

We all see things differently as a result of our genetic and psychological structuring, as well as environmental influences and outside forces. Psychology plays a role in cartographic representations of places, as each viewer sees a map through a unique personal lens and reads the cartographer’s design differently. A cartographer can mold two completely different perceptions of the same place by choosing how to represent the place through color associations, typography, differences in the hierarchies of visual elements, and other design decisions. Design triggers psychological responses in people, thus influencing the way we absorb knowledge. Our knowledge about places and ideas shapes worldviews and determines how we interact with our daily lives. In this way, design in communication is highly significant.

I began to reflect on how I could translate my interest in the psychology of visual communication and design into a map. The outcome borrows themes from surrealism, which explores psychology through dreamlike imagery, to form a narrative about place using a blend of art and traditional cartographic elements.

The written narrative in the map illustration is about transformation in place. Design techniques depict how the character's perceptions of the same place, Athens, Ohio, changed based on the psychological transformation occurring within the character of the narrative. The left side visually reveals the character's isolation by using cool hues, and an almost eerie representation of the character draws on emotions about cool metal, smoke, and ghosts to instill a haunted impression of Athens. White streets stand out starkly to impress upon the viewer a feeling of emptiness, while the fading of the head into the center provides a sensation of melting to reflect the story being told.

Symbolism, used in surrealism, embodies the transformation of the character's psychology. The "great phoenix," may be viewed as an event that changes the psychology of the character, thus changing the representation of the place experienced by the character. Old perceptions of Athens literally melt away as the character's worldview of the place transforms. A melting Earth symbolizes this change of worldview and burst of roses reflects the character's positive growth. The inclusion of a north arrow changing into a rose represents a change in mental orientation. Warm hues and a more realistic representation of the character help to represent a vibrant conception of Athens, which now features glowing streets and luminous tones.

This map illustration may be seen as an example of map art, which I am exploring as a way to tell stories about places and the way people interact with places. My interest in the psychology of visual communication began while I was a graduate student at Ohio University, where I am currently studying environmental and visual communication. This work is the first exploration of the journey, but also a statement about the relationship between art and cartography and using imagery as storytelling.

Sources: This map illustration was made using Athens City GIS and Natural Earth data. I used a vertical near side perspective projection for the globe, and left out a scale bar, as scale here is irrelevant. I wish to thank my former professor Dr. Margaret Pearce for mentoring me as an undergraduate student and introducing me to the art side of cartography. I also thank my current Ohio University professors and the GIS staff at the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs for their patience and support with my mapping endeavors.

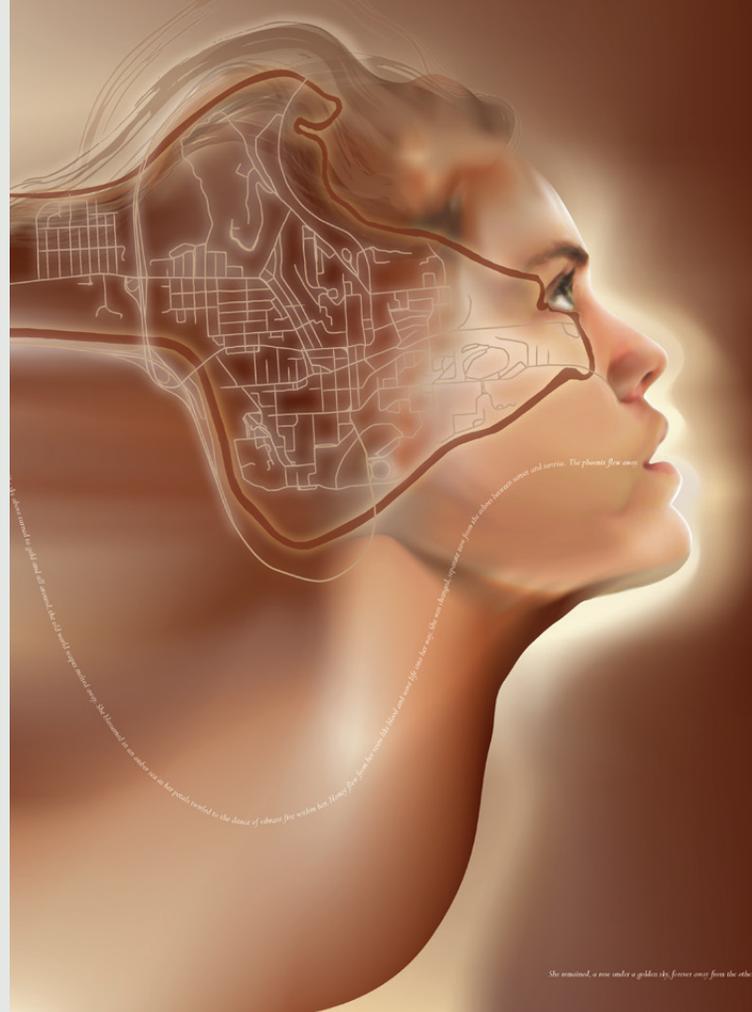


Figure 1. Detail.

Visual Fields focuses on the appreciation of cartographic aesthetics and design, featuring examples of inspirational, beautiful, and intriguing work. Suggestions of works that will help enhance the appreciation and understanding of the cartographic arts are welcomed, and should be directed to the section editor, Daniel Huffman: daniel.p.huffman@gmail.com.