

Art 341 – Letters, Signs & Symbols

Project: Mapping

Critique date: **September 29**

. . . In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

– Jorge Luis Borges, “On Exactitude in Science”

The project is to create a map, of any place you choose, without using any existing maps; no Google Maps, no atlases, nothing. It may be a map of any place you choose.

There are two problems to solve with this project, once you have decided on the place. The first is to decide what about this place you are choosing to map. Will you stay true to the geography of that place, as with the most usual kind of mapping? What information are you representing? Population concentrations; the development of housing styles over time; where the greatest concentrations of books are to be found; all the fire hydrants in town; or purely subjective, personal, or even imaginary materials?

The second problem is to decide how to visually present this place, and the information about that place that you’ve decided to focus on. As source material, you can use photographs, or measure out the place yourself, or just use your best guess. What about your map makes it recognizable to the map-reader, and what makes the map informative to that person? What are they learning about this place? Consider not just the place you are mapping, but what the map represents about that place. How does the map comment on the territory? Are you being true to the real geography or topography of the town, or are you altering it for effect? What are you revealing in the map, and what are you hiding?

Technical (and other) considerations

- You may use Illustrator, Photoshop, and physical processes in any combination you choose. There is no size requirement for this assignment; the map must be easily readable, and the reasons behind the size and format you choose must be clear (a folding pocket map, a large wall map, etc). Thus, if you are designing a wall-mounted map, it must be of a large enough size to see at a distance.
- Treat this as a design proposal. Your final map must be mounted and formally presented for critique.
- In this project you are creating not just a map, but the signs you are using on the map—icons (houses, streets, parks), words, etc. Think about the signs you are creating, and how legible they are to the map-reader.