

Chapter 3

Cognitive Data Visualization—A New Field with a Long History



Zsolt Győző Török and Ágoston Török

Abstract Cognitive data visualization is a novel approach to data visualization which utilizes the knowledge of cartography, statistical data representation, neuroscience and ergonomic research to help the design of visualizations for the human cognitive system. In the current chapter, we revisit some benchmark results of research in cartography in the last half a millennium year that shaped the ways how we think of and design visualizations today. This endeavor is unique since typical earlier reviews only assessed research in the past century. The advantage of our broader historical approach is that it not only puts cognitive data visualization in wider cultural context, but, at the same time, it calls attention to the importance of reconsidering the proceedings of earlier scholars as a crucial step in directing exploratory research today. In this chapter, we first review how conventions in data visualization evolved in time, then we discuss some current and pressing challenges in modern, cognitive data visualization.

3.1 Introduction

The methods of effective visual communication has been in the focus of research within various fields, from cartography to statistics in the past decades [1–3]. Numerous benchmark books and several papers endeavored to describe the principles of visual representation of information and authors have recommended practical hints

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19 how to assemble, analyze, and present collections of data. These principles, however,
 20 were rarely based on experimental knowledge about the human cognitive system.
 21 Although recently the accumulated knowledge about human memory and attention
 22 (how much information we can process), emotion (Kahnemann and Tversky) and
 23 perception (affordance, Gestalt principles) has begun to affect our views of the ideal
 24 way of visual infocommunication, there is still a lot to do. While data visualization
 25 has improved significantly, we need to reconsider traditional design principles and
 26 find new and effective methods to adapt to the new challenges of cognitive infocom-
 27 munication [4, 5], namely virtual and augmented reality [6].

28 Nowadays, emerging technologies facilitate the need of revisiting and extend-
 29 ing data visualization guidelines. As data dashboards, interactive visualizations, and
 30 mixed reality data displays are becoming widespread the guidelines developed for
 31 static, low dimension visualizations has to be adapted to help researchers and practi-
 32 tioners from various fields in creating effective visuals with new technologies. This
 33 endeavor is especially important since the price of generating massive amount of
 34 data is rapidly increasing, and visualization tools struggle hard to keep up with it [7].

35 Most books on visualization are dealing with the challenge if how to present the
 36 results of statistical or spatial analysis, however visualization actually serves various
 37 purposes:

- 38 ● explore patterns, structures, relations in mass data
- 39 ● present results of some analysis visually
- 40 ● support human decision making with graphical interface.

41 Visualization is therefore a multifaceted tool. As such, forms of visualization does
 42 not only include graphs and charts, but also maps, dashboards and other interactive
 43 visualization types as well. However it is more than a simple graphical display of raw
 44 data. It always includes some kind of abstraction, either in the form of interpretation
 45 or simplification. From visualizations users can derive information and knowledge
 46 (Table 3.1).

47 In the following chapter, we first overview the history of graphical methods of
 48 visualization and revisit the historical material and the empirical results of practice
 49 that helped modern scholars in establishing the principles of data visualization.
 50 Thereafter we discuss the challenges raised by the emerging new technologies, and
 51 third we formulate an updated set of guidelines that can be applied to data visualiza-
 52 tion.

Table 3.1 Difference between data and visualization

Data	Visualization
Nonstructured	Structured
No communication purpose	Communication purpose
High resolution	Low resolution
Not interpreted, meaningless	Interpreted, meaningful
As is	Designed

3.2 History of Visualization as a Cognitive Tool

The ability to represent objects or concepts in the external world goes back to prehistory [8]. Rock carvings or cave paintings from different parts of the world demonstrate the important development steps in the human cognitive system. The fundamental issue here is the appearance of the ability to represent something with meaning, reflecting the intention of the human subject. In other words, the external representation and the internal representation (i.e. thinking) had to be linked somehow in one system, material culture. Although our knowledge about the beginning of the use of external representation as a cognitive tool is rather limited, the earliest examples of identifiable, ‘meaningful’ images were presumably created by *Homo sapiens* more than 12,000 years ago. According to the theory of cultural evolution by Donald [9], this was a decisive invention in human history and meant the dawn of material culture and the end of the mimetic and the episodic eras.

3.2.1 Visualization as a Form of Externalized Memory

From the beginning external representations were projections of the human mind. In particular, they served as an expansion of biological memory: their appearance made it possible for early societies to accumulate and transfer knowledge. It is important to note that, once materialized, the constituents of any graphic bear also spatial attributes. The graphic space of a representation becomes part of the system which is inherently spatial. This is why *mapping* or, in its more developed form, map making is considered here as archetype of *any visualization*. However, one should keep in mind that not only have been maps simply used as visualization tools by highly diverse human cultures for thousands of years. Working with diagrammatic space had tremendous effects on human minds in the course of history leading to modern societies, where map use is common in spatial problem solving. The effective instruments of visualization have made humans able to explore, beyond their geographical environment, large, inaccessible or complex sets of objects, phenomena or even abstract concepts.

Drawing on the definition proposed by Harley and Woodward [10], maps can be interpreted as graphic designs that facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes and events in the human world. This functional approach is in contrast with the professional definitions focusing on the form, structure and content of the modern map. Although these may describe the most important, contemporary types of maps, it is historically misleading to apply modern criteria to all kind of mapping. Indeed, as a social practice mapping was never a monolithic enterprise—how it is suggested by traditional stories about developments of cartography [11]. On the other hand, mapping was always based on the relations between the external representation space and its graphic objects on one side, and also on the internal processes of the human mind on the other.

92 3.2.2 *The First Map*

93 Although the pictorial form of some modern maps may suggest so, historical evi-
94 dence shows that early maps were highly abstract graphic representations. The
95 first maps made by humans were presumably ephemeral and has not survived. The
96 Mesopotamian clay tablet from c. 2300 BC is generally considered to be the earliest
97 uncontested. It demonstrates how advanced cartographic principles had been applied
98 by the unknown maker of that more than four thousands years old instrument. As
99 the cuneiform script reveals, its direct function was to depict the location of a land
100 property in the geographical context of ancient Mesopotamia. The graphic language,
101 the symbols for water flow, mountain range or settlement are, although abstract
102 in form, easily recognizable for a modern reader who can understand geographi-
103 cal concepts from this very early artifact. The same clay tablet exemplify another
104 remarkable characteristics of cartographic visualization: although a property map
105 the two-dimensional representation is oriented according to the cardinal directions,
106 which were originally marked on the sides. In other words, the first map survived
107 is strong evidence that a universal, geographical reference frame has been used by
108 human civilizations for more than four thousands years.

