AESTHETICS, PERSONALITY, AND THE HUMAN TOUCH

Marty Elmer - @maphugger
A History Lesson

The history of CLEAN and MODERN begins in the mid-20th century.
An aspiration for wholly objective design:
Culturally universal
And driven entirely by function.

Coca-Cola c. 1930, 1980
A History Lesson

The Quick Brown Fox Jumps Over The Lazy Dog.

Swiss typographic style

For instance

ISOTYPE (Otto Neurath)

Antiqua/Fraktur debate
Meanwhile, in Cartography:

- Quantitative revolution is occurring
- Modernist ideals are a perfect fit
- Cartographic design enters university curricula
  - Edward Tufte happens
A History Lesson

That leads to where we are now:

A cartography of authority and objectivity that ruffles at "chartjunk"

Adriaan Reland (1917)  
British Information Services (c. 1940)  
Philippe Recakewicz (2011)
A great man once told me:

“A good map doesn't look like it was designed, but rather simply emerged from the ether”

Are we systematically undervaluing the role of the author, the role of emotion, and the role of subjectivity?
In the late 1800s, the “Arts and Crafts movement” emerged as a reaction to the soulless, mass-produced consumer goods of the industrial revolution.

William Morris
Similar attitudes today have led to a trend of “Etsy-flavored” graphic design
A Carto-Arts and Crafts Movement

Cartography has not been spared this trend

>1/3rd of maps in AoD II are handmade

Deth P. Sun

Atlas of Design II
A Carto-Arts and Crafts Movement

Hand-drawn, illustrated, and quirky sensibilities are showing up in all sorts of maps, especially where you'd least expect it.
Based on this description, it might be assumed that 'human-touch' cartography is a fad: made out of novelty and passing taste.

But I think there's more to it than that.
Emotional Design

Good design is more than simple utility.

The things we design have a personality. The people we design for have emotions. We need to account for this.

Don Norman
Building for Personality: MailChimp

8-page styleguide outlines the brand's personality, and how to evoke it in everything they make

Careful consideration for users' needs and feelings (no jokes when the server's down)

Freddie Von Chimpenheimer IV is the face of MailChimp, and the embodiment of the brand personality. Freddie's stout frame communicates the power of the application, and his always on the go posture lets people know this brand means business.
Emotional Design

CLEAN and MODERN cartography has a formal/trustworthy personality.

That's not bad on its own, but leaves large expanses of the emotional landscape unexplored and underutilized.
Potential benefits of “Human Touch” maps:

- More Engaging
- More Effective
- More Ethical
The Three Es

Engaging:

Visual novelty catches attention and encourages exploration

The Gilded City
struggling to survive in Mayor Bloomberg’s New York

23 people died in Staten Island when Superstorm Sandy struck the city on October 29, 2012. New York City as a whole suffered 43 fatalities, and the storm left an estimated $19 billion in damage to the city in its wake.

The National

Willard Brinton
Effective:

Emotion enhances memory

“Emotionally charged events are recalled with greater accuracy than neutral memories. [...] Getting the brain to put a chemical Post-It note means that information is going to be more robustly processed.”

- John Medina
The Three Es

Ethical:
Speaking like we're people encourages intellectual honesty
Ethical:
Informal maps communicate uncertainty