

reviews

BOOK REVIEW

Pictorial Maps

Nigel Holmes. New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1991. 192 pp, maps. \$39.95 hardcover. (ISBN 0-8230-4013-5).

Reviewed by Charles P. Rader
Department of Geography
Michigan State University

In his third book on information graphics, *Time* magazine's graphics director, Nigel Holmes, explores pictorial maps. Pictorial maps, like thematic maps, present a specific message, however, pictorial maps usually rely on pictorial symbols to highlight their message. This category of maps is exceptionally loose and includes maps used in advertisements, postcards, travel and news magazines, and the high art of Jo Mora, Richard Edes Harrison, Robert Chapin, and Erwin Raisz. In many ways, these maps escape the traditional planimetric flatland of conventional cartography.

The book is bold, glossy, and colorful with over 250 examples that excite the eye and tickle the imagination. The reproductions are quite good and illustrate well the themes about which Holmes writes. Because they are fun, pictorial maps are a genre that has received relatively little attention in cartographic literature. By concentrating on these maps, Holmes has produced an imaginative and fun examination.

Pictorial maps are introduced and contrasted to atlas (reference) maps in the first chapter. In this chapter, Holmes also outlines his hopes for the book. Helping professionals avoid "run-of-the-mill locators" (p. 15), rekindling an

interest in geography, and providing viewing enjoyment for others are his goals. He concludes with a summary of why we find maps interesting and discusses the cartographic license that we allow conventional maps.

Chapter two presents an uneven and idiosyncratic history of cartography that briefly covers the period from the clay tablet maps of Gazur (2300 B.C.) to the works of Mercator (1569 A.D.). The author then leaps 350 years to the 20th century; he acknowledges this leap, but offers no explanation for it. Despite the gaps and the broad brush strokes, Holmes identifies some important themes and questions in the history of cartography (that also help to prove his point that pictorial symbols are often more than frivolous decoration), e.g., Wilma George's thesis that maybe elephants did "occupy land where there were no towns" rather than provide cartographic filler for the "pesky blank spaces" (p. 23) assumed to be terra incognita. Other topics include the work of Eratosthenes, Ptolemy and three world views from the middle ages: the rediscovery of Ptolemy, portolan charts, and the medieval mappaemundi. He introduces the 20th century with a discussion of Jo Mora's pictorial maps.

In the third and fourth chapters, Holmes presents maps of America and the world and discusses the iconography of these images. While many examples in these chapters are drawn from advertisements that use the shape of the United States or world to aid in making a point about a product, some interesting pictorial maps, such as Anna Walker's bas-relief maps and illustrated maps are also included in these chapters. In addition, examples of city maps that contain some of the best perspective images of New York, such as Constantine Anderson's midtown Manhattan, are repre-

sented. In the captions, Holmes illuminates the innovative techniques used in the construction of these examples, e.g., the widening of the streets in Anderson's map (p. 77). Maps of foreign cities are drawn from *Condé Nast Traveler* and historical works. A variety of postcard maps are displayed in both chapters.

News maps are the subject for chapter five. War, elections, and weather are the major themes. Unfortunately, war has been a major news item for the better part of this century, and this theme dominates the chapter. Holmes' own work on recent conflicts—the Falklands War, Grenada, and the Persian Gulf War, and Robert Chapin's work for *Time* during World War II are represented. Elections are covered briefly, but the main purpose of this section is to rebut Tufte's comment that embellished graphics are chart-junk. Holmes retorts, "Call it over-decorated chart-junk if you will, but watch your readers disappear as you preach from an ivory tower." (p. 130). Holmes approaches the graphics from the perspective of business, and in this realm style and presentation are often emphasized over content. Weather maps, as illustrated by *USA Today's* map, are discussed in relation to the problems of available data. Here, Holmes questions Wurman's suggestion of using a comparative comfort index rather than raw weather data because the index relies on the availability of good data. This section ends with images of weather from satellites and computer simulations.