109 3.3 History of Graphic Methods

110 Although map making looks back to a long history, as a regular and systematic social
111 practice it is closely related to the early modern period. In the past five hundred years
112 graphic representation became a common tool to visualize highly complex systems
113 and solve various problems using maps, charts, plans and diagrams. Medieval maps
114 demonstrate the transfer of and knowledge about methods of data visualization [12].
115 However, the most common type of world maps, the circular maps also evidences
116 for the importance of social-cultural aspect of visualization.

117 3.3.1 *Early Forms of Infographics*

118 The usually small size and diagrammatic depiction of the division of land and water
119 according to the Bible clearly display the geographical arrangement of the known
120 continents and their spatial relations. Though, the simplicity of the graphic design
121 may be misleading for the modern reader, who is not familiar in Christian symbolism.
122 But one must note that the waters dividing the land form the letter 'T' (*terra*), here
123 also a symbol for the Crucifixion. It is placed in the middle of the circle of the ocean,
124 making a letter 'O' standing for the Latin word '*orbis*', world. Simply drawing these
125 two letters, arranging them this way in the graphical space, medieval scribes would
126 not only draw an initial with map of the world: they also told the reader the whole story

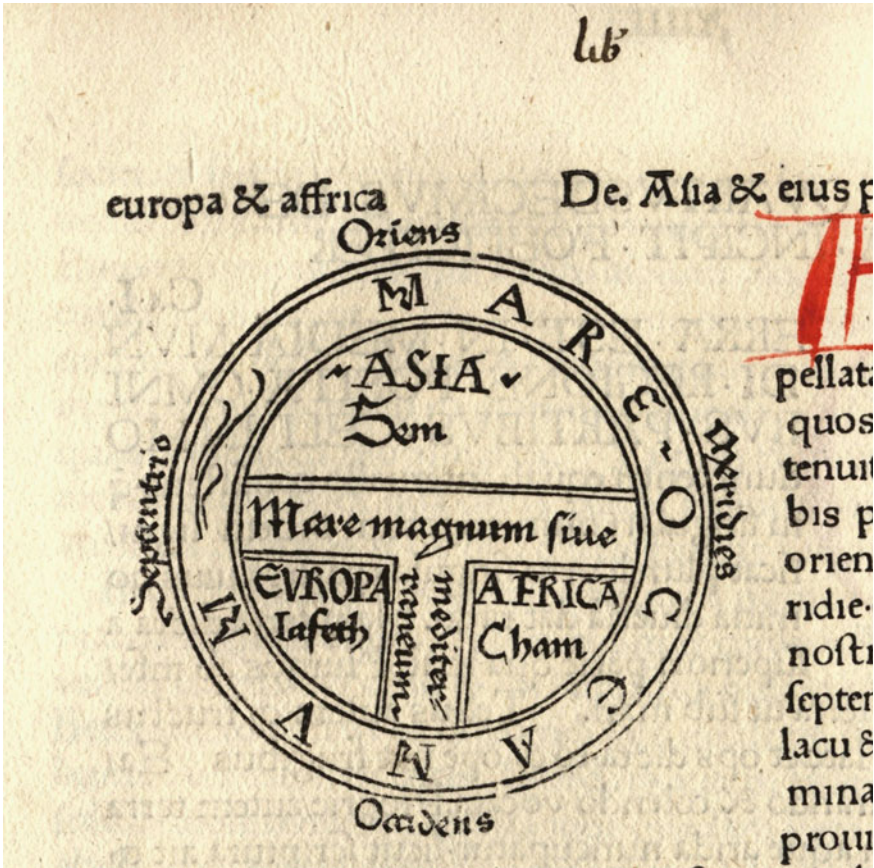


Fig. 3.1 The first printed map: a diagrammatic representation of the Christian Universe (Augsburg, 1472)

127 of the creation of a Christian Universe. The abstract letters interpreted as a diagram,
 128 as a representation in a graphical space, convey much information about the spatial
 129 structure, the geography of the world. If it was made today, it was considered an
 130 infographic rather than a real map (Fig. 3.1).

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131 3.3.2 Visualization Before Conventional Signs

132 *Signs* and symbols on the map, in the graphic space, are located in a spatial reference
 133 system and this is the fundamental advantage of graphic representation over verbal
 134 or written description. On early modern maps one can find great variety of pictorial
 135 and abstract signs, which makes interpretation sometimes difficult. Although the



Fig. 3.2 Wilhelm Crome’s economic map of Europe with symbols

136 signs standing for the same object are similar, each map maker could use its own
 137 version. The lack of convention in the sign systems used is a striking characteristics
 138 of early modern maps. 16–17th century maps often represent information which is
 139 not directly visible in the field and stands for the quality of objects. Signs could be
 140 referred to points, but could be distributed to represent the spread of the same type of
 141 qualitative information, usually a category (e.g. forest). The distribution of languages
 142 on each continents on Gottfried Henschel (1741) or the pioneer ‘geognostic’ maps by
 143 Jean Etienne Guettard demonstrated how early visualization could make invisible,
 144 inaccessible objects or phenomena visible and easy to comprehend [13]. By the 18th
 145 century scientific research or statistical surveys resulted in large collections of data,
 146 including both qualitative and quantitative information.

147 In 1782 the German economist and statistician Wilhelm Crome published a map
 148 of Europe (Fig. 3.2), showing the major products in the countries by signs and letters.
 149 A few years later Crome produced a series of comparative diagrams [14] showing
 150 the size and population of states in Europe in graphic form. In 1818 he published his

167 Oresme explained concepts like time, velocity, distance in a graphical way, using
 168 simple *graphs*. The method of modern analytical geometry was introduced by René
 169 Descartes in 1637 [15].

170 In 1765 Joseph Priestly published ‘A Chart of Biography’ [16], which represented
 171 temporal data: the dates of birth and death of important persons were connected
 172 to create a *stick chart*. The representation of statistical data by *diagrams* was the
 173 novelty of William Playfair’s ‘The Commercial and Political Atlas’ [17] (Fig. 3.4).
 174 Although it was called an atlas, the economic data was represented not in maps but
 175 by the method called ‘linear arithmetic’, which meant graphs. Playfair’s books were
 176 published in different editions and these publications made the methods of statistical
 177 data visualization, graphs and diagrams, available for scholars of the 19th century.

178 3.3.4 The Emergence of Isolines

179 Edmond Halley is generally considered by historians of cartography as the first
 180 thematic cartographer, especially because of his highly influential charts showing
 181 the variations of the compass [18]. The novelty of these graphic representations was
 182 not only the representations of magnetic declination, but also helped finding the
 183 geographical position of ships in the oceans. Halley, who collected magnetic data
 184 during his journey in the Atlantic, selected to show the variation of the magnetic
 185 compass by ‘curve lines’, running across points with equal declination (Fig. 3.5).
 186 As the magnetic field is a *continuum*, the graphic invention of the *isoline*, a line
 187 connecting points of equal value, made map makers able to represent all kind of
 188 continua. This technique is now widely used in other fields too, for example in the
 189 form of contour plots.

