

## Week 2a – Sept 11: Why does geography matter, anyway?

*'As a young man, my fondest dream was to become a geographer. However, while working in the customs office I thought deeply about the matter and concluded that it was far too difficult a subject. With some reluctance, I then turned to physics as a substitute.'*

~ Albert Einstein

GEG1302: Spaces and Places of Human Activity  
Prof. Sonia Wesche

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## What is Human Geography?

- Are you **fascinated** with places? Peoples?



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## Human Geography: Definition

- Spatial analysis of human populations, their cultures, their activities and behaviours, and their relationship with and impact on the physical landscapes that they occupy.

• Fellmann et al, 2009: Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)



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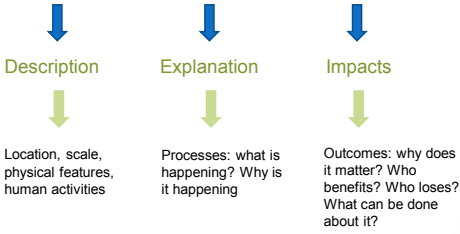
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# Practical Definition

What is where, why there, and why care? (Gritzner 2002)




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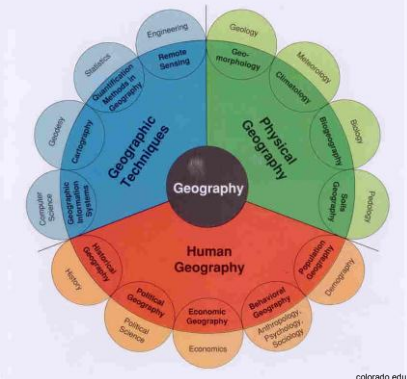
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What is Geography?: National Geographic - <http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/multimedia/what-geography/>

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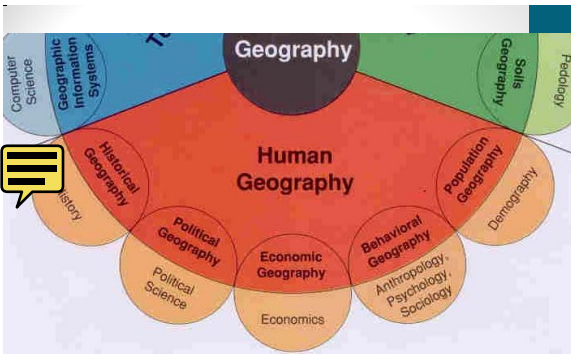
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## Transect



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## Outline

1. Why Places Matter
2. The Importance of Scale
  - Globalization
3. From then to now: Development of Geographic Thought

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## 1) PLACES & WHY THEY MATTER

- Human geography involves two basic endeavours:
  1. Need to establish facts ('geographic literacy')
  2. Need to understand and explain the facts ('geographic knowledge')

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Geographers are united by similar questions and concepts

Questions include:

- What is it?
- Where is it?
- How did it come to be where it is?
- Where is it in relations to other things?
- How is it part of a functioning system?



All of these questions are rooted in geography's central concern with *space and place*.

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## Core Geographic Concepts

### PLACE

Two levels of meaning:

1. An **objective location** that has both uniqueness & interdependence with other places
2. A **subjective social and cultural construct**: somewhere that has personal meaning for individuals or groups



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## Canada's North as place

- How do we imagine Canada's north?
- What sources of information contribute to this imagining?



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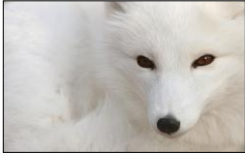
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### Popular Media



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### Advertising



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### Internet



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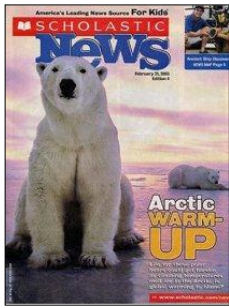
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Educational/Academic Publications



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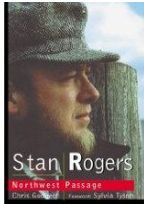
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Song

**NORTHWEST PASSAGE - Stan Rogers**



Ah, for just one time I would take the Northwest Passage  
To **find the hand of Franklin** reaching for the Beaufort Sea  
Tracing one warm line through a **land so wide and savage**  
And make a northwest passage to the sea ...

