



# Cartographic Perspectives

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## From the President

Dear NACIS Members,

I write this at a time of economic uncertainty. Here at Brigham Young University, we have a hiring freeze, and much of our auxiliary budget (travel, student assistants, etc.) is being cut. We recently lost our university map librarian, and the library is considering filling his slot with something different. Funding for my research is harder to come by. My students are worried about their job prospects. In my freelance work at home (Kinesava Geographics), long-time clients are unsure of their own viability and whether they can continue to afford my services.

It is easy to feel that Cartography is headed toward a perfect storm. Economic cutbacks come at a time when the exponentially increasing popularity of mapping as a tool (or a toy) paradoxically seems to threaten mapping as a craft. Will our clients, our employers, our funding sources, or our students' employers soon see us as an expendable luxury that can be easily replaced by free maps off the Internet?

I see two possible courses we can take to navigate this storm. The reactionary approach would be to fight to protect our turf from the "amateur cartographers," using legislative and other means to try to kill neogeography. While some professions, such as surveying and engineering, have been very successful at this "fortress

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plan," I see some problems. It would keep our profession very small, and it assumes that we know everything, and that the newcomers have nothing to contribute.

The proactive approach is exemplified by the graphic design profession. When desktop publishing arrived in the late 1980s to democratize the tools of design, the trade literature was rife with professional designers afraid that the peasants were taking over the kingdom, that anyone who knew what they were doing would be out of a job, and soon every document would have 35 fonts. But they weathered the storm, and in the end the profession was stronger than before. How?

- They allowed the market to blossom. Yes, there are still newsletters with 35 fonts, and there are millions of amateurs making ugly brochures, but eventually, those with serious

needs recognized that they didn't know what they were doing, and turned to designers. By letting a huge number of people make their own mistakes, the market for professionals grew.

- They embraced the technology. New technologies should create new opportunities for newcomers and veterans alike. GIS and the Internet are frequently used by non-cartographers to create really bad maps, but they are also being used to create beautiful, powerful maps that wouldn't be imagined before.
- They got better. I think we all realize that the best way to prove that you deserve to get the job is to show that you are better than the competition. If the competition is increasing, then it is our responsibility to improve our own skills and talents to stay ahead.

Fortunately, we have the perfect resource to weather the storm: NACIS. As I have talked to NACIS members, your observations have

matched my own experience: this community is already taking the right approach to change. In *Cartographic Perspectives*, and at conferences like our very successful meeting in Missoula, Montana, we see firsthand how the best cartographers (i.e., you) are innovating to continually improve the quality of their work. I always come away inspired to develop my own skills, and can't wait for the next map project to improve on the last one. Nick Springer's *Cartography Design Annuua/* and Cindy Brewer's *Designed Maps* were invaluable tools in my cartography class last semester to help my students see the difference between an adequate map and an excellent map (and how to make the excellent map). The MapGiving experience inspired me to better use my skills to make a difference. I was a spectator that night, but I enjoyed seeing professionals that are technically in competition help each other learn and improve. When we work together, we all will succeed.

I look forward to being educated and inspired this year from every issue of *CP* and our conference this fall in Sacramento, California. But we need you! I hope that each of you will be willing to share your insights with the rest of us in the journal and at the conference. We and you both benefit from your active participation in the cartography community.

See you in California!

Brandon Plewe  
Brigham Young University

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## The Cover

### Polar Plait

1995, 10<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" x 10<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>", oil and acrylic on wood panel

Susanne Slavik  
Carnegie Mellon

*Polar Plait* is from a series of paintings inspired by map projections that inevitably distort reality. Some assume shapes that suggest human organs. While the projection of *Polar Plait* is more geometric, I maintain a connection of the body to the world. Geographic boundaries are erased and analytic and schematic information is replaced with an absorbing atmosphere. The new blank world is encircled with an extended braid, spiraling toward a hemispheric pole.

The five girls in my family grew up with my German mother braiding our hair each morning. The impossible plaits in my paintings are light and ethereal, anything but tectonic. They introduce personal memory into a cosmic space, zeroing in on home.

<http://artscool.cfa.cmu.edu/~slavick/>