190 Modern thematic maps similarly represent the spatial distribution of objects or
 191 phenomena in the geographical or abstract spaces. For spatial reference a background
 192 map is needed and the map theme is layered above that. These types of maps are
 193 in contrast both conceptually and graphically with the general map, which shows
 194 the spatial location of a set of geographical objects (settlements, rivers etc.) and
 195 serves orientation and navigation. One of the most important followers of Halley
 196 was Alexander Humboldt, who published his treatise in 1817 with a diagrammatic
 197 chart showing the global distribution of temperatures by using lines of equal value,
 198 *isotherms* [19] (Fig. 3.6).

199 3.3.5 Flow Lines

200 Halley’s first thematic map, his 1688 wind chart, also brought a remarkable novelty.
 201 The *dynamic* phenomena was symbolized by small strokes. As the author explained,
 202 these represented the ship sailing with the wind behind, the direction of the wind
 203 was shown indirectly by the narrowing end of the lines. This was a remarkable

THE
 COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL

 A T L A S,


 Representing, by Means of
 STAINED COPPER-PLATE CHARTS,

 THE
 PROGRESS OF THE COMMERCE, REVENUES, EXPENDITURE,
 AND DEBTS OF ENGLAND,

 DURING THE WHOLE OF THE
 EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

 THE THIRD EDITION,
Corrected and brought down to the End of last Year.

 BY WILLIAM PLAYFAIR.



 Printed by T. Burton, Little Queen-street, Lincoln's-Inn Fields,
 FOR J. WALLIS, NO. 46, PATERNOSTER-ROW; CARPENTER AND CO. BOND-
 STREET; EGERTON, WHITEHALL; VERNOR AND HOOD, POULTRY;
 BLACK AND PARRY, LEADENHALL-STREET.

 1801.

Fig. 3.4 The title page of Playfair's statistical atlas (1801)



Fig. 3.5 Detail of Edmond Halley’s isogonic chart of the Atlantic Ocean: note the ‘line of no variation’

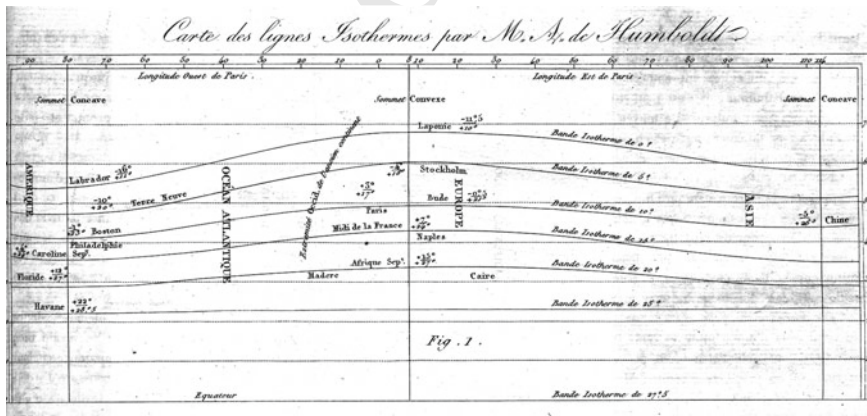


Fig. 3.6 Alexander von Humboldt 1817 isothermal chart showing the distribution of average annual temperature

204 invention to show movement on a static map by *flow lines*. Navigational charts with
205 the direction of the winds appeared regularly in the 18th century, usually applying
206 arrows, of which a few appeared on Halley's chart as well. Another early example
207 designed by the Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher (1665), or the German novelist,
208 Eberhard Happel's 1685 chart displayed the water circulation of the world oceans
209 with streamlines, but, curiously, without direction arrows.

210 In the 19th century the graphic representations of social and economic activities
211 could use detailed statistical data bases in France, where Charles Joseph Minard
212 produced a series of highly inventive flow charts. He was interested in international
213 economic relations and the movements of a wide range of subjects from people to
214 products. Of his maps, '*carte figuratives*' Minard published some ten thousand copies
215 from the 1850s and his graphic methods became known by a wider public [20].

216 3.3.6 From the Depth of the Sea to Population Density

217 However, one must note that isolines appeared much earlier, already in the 16th cen-
218 tury to show the depth of water in a river in the Netherlands (Bruins 1584). After
219 this pioneer visualization it took almost two centuries to expand the scope of the
220 method from rivers and seas to continental areas. After important publications with
221 isobaths (e.g. Marsigli 1725, Buache 1752 referenced in [2] in 1782 Bonifas Mar-
222 cellin du Carla proposed the general use of isolines to show the physical surface of the
223 Earth. To represent the *contour lines* of equal depth or height, however, cartographers
224 needed mass qualitative data about relief. Unfortunately, before remote sensing to
225 measure altitude accurately and economically was cumbersome and costly. In 1791
226 the French geographer Dupain-Triel published the first map of a country with a few
227 contour lines based on barometric measurements and calculations. A few years later,
228 in 1798–99, to enhance the graphic he added different shades to layers between his
229 contours, following the principle 'the higher the darker', and produced the first layer-
230 tinted map. The first map with hypsometric coloring represented a region in northern
231 Hungary (today Slovakia), and was constructed by the Swedish botanist and explorer,
232 Wahlenberg in 1813. These traditions triggered the use of several color-map schemes
233 in contemporary visualization.

234 A milestone in the history of data visualization, more specifically thematic carto-
235 graphy, was published in the form of a systematic collection of thematic maps by
236 Heinrich Berghaus in 1838–48 [21]. The sheets of the '*Physikalischer Atlas*' were
237 based on the concept suggested earlier by Humboldt, and they were intended to illus-
238 trate his ambitious physical description of the world (Fig. 3.7) five volumes of his
239 '*Kosmos*' (1845–62). To portray meteorological, geophysical phenomena, but also
240 plant geography or anthropogeography a wide variety of data visualization techniques
241 were used by the designers of the maps, including isolines, diagrams and graphs.
To demonstrate quantitative data by lines of equal value, based on the interpolation



Fig. 3.7 Choropleths and isolines combined in a complex thematic map in Berghaus' atlas (1840)

242 *between localized observations or measurements points became a common place by*
 243 *the mid-19th century.* To depict more abstract, e.g. statistical phenomena was the next
 244 step. This was proposed by Lalanne in France [22], who extended the ideas of du
 245 Carla and Humboldt to statistical data, which was considered as a third dimension
 246 superimposed on the general map. In 1857 the naval officer Ravn published such
 247 a map [23], showing the density of the population in Denmark by *pseudo-isolines*
 248 and using colour tints for his 500 person per square mile intervals. As the result of
 249 the evolution of the graphic methods of data visualization a highly effective new
 250 method was created, the *isopleth*. Although graphically similar, the *choropleth* rep-
 251 resent data related to pre-defined regions or areas (e.g. nodes belonging to the same
 252 cluster) whereas *isopleth* is based on quantitative data located to points (e.g. degree
 253 of a nodes).