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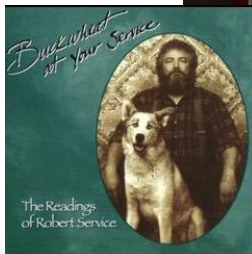
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Verse



THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS DONE  
IN THE MIDNIGHT SUN  
BY THE MEN WHO  
MOIL FOR GOLD;  
THE ARCTIC TRAILS  
HAVE THEIR SECRET TALES  
THAT WOULD MAKE  
YOUR BLOOD RUN COLD,  
THE NORTHERN LIGHTS  
HAVE SEEN QUEER SIGHTS,  
BUT THE QUEEREST  
THEY EVER DID SEE  
WAS THE NIGHT ON THE MARGE  
OF LAKE LEBARGE  
WHEN I CREMATED  
SAM MCGEE.

-from 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' by Robert Service

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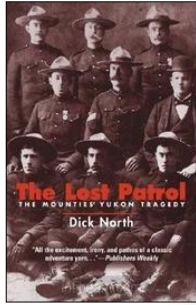
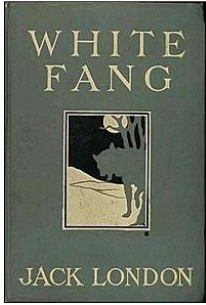
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Literature



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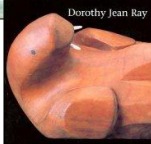
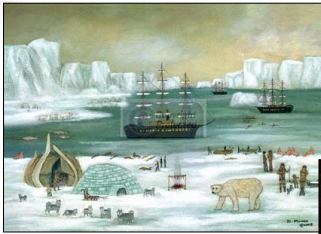
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Art



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Personal Experience



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### Core Geographic Concepts



PLACE: An example



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### Core Geographic Concepts

PLACE

Two levels of meaning:

1. An objective location that has both uniqueness & interdependence with other places
2. A subjective social and cultural construct: somewhere that has personal meaning for individuals or groups



• **Sense of Place** refers to the attachments we have to specific locations

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### Core Geographic Concepts

Place: Ground Zero, New York

- 110 Stories App  
<http://www.cbc.ca/spark/2011/08/remembering-the-twin-towers-using-augmented-reality/>



<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/september-11-attacks/8752951/911-New-York-before-and-after-the-attacks.html>

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### Why Places Matter

Geographic knowledge is important because world is increasingly characterized by:

- instant global communications
- unfamiliar international relationships
- unexpected local changes
- growing evidence of environmental degradation




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### Influence and Meaning of Places 1

- Sites of dynamic human-environment interactions, fluid boundaries
- Influence people's well-being, opportunities & lifestyles




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### Influence and Meaning of Places 2

- Contribute to collective memory – powerful symbols
- Sites of innovation & change, resistance & conflict



Bhangra music: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSJCv6g\\_7z4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSJCv6g_7z4)  
 Wakefield fair trade: [http://www.beanfair.ca/fairtown/english\\_main.html](http://www.beanfair.ca/fairtown/english_main.html)

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### Interdependence of Places

- Most places are *interdependent*
- Each fills specialized roles
- Complex and ever-changing social/cultural/political/economic/environmental context




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### 2) The importance of SCALE

#### (GEOGRAPHIC) SCALE

- Spatial, temporal, social
- Scale is the size of unit studied
- Human construct
- Operates on a continuum from body to global




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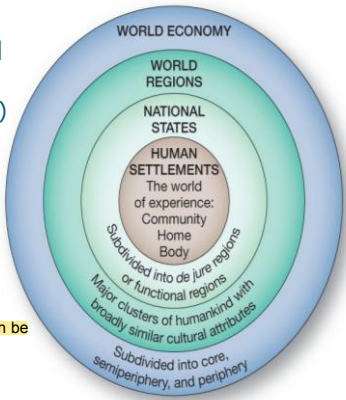
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### Geographical Scales (Spatial Levels)



#### Scale of analysis:

- important because different insights can be gained at different scales.




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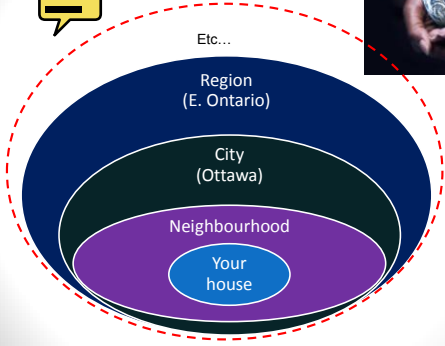
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### Geographical Scales




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### Interdependence of Geographical Scales

- **What happens at one scale affects and is affected by what happens at other scales...**



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### Interdependence as a Two-Way Process

- **Continuous two-way process** in which people create and modify places while being influenced by the settings in which they live and work.
- Place-making is always **incomplete and ongoing**, and it occurs simultaneously at different scales.



