



## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to issue 104 of *Cartographic Perspectives*. Like all our issues, this one contains content we hope will appeal to the full spectrum of NACIS members, with entries that range from in depth examinations of how the field of map history emerged (pages 6–41) to theoretical discussions of what makes a map *a map* (42–64) all the way through to practical tips on how to quickly and effectively design inset maps (65–69). I imagine I am beginning to sound somewhat like a broken record, but it is worth continuing to emphasize that this combination of breadth, expertise, and depth across the full spectrum of “cartography” (whatever that may be!) marks *Cartographic Perspectives* as unique within our shared, sometimes amorphously defined field. Publishing as a completely free and open-source journal doesn’t hurt either.

With that in mind, I’d like to call our readers’ attention to the two peer-reviewed pieces in this issue, as both are well worth your time. Matthew H. Edney has written a long, detailed piece that examines the history and emergence of the very study of “map history.” Contra Skelton’s (1972) and Harley’s (1987) claims of a long-standing intellectual pursuit, Edney traces precisely how the study of maps emerged in early modern history, concluding that it is “nonsensical to refer to the study of ‘map history’ or the ‘history of cartography’ before 1800; no such coherent field of study would have been recognized” (31). From an empirical perspective, Edney is continuing his detailed examination of specific discourses and communities of theory and practice that have emerged around “maps.” Here, he disarticulates three related (and sometimes adversarial) communities that studies maps during the early modern period: the Classical historians that used ancient texts to place sites on modern maps, “positive geographers” obsessed with “position[ing] themselves at the forefront of a long history of progress,” and antiquaries who used maps as “relics of local or national identity” to be preserved and treasured alongside other relics (31). As someone whose own work falls within both cartography and geography, the obsession of the positive geographers with presenting themselves as heirs to an ancient tradition of continual progress struck a chord—we are, after all, members of a discipline that has named one of its premier English language journals around the very theme of *progress*. There are reasons for this positioning, not the least of which is supporting claims towards and efforts for institutional valorization; but, I do wonder how much we—and here I mean both geographers and cartographers—have really *progressed* since this early modern period.

The other peer-reviewed piece is a blistering, wide-ranging, and brilliant examination of what makes a map... a map. It is a continuation of Mark Denil and Matthew Edney’s 2022

discussion in [issue 98](#) of *Cartographic Perspectives* (this marks Denil's response to Edney), and Denil continues to push at the seams of the theories that underlie how we understand, make use of, and create maps within modern society in provocative and important ways. In addition to drawing my attention to some phenomenal artwork (I strongly recommend the piece on page 57), by drawing from Conceptual Art for his framework, Denil pushes towards the center of a core question of cartographic theory (*what is a map?*); he notes that “[e]ven if this approach does not solve it, it should at least expose its sinews for examination” (51). That is my hope: that Denil's laser-like focus upon a question that's too often retreated from our consideration sparks others to examine the sinews of a map to better understand what, how, and when it emerges as such.

In addition to our peer-reviewed pieces, we also have an entry in the Practical Cartographer's Corner by Vicky Johnson-Dahl that walks readers through a concise ten considerations for improving inset maps. Perhaps a leap from the heady question of what makes a map a map, Vicky's piece is emblematically practical—we've all made inset maps, here's how to improve them. We also have three book reviews in this issue. First, Lily Houtman reviews Alberto Cairo's *The Art of Insight: How Great Visualization Designers Think*, finding it an important tonic that reminds us that “many of the most breathtaking visuals are still made by slow, careful human processes” (72). Kimberly L. Campbell reviews Vicky Johnson-Dahl's *Buffalo In 50 Maps*, describing an atlas that is at times both humorous and insightful (unfortunately, no discussion of inset maps). Finally, Aimée C. Quinn reviews Seong et al.'s entry in Korea's *National Atlas*, specifically *The National Atlas of Korea for Children*, and finds it “just the kind of thing to spark national, civic, and cultural pride in the minds of young readership” (78).

Taken together, this issue runs the gamut of interests within the NACIS community, from the applied, technical improvement of an aspect of cartographic design (inset maps!) to the very question of what it means to call something *a map*. In it, I hope you find something of value and, as always, encourage you to reach out with ideas or comments. Finally, I encourage you to keep your eyes peeled for our next issue which will follow shortly and be dedicated to the ethics of cartographic practice.

Best,  
*Jim*

## REFERENCES

- Harley, J. B. 1987. “The Map and the Development of the History of Cartography.” In *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*. Vol. 1 of *The History of Cartography*, edited by J. B. Harley and David Woodward, 1–42.
- Skelton, R. A. 1972. *Maps: A Historical Survey of Their Study and Collecting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