3.3.7 Visualization for the Public: Geographical and Abstract Spaces

By the mid-19th century both the physical surface of the Earth and abstract, statistical surfaces could be represented cartographically, using the same graphic methods, isolines and layer tinting. Despite their simple visual appearance these representations were based on rather sophisticated concepts. For example hypsometric relief representation was used only at small scales because it required a precise measure of altitudes, which before air photogrammetry was cumbersome. Thematic cartography also depended heavily on reproduction methods. The introduction of a new printing method, lithography, made graphical reproduction faster and cheaper in the early 19th century. Another advantage, chromo-lithography offered color printing, and this technical invention had great impact on the distribution of data visualizations in public media.

From the mid-19th century international conferences advanced the emerging discipline of statistics [24]. The graphical methods of data representation were explored and discussed in Wien in 1857, where the maps of Josef Bermann or Carl Czoernig were also displayed. The connection between topographical and thematic map making is best exemplified by the participation of Franz Hauslab, a military cartographer, who proposed the principle ‘the higher is the darker’ for hypsometric representation

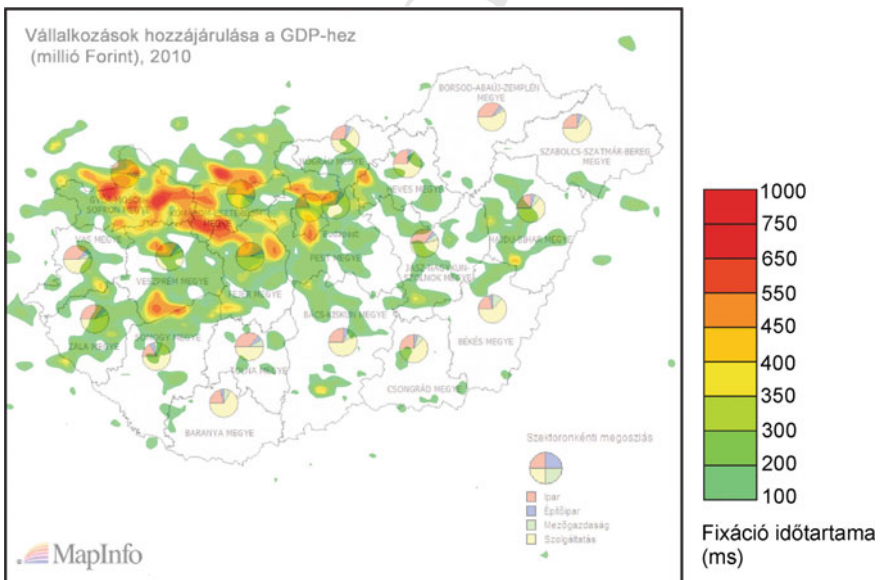


Fig. 3.8 Eyetrack data visualized with hypsometric color scale (so called ‘natural colors’)

272 of the relief (Fig. 3.8). Later special committees regularly reported to the plenary
 273 session about graphical methodology issues, first of all categorization and the use of
 274 colors.

275 3.3.8 Cool Heatmaps and Cognitive Issues

276 In 1885 Émile Levasseur [25] proposed to demonstrate deviation of mean values:
 277 red for categories above and blue for categories below the average, giving birth to
 278 the jet colormap. This approach had its roots in the antique traditions of cartography,
 279 warmer colors were used for land surface and cooler, usually blue and green, colors
 280 for waters. This tradition and later convention demonstrates also how real world inspi-
 281 ration drove color choices in visualization. As a reflection to scientific advancements
 282 thematic maps were included in general atlases, showing e.g. the global distribution
 283 of temperature. Already Humboldt suggested to show summer and winter average
 284 temperature (isotherms and isochimenes).

285 From the meteorological data a statistical surface was created, and the intervals
 286 between the *isotherms* were colored according to a legend (i.e. colorbar). These were
 287 the real heatmaps, and for the associative use of color, anybody would understand
 288 which parts of the world were the warmest or the coldest. Similar maps appeared
 289 in school atlases everywhere and the graphical presentation methods of scientists
 290 became part of the pictorial language of everybody. The heatmap in statistical data
 291 visualization represents the structure of a data matrix and goes back to the 19th
 292 century [26].

293 Considering the great popularity of ‘heatmap’ we should clearly better under-
 294 stand not only the historical roots of the concept. Although it is well known that
 295 modern ‘heatmaps’ are actually density maps, it is questionable how much about the
 296 complexity of the visualization is understood by non-professionals. What is actually
 297 represented in the heatmaps used by visualizations of eye tracking data? How would
 298 people understand aggregated or dynamically displayed fixations? How different
 299 color schemes influence the communicated message? Some of these questions had
 300 been addressed in cartography (e.g. the eye tracking study of graphical potential of
 301 different GIS softwares by [27]) or data visualization, but many of the graphical prin-
 302 ciples used today are still based on tradition and have never been seriously evaluated.

303 This is why a systematic research on the usability of graphical visualization meth-
 304 ods is an important and immediate task for the field of cognitive data visualization.

305 3.4 New Challenges for Data Visualization

306 For a long time, data visualization has been constrained to two dimensions and was
 307 static in format. Both traditional, analogue media (e.g. paper) and the computer
 308 screen are primarily suitable for visualizing data in two spatial dimensions. This

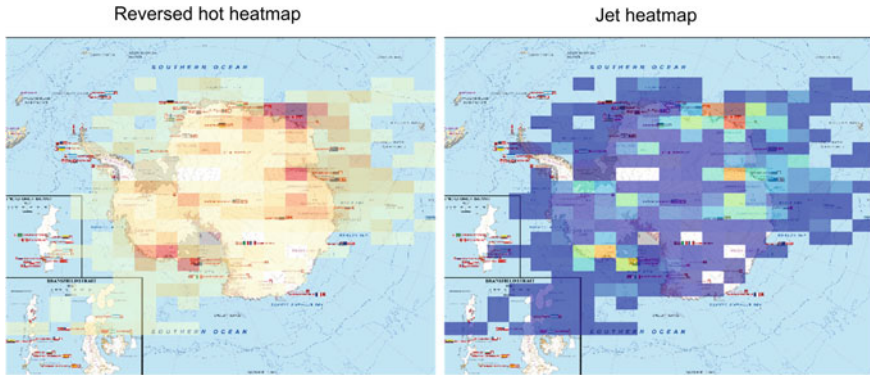


Fig. 3.9 Visualizing eyetracking data using a reversed hot colormap and the frequently used jet heatmap