"Doing it" is the topic of the sixth chapter. Projections, relief, symbols, computers, scale, and distortion are covered. The problems of projecting a spherical object onto a plane and the major classes of projections are examined. He includes the debate over the appropriateness of particular projections, e.g., Mercator's, Gall-

Peter's, and Robinson's. A review of relief representation discusses mountain drawing, hillocks, hachures, contours, shading, and the role of exaggeration in representing landforms. A section on symbols offers advice on choosing and designing pictorial symbols. The computer's role in revolutionizing map production is examined with an eye toward both the benefits and the horrors of the technology. Vehicle navigation systems and scientific visualization are tacked on as further expansions of computer technology. Scale is approached in a very practical manner; the goal is to make the scale of a problem comprehensible by placing the information in the context of something known. Finally, distortions, such as cartograms, are discussed as means of altering views of information.

The seventh chapter concludes Holmes' examination of pictorial maps with metaphors, directions for friends, and cartographic jokes. The Gerrymander and other satiric maps are examples of metaphorical maps. Directions for friends are exemplified by sketch maps, and cartographic jokes are covered by several joke postcard maps and cartoons. A list of map sources, a partial bibliography, map credits, and an index complete the book.

Holmes writes in a conversational style and covers topics broadly. Most people would find his book easy to read and informative. The broad brush strokes may disturb trained cartographers, and from an academic perspective this book would be easy to criticize for lack of substance and detail. However, Holmes accomplishes his goals, and he makes no pretense of academic rigor. Simply, he takes a fun look at fun maps. The book's main value lies in its examples and in Holmes' discussion of pictorial map design. The book is meant to be looked at and here lies its appeal. It is copiously

illustrated in color and gives one a great deal to explore. To fit the number of illustrations in this book, they are often small; however, as examples of the themes, the maps are well chosen and are large enough to illustrate the point.

Few, if any, books are perfect. Other than a few typographic errors and two instances of misplaced graphics, the only conceptual error is a bungled description of Kitiro Tanaka's illuminated contour method (p. 151). Tanaka's (1950) method does not employ hachures between the contours, but instead uses a medium background with light and dark contours of systematically varied width to represent, respectively, the lighted and shaded sides of the land surface. The remainder of his discussion of this method is accurate. These are minor deficiencies and do not significantly detract from the book's impact.

The subject, pictorial maps, overlaps slightly with several other books; e.g., Monmonier's *Maps with the News*, Tufte's books *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* and *Envisioning Information*, and Wurman's *Information Anxiety*; however, these are different books written with different purposes in mind. This is the only book that examines a very different genre of cartographic material and is therefore one of the few sources that sees the role of maps in a broader context of commercial art and design. This book shuns typically sterile approaches taken toward maps, and the book in its own right is not meant to be taken entirely seriously. It has much to offer visually and would be a good source of inspiration for cartographers and information graphics artists, for a cartographic design class, or for anyone with an interest in maps. *Pictorial Maps* is a book to be looked at, and in looking, we might learn to escape the flatland of conventional cartography.

References

Tanaka, K. 1950. The relief contour method of representing topography on maps. *The Geographical Review*. 40(3): 444-456.

ATLAS REVIEW

The New State of the World Atlas, 4th edition

Michael Kidron and Ronald Segal, London: Simon and Schuster, 1991. 159 pp, maps. \$15.00 paper. (ISBN:0-671-745-565)

*Reviewed by Ellen R. White
Department of Geography
Michigan State University*

This edition updates and revises a volume first published by Pan Books in 1981. As in previous editions, the atlas shows that while much has changed in the world, much remains the same.

The atlas is composed of 50 world maps (including 12 cartograms) divided into the following sections—The Scene, Economy, Society, Government, Holds on the Mind, Business, Labour, Arms and the State, and Environment. Each map occupies a two page spread and frequently contains a smaller world map and/or a graphic on a related topic. Insets are included where appropriate and generally cover the areas of Europe or the Middle East. All of the map topics relate to current issues, e.g., population growth, food production and distribution, health and disease, government influence, international corporations, or military presence. A set of explanatory notes discusses each map in terms of the data used to create it, sources, reliability, and brief remarks on interpreting what is shown. A table of basic data for each country is also included.