

Defining & Applying Human Geography

The Anchorage Museum's *Counter Cartographies: Living the Land* exhibition went to archive this week. I was fortunate enough to pass through it this summer on my way to Penn State after working the summer salmon run in Bristol Bay. The visit helped me to integrate my experiences in Alaska with my understanding of geography, and it would take a book to cover everything, but one of my primary takeaways was the interrelation of cartography with epistemology and ideology. I've always been drawn to cartography because of its ability to both inform our world views *and* reflect our own internal processes. As O'Dwyer said "maps can represent psychological as well as physical distances that are rarely linear or uniform."

It is ultimately why so many of the definitions of geography supplied throughout the reading fall short for me. I'm inclined, nonetheless, towards the one given by Gale in 1992: "Geography, for me, is about how we view the world, how we see people in places." It's a broad definition, sure, but geography is a broad subject, and this sufficiently encapsulates the underlying framework of human geography that connects such disparate subdisciplines as political-industrial ecology, historical cartography, polar climateology, and geospatial intelligence.¹ I feel it's lacking, however, by not acknowledging the ways geographical *praxis* in turn shapes how we understand, view, and interact with the world.

Donna Haraway was correct, then, when she wrote "[O]bjectivity is a parable which fails to describe how scientific research is actually undertaken." The pursuit of so-called objective geographic knowledge through the rigorous scientific methods employed in the natural and physical sciences is tantamount to tilting at windmills. Of course, all the fantastic work that's

¹ These are all real "areas of expertise" of faculty within the EMS Department of Geography at Penn State.

been done in regards to trying to approach this ideal shouldn't be dismissed out of hand, but it also shouldn't come at the expense of other methodologies.