309 does not necessarily mean that more dimensions cannot be represented here, it is
 310 adequate to say, however, that visualization in higher dimensions require steps of
 311 abstraction, both from the author's and from the reader's side. For example, as was
 312 described earlier, heatmaps are used in several domains today. In the simplest case,
 313 the heatmap uses colors to represent a third dimension. While this is a very useful
 314 feature, it works best if the color dimension denotes a qualitatively different measure.
 315 For example, if we want to visualize the average annual temperature in a country,
 316 the x and y axes should denote location in space, and an added color space should
 317 be used to demonstrate temperature. While this is a rather straightforward example,
 318 often we visualize data where all dimensions are different, and in this case the author
 319 has to make a decision as to which dimension to select for color or attribute coding
 320 (Fig. 3.9).

321 Another challenge with heatmaps is the proper selection of color. Some colors
 322 have conventional associations. However, associations such as blue is 'cold' and red
 323 is 'hot' are not innate, but develop through cultural influence [25, 28]. This also
 324 means that while it is easy to think that all color associations are universal, they are
 325 possibly not. For example, associations for red as sign to stop and green to go are
 326 particularly strong in western culture, but they are not in eastern cultures, e.g. in
 327 China [29]. One should also note that colormaps were often created to depict some
 328 graphical resemblance to their signaled quality. Blue for lower values was motivated
 329 by the color of water, green as the middle was motivated by grass, whereas yellow
 330 by the sun in the jet colormap. This also means for other types of visualization the
 331 colormap can and sometimes should be adapted also to the denoted quality.

332 There are ways to visualize three dimensional structures in two dimensions
 333 through projections. Mesh plots, contour plots and surface plots are the most fre-
 334 quent of these, but their use is usually not preferred because due to the nature of
 335 projection some parts of the image are not visible unless rotated, which option is
 336 rarely available for traditional data visualizations. This is not an issue when repre-

337 senting curved surfaces (e.g. the Earth), how we make maps, but issues may emerge
338 when the data to be represented is relevant in its three dimensional form. This means
339 that the reader has limited options to investigate the visualization which is communi-
340 cated by the author. The static nature of visualizations on paper and computer screen
341 makes them ineffective when it comes to visualizing high dimensional data. In the
342 following section, we propose how data visualization can be extended to more than
343 two dimensions. In the end we explain why dynamic and interactive visualizations
344 are essential for human intelligence today.

345 **3.4.1 Visualization Above Two Dimensions**

346 The perception of the world around us is essentially three dimensional. The human
347 visual system developed to render the three dimensional information of the environ-
348 ment in the mind. This not only means that we perceive depth information despite the
349 two dimensional nature of the optical image on the retina, but, more importantly, our
350 perceptual system has adapted to the challenges of the physical world. So to speak,
351 the framework of embodied cognition [30] claims that the cognitive system is insepa-
352 rable from the body [31] and the environment [32]. This evolutionary developed
353 fit between our cognition and the environment makes us able to cope with the vast
354 amount of information reaching our senses at any given moment [30] and quickly
355 react to new information in the environment [33].

356 **3.4.2 Ultra-Rapid Visual Categorization**

357 Embodied cognition is the reason why processing information presented in forms
358 that are not present in nature takes more time and are not straightforward to inter-
359 pret. Oddly, this suggests that carefully designed two dimensional graphs may take
360 more time to process than a more natural three dimensional scene. This notion is
361 supported by the results of several studies investigating ultra-rapid visual categoriza-
362 tion [34–38]. These studies consistently find that complex natural scenes displayed
363 for milliseconds can be categorized under 150 ms as it is revealed by both EEG
364 evidence [37] and saccadic reaction times [38]. Further studies showed that people
365 can process even multiple scenes in parallel with this speed [36], which means that
366 no directed attention is required. Furthermore, ultra-rapid categorization of complex
367 natural scenes is not only highly automatic but is not affected by the familiarity of the
368 exact pictures [35]. Thus, this phenomenon clearly indicates that the visual system
369 is adapted to the complexity of the visual world; consequently, the natural-unnatural
370 dimension is far more important in perception than the simple-complex one.

371 3.4.3 *Multisensory Effects on Visual Perception*

372 Another corollary of the embodied nature of the human cognitive system is that
373 we perceive through all of our senses, and sensory modalities can facilitate each
374 other. Such multisensory enhancements causes decreased reaction times and better
375 performance for multisensory stimuli [39, 40].

376 The most prominent multisensory phenomena are the visual capture of sounds
377 in the spatial domain, known as ventriloquism [41]; and the auditory capture of
378 visual stimuli in the temporal domain, known as the illusory-flash effect [42]. The
379 ventriloquism illusion is so strong that this is actually the reason why the cinema
380 experience is so natural: our eyes easily makes us believe that the sounds are coming
381 from the mouth of the actor and not from the speakers [43]. The illusory-flash effect is
382 a little less trivial. In the typical experimental situation one flash is presented with two
383 short beep sounds, of which one is concurrent with the flash. The resulting percept
384 is two beeps *with two flashes*. These results show sensory stimulation in multiple
385 modalities interact and shape the final percept. Nevertheless, in both of these cases
386 we were aware that auditory and visual stimulation was also present.

387 In data visualization these factors may not take a significant role since we usually
388 design visuals and not synchronized stimuli in another modality. However, this is
389 only partly true. Curiously enough, multisensory effects are present also in situations
390 where one would not expect them. There is actually one organ of sense people
391 usually forget about—despite being the most fundamental percept in life. This is the
392 vestibular sense and its contribution to the perception of up and down directions. Our
393 primary senses, eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue are all easily observed and have
394 been studied since ancient times. The vestibular sense, however, is located in the
395 inner ear and was discovered only in the beginning of the twentieth century by von
396 Bárány [44]. This is responsible for our sense of balance [45] and contributes to bodily
397 awareness [46]. Studies investigating the neural underpinnings of vestibular sensation
398 found that although there are areas dedicated to vestibular processing, vestibular
399 afferents reach several areas throughout the cortex [47]. Therefore, despite being
400 often subconscious, the vestibular sensation modulates the perceptual processes in
401 other sensory modalities.