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### Globalization

- Process & a condition that involves the **increasing interconnectedness** of different parts of the world through **common processes of economic, environmental, political, and cultural change**



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### Key Issues in a Globalizing World

#### Environmental Issues

- Humans can (and do) alter the environment at the **global scale**
  - Huge environmental footprint
  - Economic disparities among regions
  - Serious global environmental degradation



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### Key Issues in a Globalizing World

#### Health Issues

- Rapid spread of diseases with international travel
  - E.g. SARS, avian influenza, etc.
  - E.g. HIV/AIDS over 25 years



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### Key Issues in a Globalizing World

#### Security Issues

- Increasing concern over international security – linked to globalization



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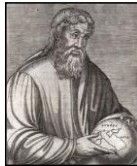
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### 3) THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEOGRAPHIC THOUGHT

- The roots of the word 'Geography' are Greek:
  - *Geo* means 'the world'
  - *Graphai* means 'to write'



STRABO (63BC – 24AD) Ancient Greek Geographer / Philosopher. Author of *Geographica* – an encyclopedic description of people and places.

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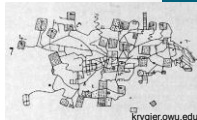
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### Early geographic knowledge

- Preclassical:
  - Earliest geographic descriptions seen in maps
- Classical (*began shortly after 1000 BCE*):
  - Greeks were mobile beyond local areas
  - 2 traditions: literary & mathematical



Bronze age map




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## Geographic Perspectives

- Environmental Determinism
  - Environment largely determines human activities and landscapes
  - (relatively short-lived)



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## Geographic Perspectives

- Possibilism
  - People make choices in response to opportunities and constraints provided by the environment



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## Geographic Perspectives

- Probabilism
  - Humans are more likely to make certain decisions based on the nature of the environment
  - (In-between)



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## Contemporary Human Geography

- Contemporary human geography is a social science, but one with special and valuable ties to the physical sciences, especially physical geography



© whatafy.com

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## Contemporary Geography: Global Issues

- People and places are in the contemporary world increasingly connected and interconnected
- Necessary to look at the big picture—the world—to understand the detail at the local level



drpinna.com

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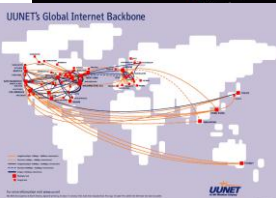
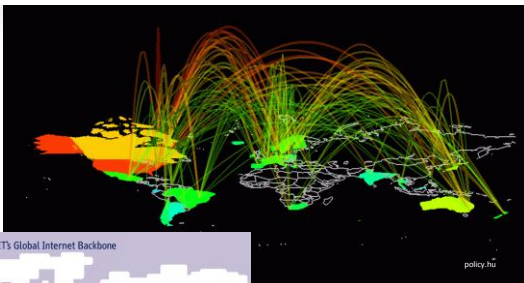
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Internet connections & bandwidth  
• spatial distribution & movement of information

[http://johnroach.net/simultaneousweb\\_maps.html](http://johnroach.net/simultaneousweb_maps.html)

polloy.hu

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## Contemporary Geography: Applied Geography

- Geography has always had an applied component in which geographic skills are used to solve problems.
  - E.g. land-use studies
  - Technology



Infrared aerial photography:  
Developed in WW2 to detect  
painted targets camouflaged to  
look like vegetation

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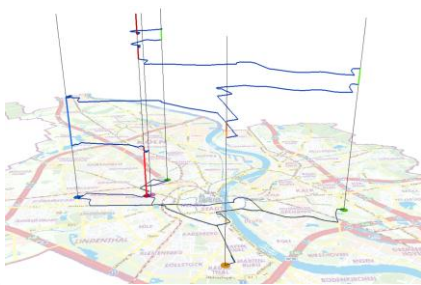
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## 3-D GPS Plot

Understanding how people move around and use services in urban areas



Verkehr (abgeleitet aus individuellen Aktivitäten)  
Courtesy of Guido Rindfuser, RWTH Aachen (Köln)

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## Many facets of geography!

- Check out the uOttawa geography website




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## Summary

1. Why Places Matter
  2. The Importance of Scale
    - Globalization
  3. From then to now: Development of Geographic Thought
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- ...Next class: Core concepts
  - Readings: Chapter 1 (ctd)

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