In close succession, the third newsletter for 2021 is completed, this time returning to the egg theme adopted for Easter last year. Newsletters should be back to their normal monthly cycle very soon.

Date for your diary
The third Schematic Mapping Workshop will be held on 21st/22nd April, 2022, at Universität Würzburg, Germany. The workshop website includes the full scope and submission timetable. Reports on all aspects of schematic map research are most welcome. The portal for submissions opens in April 2021 and we are happy to take questions about these at submissions@schematicmapping.org.

On the web
I was surprised to see a terrible howler in a design article describing the work of Massimo Vignelli. My own concentric circles map from 2017 was reproduced and implied to be his own. This was quickly corrected after a tip-off, but I took plenty of screen dumps. Perhaps I should feel flattered, but this was hardly an advertisement for journalistic standards in the world of design. Thanks to Peter Lloyd for drawing my attention to this.

Map of the Month: Moscow is Egg-Shaped, Part 3
In Newsletter 78, I included a Moscow Metro map in which the new circle lines were depicted as eggs. This was effectively a hybrid curvilinear-octolinear design and my initial dissatisfaction with this led to further investigations. The next map (Newsletter 84) abandoned the concept of curvilinear circle lines, attempting a pure octolinear design, with all lines aligned to a reasonably strict grid in order to create something more cohesive. The surprise, for me at least, was just how much the pure octolinear design failed to live up to my expectations. Far from being better organised, it looked rather insipid to me and shapeless (many newsletter readers agreed). This has changed my opinion forever about hybrid maps.

I have always advocated choosing design rules to fit the structure of a network, but I know of no complex network in the world where well-chosen design rules are perfectly compatible from corner to corner. Could it be the case that well-executed hybrid maps, in which design rules vary across the design according to local line properties, have something to offer?

As a psychology researcher, I have always been aware of the need to fully block out research design, i.e., ensuring that all combinations of variable values are investigated. Failure to do this – the problem of empty cells – can lead to incomplete or incorrect conclusions. In the case of my Moscow exploration, so far I had investigated: (1) orbital
lines: curvilinear, radial lines: octolinear; and (2) orbital Lines: octolinear, radial lines: octolinear. With my natural suspicion of hybrid maps, the next step was to attempt (3) orbital Lines: curvilinear, radial lines: curvilinear. My usual criteria were applied for creating this: changes of direction were gradual whenever possible, S-bends and other points of inflection were avoided and, for each line, the smallest number of control points was sought (all of which were tangents, no cusps permitted). More subtle criteria – such as seeking pleasing curves that relate to each other nicely – are almost impossible to operationalise.

The outcome makes a fascinating comparison with the original but I suspect that the point has been reached at which only extensive user testing could possibly resolve which is the most usable and acceptable of the designs. I’ve created far too many curvilinear maps over the years not to like them!

As I wrote this newsletter, I suddenly realised that I am still guilty of incomplete research design. To complete all combinations of variable values, I must next create a Moscow Metro map with octolinear orbital lines and curvilinear radial lines. On paper this sounds silly, but the outcomes of mapping are visual not logical products, so watch this space! I am not yet sure what the Map of the Month for the next newsletter will be. To find out, subscribe to my newsletter at www.tubemapcentral.com.

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