

Mental geography

November 25, 2003



Today's fun fact

- In November 2002, despite a deluge of news about the prospect of a war against Saddam Hussein, only 13% of Americans tested could point Iraq out on a map of the world.
- 11% of Americans could not find America.
- 71% of Americans could point out where the Pacific Ocean - the world's largest body of water - was located. Worldwide, three in 10 of those surveyed could not locate the Pacific Ocean.
- Apart from the Swedes, only 40% or fewer young adults could name China and India as the two countries with a population over one billion.
- Less than 25% of French, Canadian, Italian, British and Americans could name four countries that officially acknowledged owning nuclear weapons.
- 58% of Americans know the Taleban and al-Qaeda were based in Afghanistan, compared with 84% of Britons, but only 17% of Americans can locate the country.

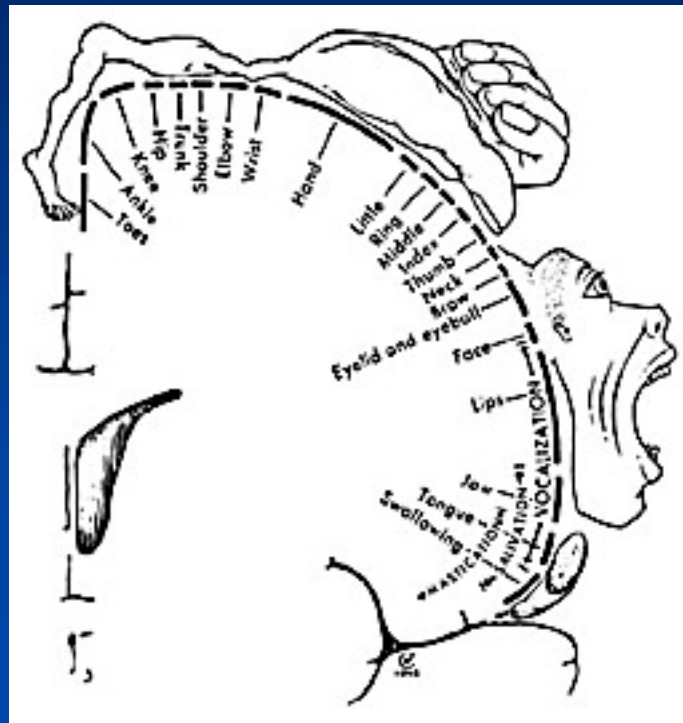
(courtesy of National Geographic Magazine and BBC News World Edition)



Who's to blame?