402 One striking example of this is the interaction between visual and vestibular
403 sensation in visual distance perception [33, 48–50]. These studies show that the
404 same visual distance is perceived differently depending on the position of the body
405 [48, 49], the head [33] and the eyes [50]. Things above the horizon seem afar while
406 things below that seem closer. There are reasons to believe that the direction of the
407 effect is in connection with perceived effort [51], but is present also when no effort
408 is included in the task [33]. The effect is also nonlinear: experiments dealing with
409 unnavigable angles (90°) found that because of fear of falling the effect reverses for
410 these extreme angles. From the scope of the current review, the relevance of these
411 results is that the size and layout of a visualization may easily distort the perceived
412 differences between two figures. Since visual distance is inferred from the perceived
413 size and known real size of the object [52] one can easily deduce, that any change in

414 the perceived distance of the same object means change also in the perceived size-
415 since the known size cannot change.

416 The vestibular perception of gravity affects visual information also on another
417 level. Difference in the speed of motion of an object is differentiated more accurately
418 when the motion is consistent with gravity [53]. Also, even memory for gravity
419 consistent motion is biased [54]. This is most easily seen when in an experiment
420 the participant is required to show the location where an object has disappeared.
421 They consistently find that people show below the location where the object actually
422 disappeared when the motion was consistent with gravity.

423 The relevance of these effects to data visualization is emphasized for map-like
424 dynamic visualizations. As North is traditionally associated with up and South is
425 associated with down in cartography, this cultural convention shapes our perception
426 of the world. Although we may think it was always so, before the early modern
427 age different orientations were used in cartography. This may have been related to
428 human values maps always presented. Not only size differs on the vertical axis, other
429 studies showed that “up” is associated with good, profit, and higher altitude, whereas
430 “down” is associated with bad, prices, and lower altitude [55–58]. The down-up
431 visual axis is also associated with hierarchy and development. Furthermore, our
432 memory of the world map is biased in the location of the home continent, which
433 is usually remembered larger than actually. Also, Europe is remembered as being
434 larger while Africa as being smaller than its actual size [59]. The strength of the
435 verticality effect can be easily seen if we look at a map where South is associated
436 with up (see Fig. 3.10). Little known is the fact that, although orientation to the North
437 goes back to the mathematical astronomical tradition of geography represented by
438 Ptolemy in the 2nd century AD, until the early modern age maps were oriented to
439 various other directions. Medieval Christian cosmographic diagrams had ‘Oriens’
440 at the top (and hence the word ‘orientation’), while Islamic cartography adopted
441 South as the primary direction. Even in early modern Europe, after the rediscov-
442 ery and adoption of the Ptolemaic method appeared maps with other orientations.
443 A famous example is the series of south-oriented, anthropomorphic maps from the
444 16th century, representing Europe as a Queen (see Fig. 3.10)

445 **3.4.4 Visualizing in Three Dimensions**

446 There are two areas where three dimensional visualization is especially helpful and
447 already in common use. These fields are architectural design and medical imaging.
448 In architectural design computer generated renderings are used for presentation,
449 marketing, and design purposes. Here three dimensional, more realistic visualization
450 greatly supersedes the use of two dimensional plans. These virtual copies are often
451 used for simulating different light and environmental conditions, and panoramic and
452 renovation effects [60]. As abstract and symbolic representations of the real world
453 architectural renderings are often considered outside of the traditional scope of data
454 visualization [3], but they should be included as data visualizations. Moreover, the

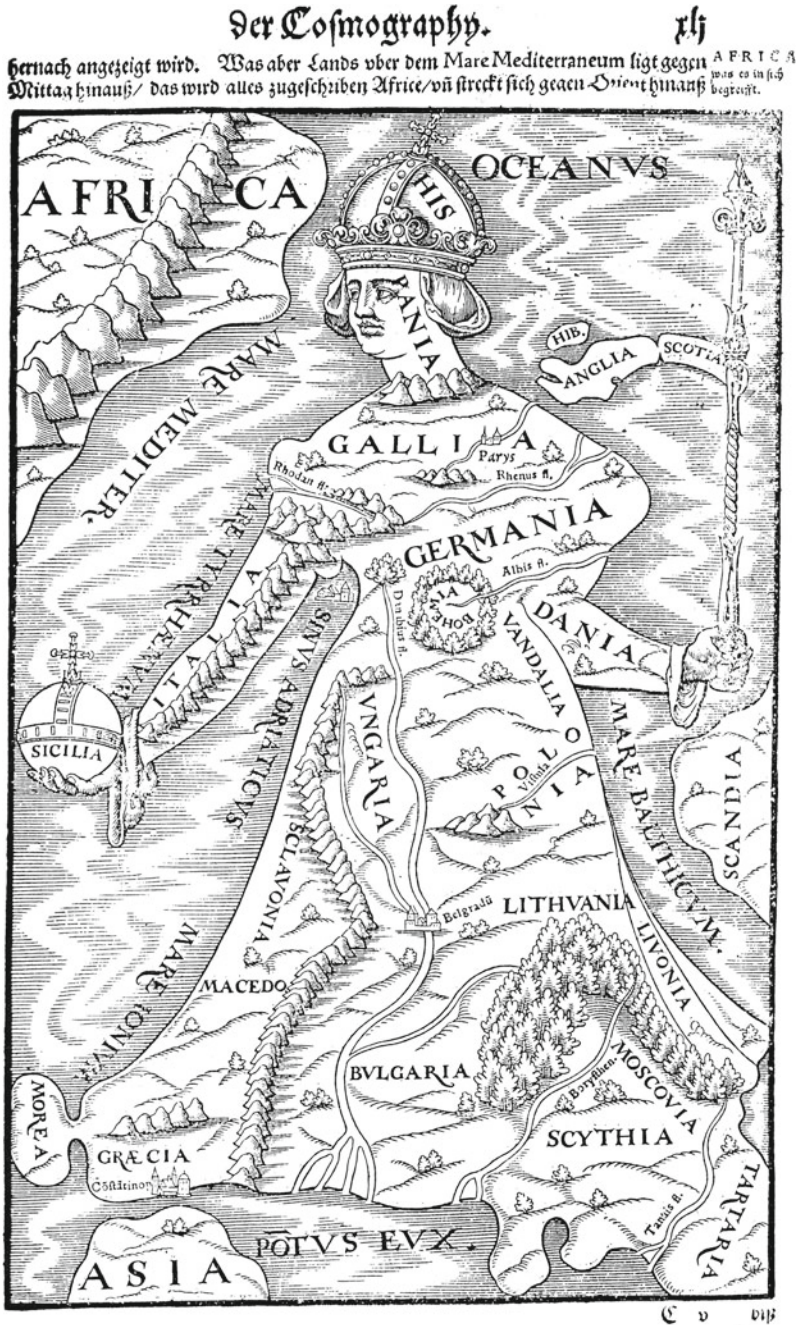


Fig. 3.10 Queen Europe as map oriented to the West (Sebastian Münster, 1588)

