

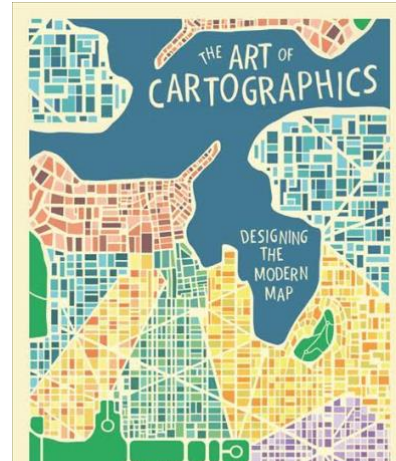
Jasmine Desclaux-Salachas (Editor)

## The Art of Cartographics: Designing the Modern Map

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Kimbal Bumstead

[kimbal.bumstead@live.co.uk](mailto:kimbal.bumstead@live.co.uk)



There seems to be a growing trend in contemporary cartography towards the acknowledgement and exploration of subjectivity in the understanding of one's environment. If we consider the lived environment to embody the memories, history and stories of those who inhabit, have inhabited or will inhabit a particular landscape, then the way in which that place is experienced or perceived exists within the lived experience and imagination of the inhabitant. To make a map of a place is then both to represent a particular reality, as well as being an active tool in the process of imagining that reality. This is, of course, nothing new. Map making has always had an agenda or aim; but what this book does is to show contemporary perspectives on the varying degrees to which these intentions, or subjectivities, are made visible or played with to offer new ways of presenting and understanding information about places. To 'map' something, or somewhere is, by definition, to create both an outline or explanation of that something or somewhere, as it is to create a plan of something that does not (yet) exist. A map therefore has the potential to sit between and be a mediator between reality and imagination.

*The Art of Cartographics: Designing the Modern Map* offers the reader a huge variety of perspectives, techniques, inspirations, uses and outlets of contemporary creative cartography. The book focuses heavily on design, as well as the use of observation, data, technological innovation, collage and illustration, to make visual and experiential maps. The book itself is predominantly image-based, with brief explanatory captions under each double-page spread image. The book is rich and sumptuous, and a great reference companion for anyone who is fascinated either by maps, map art, visual communication or graphic design. It is the kind of book that you could open up on any page to look for inspiration, to see interesting ways of making maps, or simply out of curiosity.

The book is divided into two chapters: Mapping the Physical Environment, and Mapping Human Activity. Although the maps across these broadly interchangeable categories seem also to fit into two other loose camps. Those which are focused on effective communication through clear and targeted design, and those which focus on the subjective nature of landscape and memory. Within this division, there is a further line of inquiry into maps which have an intended use, and those for which the map's function was simply the process of making it. There are maps which present data in innovative visual ways, maps which are personal to the person who made them, maps of imaginary worlds, and maps which exist purely for the sake of themselves as works of art.

Leafing through the pages, we discover that any preconception we might have about what a map is or what a map can do, can be completely contradicted and turned on its head. In

short, it's like opening Pandora's box and discovering it is filled with maps, providing a taster into the diversity of cartography.

The preface by editor Jasmine Desclaux-Salachas opens with a quote from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1893): "The author must know his countryside, whether real or imaginary, like his hand; the distances, the points of the compass, the places of the sun's rising, the behaviour of the moon, should all be beyond cavil." This is a grounding point for the maps presented in the books, whether they are real, imagined, based on data or subjectivities. The premise is that they are thoroughly researched, and produced with meticulous precision and detail, which is certainly the case.

We are presented with maps of the Hobbit Lands of Tolkien's fictional Middle Earth (pp 32 – 35), not the original drawn by Tolkien himself, but a large scale and detailed remake in colour pencil, based on research of *The Hobbit*, *Lord of the Rings*, and KW Fonstad's *Atlas of Middle Earth*. Each version of the map has surely been meticulously researched, but what is interesting here is that we are presented with an interpretation of an interpretation of a fictional world, yet rendered in high detail, with rivers, inlets, various types of vegetation and settlements marked on, as if presenting a reality as fact.

Another project presented in the *The Art of Cartographics*, is a map of the fictional world Ougeoma (p 166) designed by Sam Williams. Like the map of Middle Earth, it loosely follows the shapes of landmasses that exist on Earth, but altered, stretched and re-arranged. Topographically it appears the same as Earth, with rivers, forests and seas, just arranged differently, perhaps to allow the viewer to imagine what life would be like if the world was structured differently. While the map of Middle Earth had a function to aid the reader's understanding of the story and their ability to enter into this world, Ougeoma is a map "created purely for the joy of world making."

Other maps in the book take a more empirical approach to presenting information or data. For instance, there is a selection of maps produced by various tourist boards from around the world to communicate to visitors what they can see and do in a particular area. They depict fun and playful graphic images, cartoon cars, buildings and people layered onto loose colourful shapes symbolising recognisable geographic landmasses. The intention of these maps is to communicate the core information necessary in the easiest and most playful way possible.