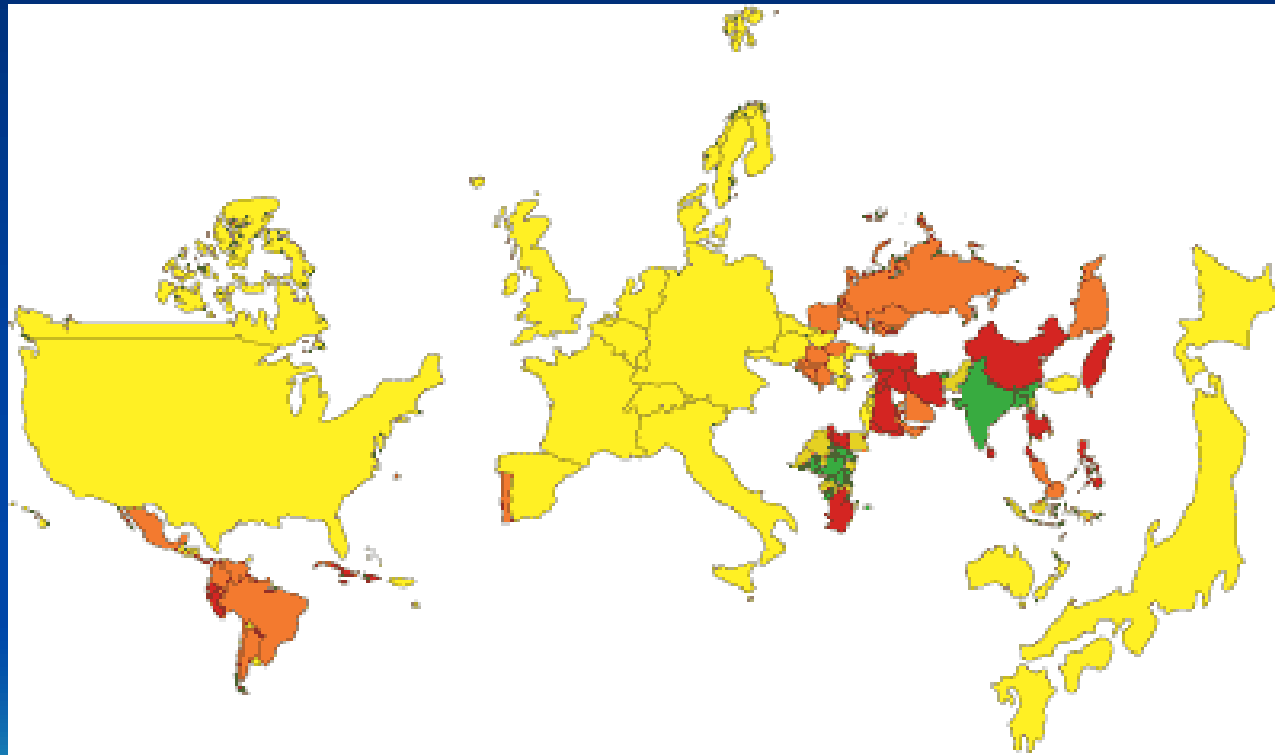


The homunculus

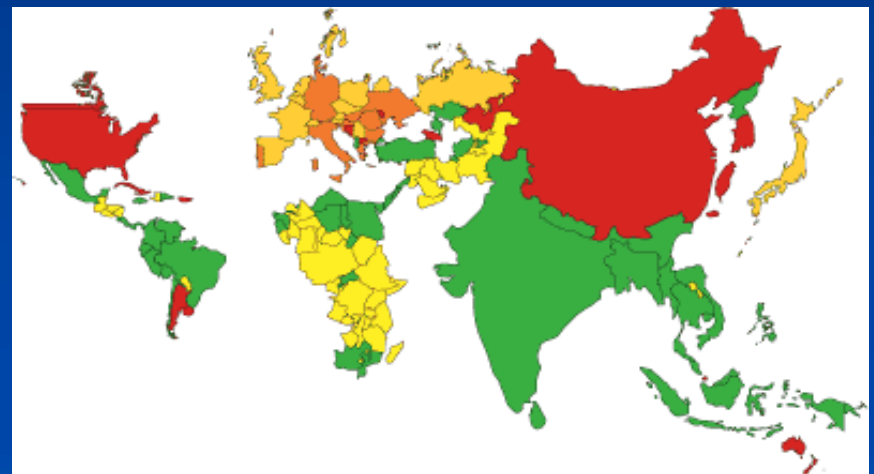
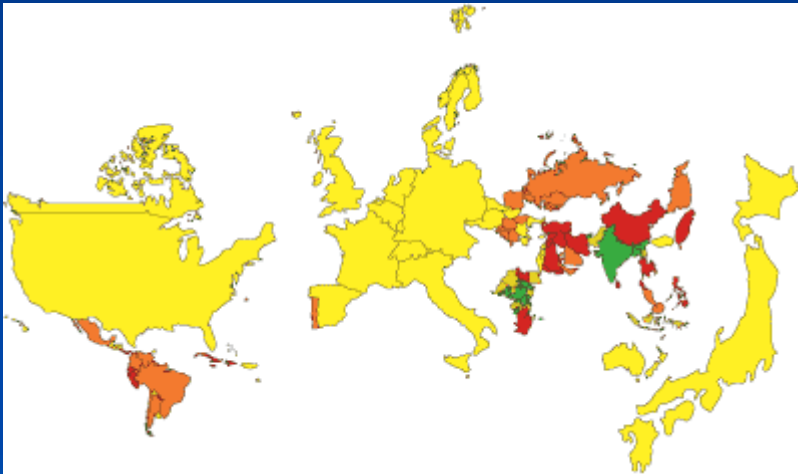


Motor homunculus, from Penfield and Rasmussen, *The Cerebral Cortex of Man* (1950)