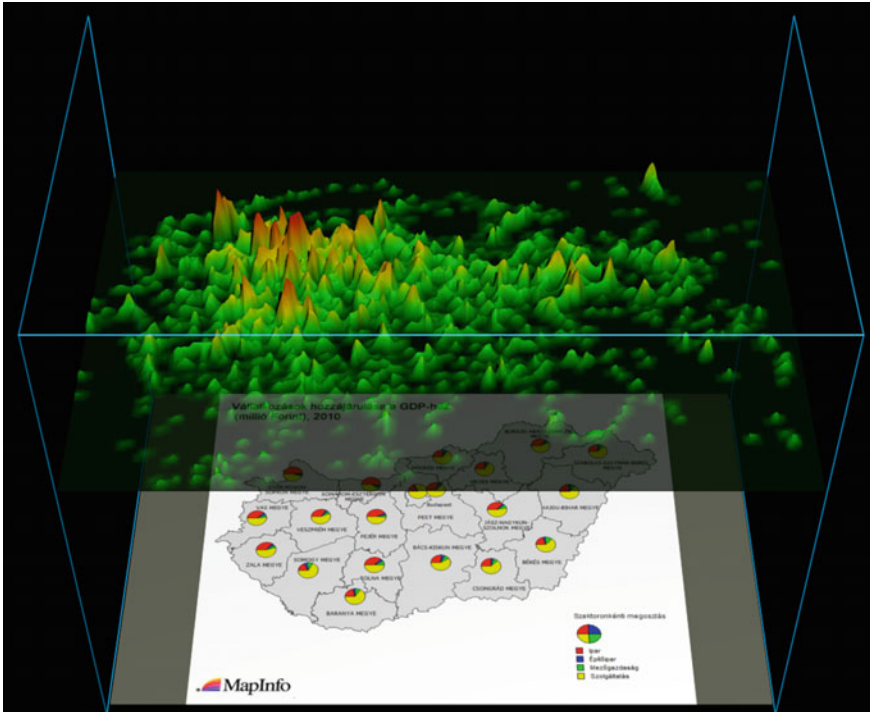


Fig. 3.11 Eyetracking data visualized in three dimensions

455 practical experience gained in the planning of three dimensional rendering softwares
 456 is already valuable for other areas, where three dimensional visualization has just
 457 begun to emerge (Fig. 3.11).

458 The other field where three dimensional visualization is already widespread is
 459 medical imaging. Medical imaging techniques such as computer tomography (CT),
 460 structural and functional magnetic resonance imaging (sMRI and fMRI), and mag-
 461 netoencephalography (MEG), along with other methods, are available in medical
 462 practice for decades. The ultimate aim of these tools to help diagnosis by providing
 463 spatial information of lesions or other alterations of tissue. These images are not
 464 only used to describe the medical situation but also to prescribe surgery. For exam-
 465 ple, pharmacologically intractable epilepsy patients undergo surgery based on the
 466 MRI + ECoG localization of epileptic foci [61]. Since in these situations millime-
 467 ters of mislocalization means potential harm to well-functioning brain tissue, the
 468 visualization of MR images is of great importance. Medical doctors have been using
 469 softwares like SPM [62] to analyze and visualize magnetic resonance imaging data.
 470 While these tools are excellent in correcting artifacts and reconstructing image from
 471 the original frequency domain information (see more in [63]), they are generally not
 472 outstanding when it comes to visualization. Luckily, in recent years more and more
 473 tools became available for medical staff to utilize virtual reality to visualize medical

482 3.4.5 Using Non-Euclidean Spaces

483 The reason why three dimensional visualization easily spreads in engineering design
 484 and medical imaging is that in both cases the actual data of which we are gain-
 485 ing insight is three dimensional. Therefore, using three dimensions for the repre-
 486 sentation means no significant spatial information loss. Unfortunately, this is not
 487 true for higher dimensional problems. Take, for example, a graph created from the
 488 co-occurrence matrix of a paper (see Fig. 3.12). The dimensionality of a graph is the
 489 least n such that there exists a representation of the graph in the Euclidean space
 490 of n dimensions where the vertices are not overlapping and edges are of unit length
 491 [70]. This number can easily go very high as the number of edges increase, actually
 492 the upper limit of n for graph G is twice its maximal degree plus one [71]. Because
 493 of this (and also because of the computational complexity of identifying dimension-
 494 ality) common graph representations often use not unit length edges. For example,
 495 a widespread graph representation—the spring layout—uses physical simulations
 496 by assigning forces to edges and their endpoint nodes. This way the resulting lay-
 497 out shows more interconnected regions being closer and less connected vertices are
 498 pulled to the extremities of the available space (see also on Fig. 18.2). In these kinds
 499 of representations—since the actual physical position of a vertex is not meaningful
 500 without the connected vertices—two dimensional embedding of the layout is usually
 501 preferred since adding a third dimension would only add another item to the arbitrary
 502 position vector.

503 However, information that may not easily be represented in Euclidean space can
 504 still easily be processed by the human brain. The simplest example for this is our
 505 social network of friends. If we need to visualize the relationship even just a cluster
 506 of our friends we will be in trouble: the information does not fit easily to the two
 507 dimensional paper or a three dimensional virtual space. Nevertheless, we can easily
 508 ‘navigate’ between these people because our cognitive map does not need to con-
 509 form necessarily the norms of the Euclidean space. This means we can conveniently
 510 utilize walls/borders, routes, shortcuts, and even subspaces. Shortcuts are probably
 511 the most interesting of these since they not even need to be physically possible short-
 512 cuts. Studies show that people easily learn to navigate in space with teleportation
 513 wormholes [69, 72, 73]. The fact that these can be processed means also that we
 514 can design environments where we purposefully place such things. That is we can
 515 visualize graphs like impossible yet interpret figures by defining such shortcuts [6].
 516 Similar, artificial memory spaces have been used by ancient Greeks and other cul-
 517 tures to store large amount of information in memory, also known as the ‘*method of*
 518 *loci*’ [74].