There are various maps which show data relating to different geographical areas, presented via infographics. For example, Blank Map (p 238), which shows the predominant colours of photographs taken in Milan and uploaded to a georeferenced photo sharing website. The resulting map is a blank outline of the city overlaid with thousands of coloured dots representing the dominant colour in each photo in its corresponding location. Other data maps include a map of the distribution of different types of trees around New York City (p 174) represented by coloured blocks, an Analytical Tourist Map (p 134) showing the development and evolution of touristic sites in Italy through colour and shape coordinated infographics, a map displaying a visualisation of global flight paths over the period of one month (p 158) and a map of flight and ship disappearances in the Bermuda Triangle (p 242). Most of these data maps take the recognisable geographical layout of landmasses or political maps of countries and cities as a base layer on which to place new information. There are even maps of Heaven and Hell (pp 24-27), which consist of words of place names which contain the words 'heaven' or 'hell'. The words are arranged into the shape of the USA and placed in their corresponding location. There are food maps (pp 56 – 58) which are made of local varieties of food produce arranged into the shape of a country and corresponding regional boundaries. For instance, an image of an installation made of locally grown tomatoes arranged into the shape of Italy and corresponding regions and a map of the USA made from regionally specific types of corn.

Other projects take the idea of presenting data more abstractly or viscerally. For instance, there is a map made from data collected from an app called MountainBike (p 206) which records data from users' individual rides including elevation, location, weather, and whether the ride was done alone or in a group. The data is then used to create a map of individual blobs or 'mountain shapes' whose shape, colour and contour rings are determined by the data. Another example is a Thermo Colour Map (p 80) for tourists in the city of Bath. Depending on the external temperature, different elements of the map show up. So, on a hot sunny day you would see parks and nice walks, while if the weather was cold or rainy, the map would show museums and indoor spaces. An equally fun, and perhaps equally impractical example is the Egg Map (p 10), a soft egg shape with a colourful blocky map of Budapest printed around, which when squeezed bulges out to reveal greater detail.

There are also many illustrated maps of cities presented through the eyes of the maker. Some are understandable to the viewer, using the city grid as a guideline whereas others would be impossible to use for navigation other than, perhaps, as a companion on a *dérive*. Nevertheless, I don't think these maps are designed to be used for navigation or any other function other than for the joy of looking at. For instance, the London City Summer map by Jenni Sparks (p 64) includes drawings of stereotypical things you might find around London, such as the hipster swimmer at the London Fields Lido or drunk lads on a pedibus riding around Borough Market. It also contains experiences which seem to be directly related to the map maker's experience in specific locations, such as 'Lost oyster card', 'Aussies slagging off the heatwave', and 'expensive mojitos'. The map is based on the viewer's ability to recognise, first the geography of London, which is made easy by the iconic shape of the River Thames, and then the stereotypes which are presented in relation to their geographical location. 'Sweating on the tube', 'wasps', 'being bitten by ants' and 'flip flops in the rain' are also perhaps universally recognisable elements of a British Summer.

We could argue that these illustrated maps are a modern version of the drawings of sailing boats, dangerous beasts and the inscription "Here be dragons" that were found in medieval maps. The drawings relate to communicating a recognisable message, or perhaps a collective unknown. *The Art of Cartographics* contains a number of artist maps, many of which use collage as a way of exploring the unknown, subjective or multidimensional associations with space. Some are more directly personal, while others are more conceptual. Vladislava Savic for instance, demonstrates the complex nature of trying to understand something beyond one's own knowledge and experience. Her work *Ecumenopolis* (p 210) is a collage of maps, bus tickets and other personally significant paper materials collected by her friend during his travels and places where he lived over a period of 10 years. The collage could be seen as a portrait of her friend, but also a map of a complex imagined city and an imagined experience within it. Emma Johnston's *Dislocation: Time and Place* (p 115), takes the artist's own geographical experience as a subject. She has precisely cut out road layouts from maps of cities she had lived in, which have been layered over each other to form an abstract layered web of cut paper. Mathew Cusick's *Mixmaster* series of collages (pp 136-141) are less self-referential and more socially oriented. He has created fictional worlds which comment on the impact of potentially disastrous architecture on landscapes. He has cut out sections of atlases along their natural contours and borders and re-arranged them into a new landscape gone awry. This is intersected by the shapes of intricate Texas highway intersections, also cut from maps, which have been built in areas where road construction has impacted on native hunting grounds and animal migration routes. His map presents a fictional imagined reality that is somehow also a commentary on the dark side of civil ambitions. Another of Cusick's maps looks at a more socially determined psychogeography. *Shauna* (p128) is a collaged portrait of Colleen Applegate, a porn star known as Shauna Grant, made from maps of certain areas of Los Angeles that are known to be a geographic hub for the porn industry. This work creates a visual link between a place and how it becomes defined by cultural inhabitation. Matthew Picton's *Map*

*Sculptures* (pp 68-71) similarly invoke the relationship between cultural production and its relationship to geographic locations. He takes film posters and the covers of literary works of fiction which relate to or originate from particular places, which he cuts and collages into the shape of city grids to mimic the city. By doing this he creates fictionalised city maps which physically embody the cultural production of the place, while simultaneously referencing the line between actual history and fictionalised history through film and literature.

In conclusion, *The Art of Cartographics* contains fascinating examples of mapping projects from around the world. It has enough variety to be applicable to anyone with a general interest in the possibilities of both map making and infographic design as well as the visual arts more generally. It is however by no means comprehensive and must be considered as an introduction or overview. It lacks detailed information about each project and there is no further analysis beyond the preface. This is, however, also the beauty of the book: it does not present answers or tell you what to think, nor does it divide the maps into categories. This is a book to pick up and flick to a random page, to dive in and look for inspiring ideas.