Your results may vary



Maps express valuations



Courtesy Pamlyn Smith Studios, New York

And relationships

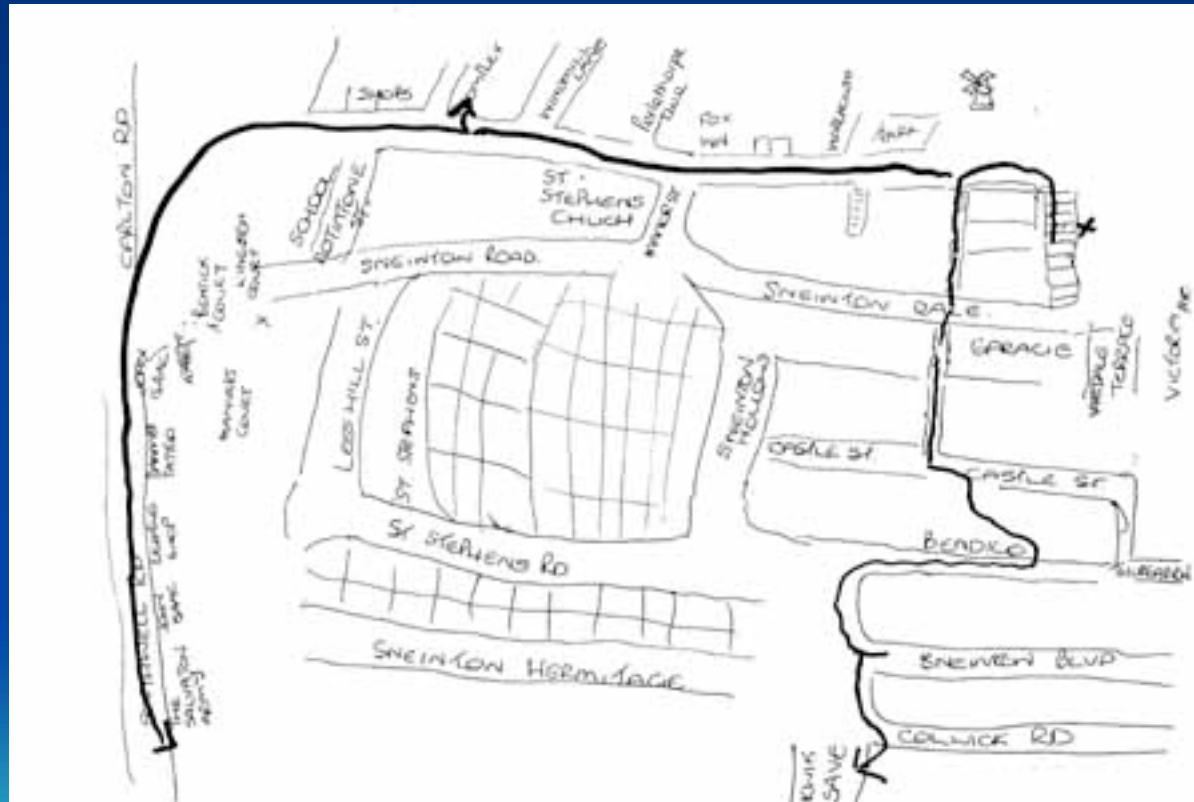


Mental maps, memory palaces

- Monuments (“reminders”)
- Walkers cut paths through cities

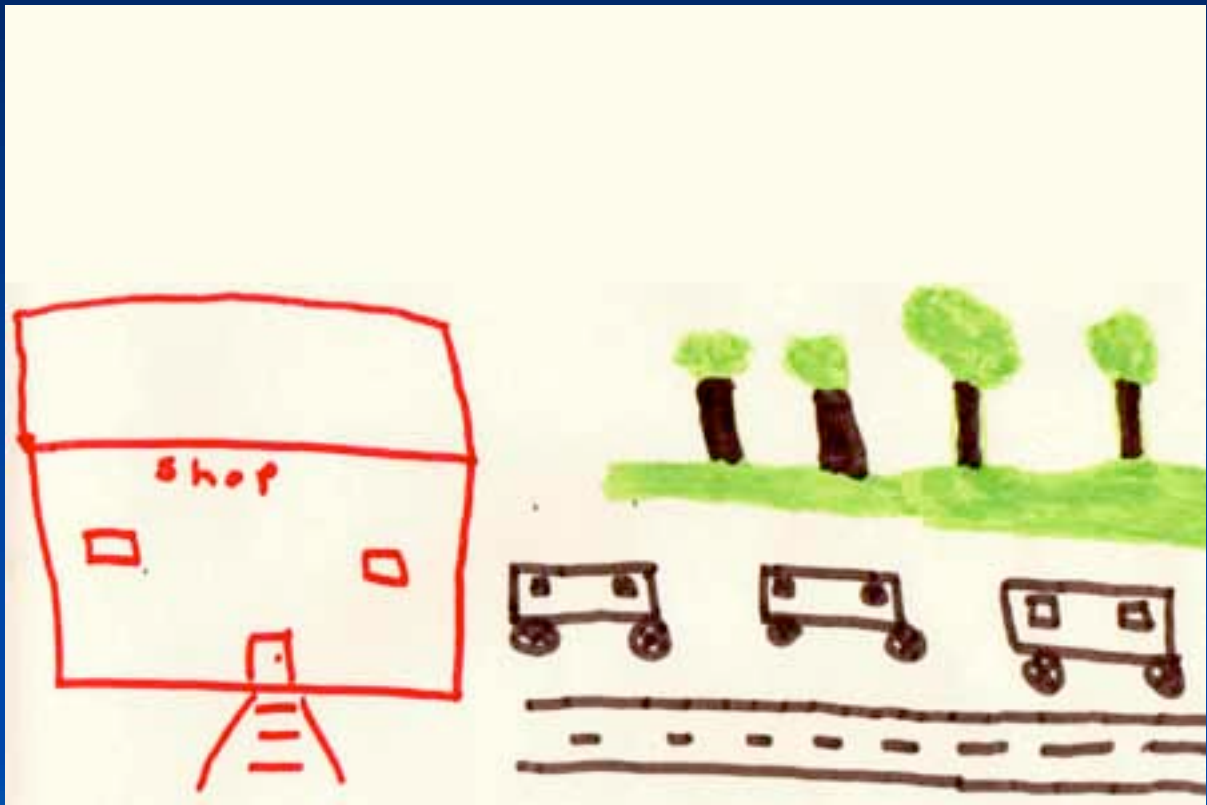


Experienced worlds



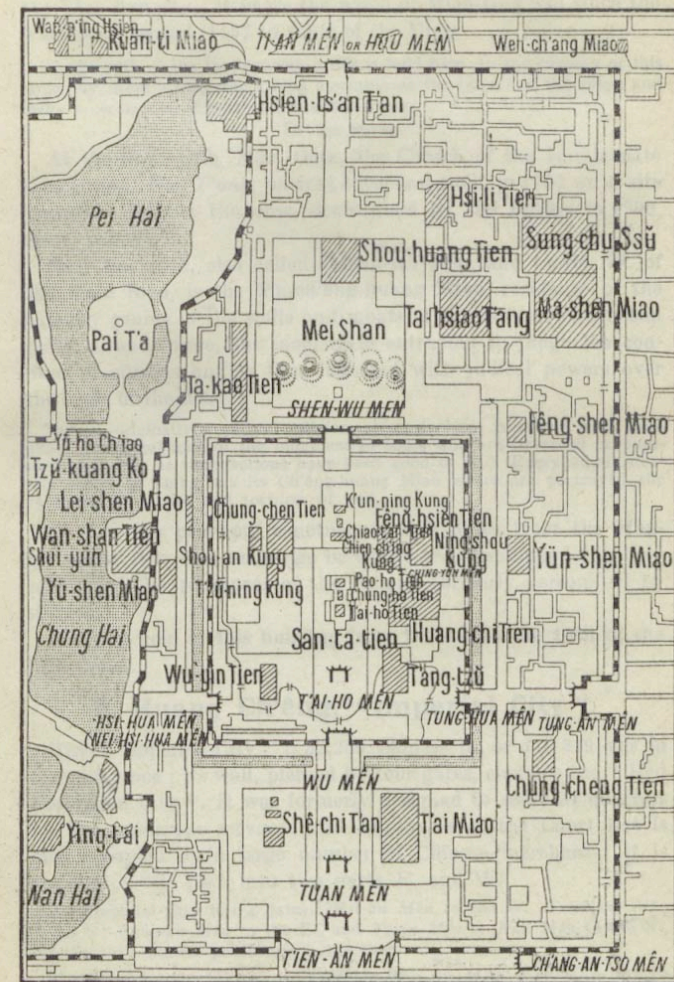
along it out on the washing line
Life Living SALVATION
Seventh Day Adventist is now my flat Personal.
All instructions carried out smile and go yes.
That has been given by
Lost
All the people
Join it on
back where I started
Mary phillips
Sally
AUNS
Small
flat come church





Urban planning: mental maps become territory

- Palaces, churches, squares, avenues, walls, canals; places of pilgrimage, forbidden places



PEKING. — The Red Forbidden City.

Sei Shonagon's map (inferred)

- First dimension: hierarchy (“inside” more powerful than “outside”)
- Second dimension: gender (“inside” more restricted than “outside”)
- Exile: “When a woman lives alone, her house should be extremely dilapidated, the mud wall should be falling to pieces, and if there is a pond, it should be overgrown with water-plants”



The world map, 1914-present: work in progress

- The disintegration of the world order laid out in 1815 (Vienna conference, to design post-Napoleonic Europe) and 1884 (Berlin conference, to regularize colonial conquest)
- Emergence of a new space: “the Third World” (Alfred Sauvy, 1952), the “non-aligned movement” (Bandung conference, 1955)



Strictly mental spaces?

- Shared virtual worlds
- Geographical annotation programs
- The metaphor of “cyberspace”: what does it reveal, both in its accuracy and its inaccuracy?
- Space still defined by social interactions and behavior



Map and territory

- “Space is an order of coexistences, as time is an order of successions” (Leibniz)
- What’s primary: relation (between things in coexistence or mutual sequence). Maps really depict relationships, whether among people or between people and the things they think are important.