519 Interestingly, these graphic tools differ from those ones we consider conven-
 520 tionally as visualizations in one key factor, which is perspective. While traditional
 521 visualizations are viewed from an external perspective, the above mentioned mental
 522 visualizations are viewed from an embedded perspective. The difference between
 523 these two perspectives is even more pronounced in the brain. Embedded perspec-
 524 tive is associated with egocentric reference frame use, while external perspective is

525 associated with allocentric reference frame use [75]. Furthermore, there are two core
526 geometric systems in the brain. One is responsible for analyzing two dimensional
527 forms from an external perspective (e.g. studying a map) and the other is responsible
528 for navigating three dimensional environments from an internal viewpoint (e.g. actual
529 navigation). Studies have found that neither of these two core geometric systems is
530 able to represent correctly all of the fundamental properties of Euclidean geometry,
531 which are distance, angle and directional relationships [76]. Studies showed that
532 from the external perspective length/distance and angle information are correctly
533 identified but shapes are easily mistaken for their mirrored versions. In turn, during
534 navigation length information and direction are parsed easily, but angles are not well
535 remembered. Therefore, changing the perspective in visualization is not only a matter
536 of aesthetics, but requires a cognitive reframing of information.

537 There are also drawbacks of the non-Euclidean properties of the cognitive map
538 for the representation of three dimensional information. Unlike teleportation, three
539 dimensional rotational movements are proven to be difficult for humans [77]. This is
540 not surprising since spatial perception is essentially a multisensory process where the
541 vertical axis remains the most basic spatial knowledge for humans [33], even if views
542 can be visually similar in any direction. In fact, representation of three dimensional
543 space has only been verified in bats [78, 79]. Bats are flying animals, and they use
544 echolocation as their primary distal sensory system. Importantly, the activity of the
545 hippocampal formation in bats does not exhibit oscillatory activity in the theta band,
546 which, in turn, is an essential functional correlate in both rodents and humans [79].
547 Therefore, the spatial representation in bats is different from that in rats [80] and
548 presumably from that in humans, too. Thus, although some nervous systems have
549 developed to deal with three dimensional navigation, the human brain has not.

550 3.4.6 *The Niche for Interactive Visualizations*

551 Most researchers would agree that, although dynamic and interactive visualizations
552 may look impressive, they are often not more than useless ‘eye-candy’. Many open
553 source (plot.ly, shiny) and proprietary projects (Microsoft PowerBI, Tableau) offer
554 solutions for more interactive visualization, so it may become even more widespread
555 in the near future. In the current section we introduce some examples where dynamic
556 visualizations are favored over static ones, and they can facilitate the better commu-
557 nication of insights.

558 With dynamic and interactive visualizations authors have to communicate infor-
559 mation in a generally interesting way to call users’ attention. For example, when
560 someone wants to tell how house renting and buying expenses are related, he or she
561 may need to use several separate graphs to display the factors contributing to costs
562 and proceeds. This kind of visualization is easily skipped by most viewers since
563 the information conveyed—despite being relevant—is too complex. However, if the
564 authors can tailor the message for the actual viewer it will reach its goal easily. This
565 was what Bostock et al. [81] did in their interactive visualizations published in the

566 on-line edition of The New York Times. Here the reader is invited to adjust sliders on
567 the specific factors to reach a conclusion at the end if renting or buying pays off for
568 his/her *specific* case. Therefore, interactive visualization is sometimes useful: when
569 understanding the structure in high dimensional data would require large effort from
570 the reader's side. It can help increasing the incentive value of the visualization and
571 motivate readers to engage in the understanding of the image. Nevertheless, this also
572 means that not the exact same message will be delivered to each reader, thus the
573 variance in the message has to be considered when designing the visualization and
574 interpretations.

575 In sum, mixed reality brought visualization new challenges. The ability to visual-
576 ize data in three physical dimensions is sometimes useful (e.g. medical diagnostics),
577 but oftentimes does not contribute to better understanding. However, mixed reality is
578 not only capable of visualizing data in three dimensions but makes us able to place or
579 project a visualization anywhere, not only on computer screens. Embedded and situ-
580 ated visualizations could be easier to understand since the surrounding environment
581 could provide us fundamental context for the interpretation. These visualizations will
582 quickly become widespread—as soon as affordable augmented reality headsets are
583 entering the consumer market [82].

584 Nevertheless, especially with embedded visualizations one has always to consider
585 that, although visual modality plays a pivotal role in human perception, the process is
586 still affected by other sensory modalities as well, e.g. the vestibular system. Finally,
587 mixed reality can help us to visualize structures that are hard to understand in pic-
588 tures, but these relations are readily processed once the perspective is not out of the
589 visualization but is internal. Good examples are graphs and other high dimensional
590 structures that are visualized in non-Euclidean ways.

591 3.5 Summary

592 Cognitive data visualization is a novel approach to data visualization focusing on the
593 strengths and weaknesses of the human mind in knowledge acquisition. Especially
594 in cases beyond the capacity of human senses our working memory we rely upon
595 external memory tools as projections of the human mind. The graphic representation,
596 mapping in its most general sense, creates spaces of data and information which are
597 open to visual and mental exploration and navigation. As a process analogue to similar
598 activities in real world, physical or geographical spaces, visualization is inherently
599 a visuospatial process resulting in the recognition of relations, patterns or structures
600 in images.

601 Data visualization has a long history starting with the first spatial representations
602 in ancient times. After the pioneer thematic maps in the early modern age systematic
603 data collection increased in the Enlightenment period, and resulted in new forms
604 of visual knowledge. Graphic data representation methods developed rapidly in the
605 19th century, when the traditional graphical methods were practically all invented
606 and tested in a great variety, in masses of statistical graphs, diagrams and thematic

607 maps produced and distributed in all societies around the world. Visualization tools
 608 were reproduced by lithographic and offset printing and became common not only
 609 scientific research but also in popular culture. A good example of this development
 610 is the appearance of isothermal charts in school atlases which laid the foundations of
 611 the recent popularity of heatmaps. By the 1980s, when visualization became com-
 612 puter graphics, the traditional methods were so deeply integrated in modern culture
 613 that their effectivity was rarely questioned. Only in the new millennium, when new
 614 visualization methods in new environments (e.g. virtual and augmented reality, net-
 615 work spaces and big data etc.) became more and more important in human computer
 616 interaction, became cognitive issues of data visualization seriously considered.

617 As it is apparent from recent research issues *visualization have vital importance*
 618 *in future human-computer interaction (HCI)*, where the rapid development of artifi-
 619 cial intelligence urgently requires more effective interfaces than the obsolete existing
 620 ones. Here plays the human visual mind a key role: with new visualizations developed
 621 on empirical research on human cognitive processes the interaction with informa-
 622 tion and spaces, interactively generated by AI, can be more effective. Based on
 623 neuropsychological research findings *cognitive design* can already effectively influ-
 624 ence pre-attentive visual processes. However, as we emphasize here, human vision
 625 is a product of both *biological and cultural* evolution. Modern researchers can not
 626 only learn from the empirical knowledge cumulated by traditional methods, but it is
 627 necessary to better know the cultural traditions and history of visualization. [AQ2]

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Chapter 3

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