A4726.001 OTHER DESIGN: Graphic Diagrams
W   09:00A-11:00A
AVERY HALL   408

Instructor Information

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Overview
"[S]ince nothing can enter architecture without having been first converted into graphic form, the actual mechanism of graphic conversion is fundemental." - Stan Allen, Diagrams Matter

This is a hybrid seminar about making diagrams, not diagrammatic architecture, but the diagrams themselves. So it is, at the core, a class about giving form to concepts. But we will also investigate how the development of the diagram itself could be generative and impact the forms that rise from it. It is a hybrid seminar in that we will look at our subject through readings and lectures as well as a series of highly practical, formulaic design exercises assembled to investigate specific conceptual problems.

In the language of semiotics, diagrams and maps may both be considered on one level to be iconic. The icon, according to Charles S. Pierce, is the order of sign that functions through direct resemblance. The typical map has an obvious relationship to the topography it represents. The diagram's relationship to its subject may seem more abstract, not because of the formal language it employs but rather because the subject itself may be an abstraction. The diagram is a picture of an idea. Most diagrams, however, works through a complex of semiotic equation that includes features of both the icon and the symbol.

As complex forms of drawing, both the map and the diagram have an important function in the process of designing. Because they are reductions, both forms may reveal an essential truth not visible in the realm of the real. The diagram is the reduction of an idea to its most brutal contradictions: The diagram depicts relationships, the map reveals adjacencies. But beyond their declarative and clarifying functions, maps and diagrams are visual objects in their own right and therefore worthy of a closer look.

The class will consist of two intertwined halves: On the theory side we will both consider a few essential readings and may have a number of visitors talking about their work. The group will include designers working in many different media. On the practical side there will be four assignments that engage four different graphic forms: concept map, timeline, relational chart, anatomical diagram (such as an exploded axonometric). We will work on how specific concepts as visualized as well as minute issues of typography, form, line weight and color. The content of these exercises can be drawn directly from your studio projects. We will review these materials on a more or less by weekly basis and discuss both representational choices and graphic and typographic details.

Evaluation will be based on the quality of the four projects and participation in the class discussions and critiques.

Resources
The class will focus primarily on direct experience through the assignments and the content of the visiting lectures.

I will also distribute related articles throughout the semester.

The following books will serve as the basic texts for the class:

Robert Bringhurst, The Elements of Typographic Style, Vancouver: Hartley & Marks, 1996

Walter Herdeg, Graphis Diagrams, Zurich: Graphis Press, 1983

Edward Tufte, The Visual Display of Quantitative Information, Chesire: Graphics Press, 1983

Edward Tufte, Visual Explanations, Chesire: Graphics Press, 1997

Edward Tufte, Beautiful Evidence, Chesire: Graphics Press, 2006

Anthony Vidler, Diagrams of Diagrams: Architectural Abstraction and Modern Representation, in Representations 72, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000