
6. To gain a greater appreciation for the fundamentals of communication design, from theoretical, historical and practical perspectives.

Required Materials
Adobe Illustrator
Adobe Photoshop
Adobe InDesign
A laptop
A smartphone
A digital image-capturing device (i.e. iPhone camera)

Meetings
Tuesday morning sessions will be held in person, which will also be reserved for review. Thursday evening sessions will be held remotely through Zoom, which will be recorded and posted in our class Slack channel.

Course Structure
This course is made up of three (3) units—form, form systems, and form circulation. Each of these units contain an assignment that will contribute to the content of a final collection of work (an “exhibition”) with an accompanying poster and catalog (“book”) that features your own writing about the work. In-class exercises, lectures, and readings with accompanying discussions will inform aspects of these major assignments, but will also touch on topics that the assignments do not necessarily cover.

Participation and effort in these areas are given equal weight to the performance of the assignments. This studio will also ask you to contribute weekly to a class Instagram account (format to be discussed on the first day).

Reading Responses
This course will assign six (6) reading assignments that will each require 400-word reading responses. Reading responses must be posted on Google docs before class.
All the readings will be provided by me. (There is no need to go buy textbooks).

**Image Bank**
Students are expected to contribute to the class image bank by posting one (1) image with a caption at the beginning of every week. This means there should be 14 total by the end of the semester. The platform will be decided as a group on the first day.

**Communication + Slack**
You are expected to contribute openly and generously to discussions and critiques happening both in class and through Slack, which will be our main communication channel for announcements, references, and direct messages. You should think of this environment as a community of peers and collaborators, and be looking to your peers for sources of inspiration and feedback.

**Class Resources**
This class is taught in collaboration with MIT’s Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication (WRAP) program, an academic program located within the Comparative Media Studies/Writing (CMS/W) department. In addition to the instruction provided by me and the course TA, students also have access to a writing advisor who will be available to help them throughout the course of the semester. This year’s advisor is Andreas Karatsolis (karatsol@mit.edu).

The MIT Writing and Communication Center is also available to any MIT class. Appointments are accessible online via mit.mywconline.com or on site at E18-233, 50 Ames Street.

**Attendance**
Attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences and tardiness may affect the final grade. Greater than two absences from studio without a medical excuse supported by a doctor’s note or verifiable personal emergency could result in a failing grade for the studio. If there are any medical issues, personal emergencies, and special circumstances that impede the fulfillment of your academic obligations, please discuss them with me.

**Grades**

A Exceptionally good performance demonstrating a superior understanding of the subject matter, a foundation of extensive knowledge, and a skillful use of concepts and/or materials.

B Good performance demonstrating capacity to use the appropriate concepts, a good understanding of the subject matter, and an ability to handle the problems and materials encountered in the subject.

C Adequate performance demonstrating an adequate understanding of the subject matter, an ability to handle relatively simple problems.

D Minimally acceptable performance demonstrating at least partial familiarity with the subject matter and some capacity to deal with relatively simple problems.

F Failed. This grade also signifies that the student must repeat the subject to receive credit.

**Grade Breakdown**
The grade will be assigned based on the following three categories:

40% Participation and Engagement
30% Concept and Exploration of Ideas
30% Communication, Delivery, and Craft

These grades will be applied holistically across the components of the class:

10% Image Bank
30% Reading Responses and Discussion
20% Exercises
40% Assignments

Midterm grades will be provided.

**Academic Integrity**
MIT’s expectations and policies regarding academic integrity should be read carefully and adhered to diligently: http://integrity.mit.edu/

The Department of Architecture promotes a learning environment that supports the diverse values of the entire MIT community of students, faculty, administration, staff and guests. Fundamental to the mission of architectural education is the stewardship of this diversity in a positive and respectful learning environment that promotes the highest intellectual integrity and cultural literacy. As architectural design learning is often accomplished through project-based activities during and outside of class times, maintaining this environment at all times is the responsibility of the entire community. Faculty and students should strive to understand and mutually respect the varied commitments of each other and work together to manage expectations of time and effort devoted to assignments, pin-ups, and public reviews.
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<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignment Details</th>
<th>Reading Details</th>
<th>Exam/Quiz Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unit 1 Understanding Form</td>
<td>Sept 08</td>
<td>What is Visual Communication?</td>
<td>Choose object</td>
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<td>Assignment 1: Object begins</td>
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<td>Gestalt: Black Shapes and White Shapes</td>
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<td>Material Language</td>
<td>Found Alphabet 1</td>
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<td>Exercise (in-class)</td>
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<td>Signs and Indexes</td>
<td>Assignment 1.2 Slides due</td>
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<td>Reading Responses due</td>
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<td>Free-writing Exercise for 1.3 (in-class)</td>
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<td>Free-writing Exercise for 2.3 (in-class)</td>
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| 9    | Nov 01 | Images  
Reading Discussion  
Assignment 3: Circulation starts  
Ekphrasis Writing Exercise Part 1 (in-class) |
| 10   | Nov 08 | Text and image Circulation  
Guest Lecture: Eline Mul  
Assignment 3.1 (identity): sketches round 1 due  
Ekphrasis Writing Revision due |
| 11   | Nov 15 | Text Lock-ups and Identity  
Reading Responses due  
Assignment 3.1 (identity): type lock-ups due  
Assignment 3.2 (poster) begins  
Assignment 3.3 (catalog) typography begins |
| 12   | Nov 22 | Poster, Catalog (Layout), Curator's Note  
Assignment 3.2 (poster) drafts due — pin-up  
Assignment 3.3 (catalog) typography check-in  
Free-writing Exercise for 3.3 (in-class)  
→ Curator's Note  
Workshopping starts  
Exercise (in-class) |
| 13   | Dec 29 | Poster, Catalog (Structure), Writing  
Assignment 3.2 (poster) finals due — pin-up  
Assignment 3.3 (catalog) typography due  
Exercise (in-class) |
|      |       | Poster, Catalog (Structure), Writing  
Assignment 3.3 (catalog) sketches due  
Project descriptions check-in |
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| 14   | 06   | Poster, Catalog Production, Writing Finalization  
Reading Responses due  
Assignment 3.3 (catalog) review |
|      | 08   | Work time + 1:1 meetings  
Curator's Note Finalized  
Project Descriptions Finalized |
| 15   | 13   | FINAL REVIEW  
Assignment 3.3 poster and catalog due |
Core Readings

  “Film as an Object in Time, or Film Fermentation, Part 1”
  “Film as an Object in Space, or Film Fermentation, Part II”

  “Two in One”


  Episode 1

Chris Marker, *La Jetée* (1963)

Canal Street Research Association, “PECUNIA NON OLET”. From The Serving Library Issue #17.


How To With John Wilson S1E2: How To Put Up Scaffolding

John Kane, *A Type Primer* (2011)
  Introduction & Basics
  Development and Classification
  Text
  Columnar Organization
  Grids

References / Secondary Readings

Armin Hoffman, *Graphic Design Manual*


Bruno Munari, *Design as Art* (1966)


  Basics, Letter, Word


Dexter Sinister, *Style Guide for KADIST* (p. 31–42 of the PDF)


  Chapter 3

  The Orange Peas


Beatrice Warde, “The Crystal Goblet” (1955)

Resources

The People’s Graphic Design Archive
The Letterform Archive
Eye on Design