

Space, Place, and the Humanities

An Overview

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γεω-,

a combining form of γῆ (earth) that appeared in a number of words including γεωγραφία (geography)

Earth

the planet, the soil, an element
(alongside fire, air and water), the
dwelling place of humans (opposed
to Heaven)

Humanities

15th C branch of learning opposed to Theology, Man as the measure of things, drawing on Ancient learning (philosophy, rhetoric, history, grammar)

Geo + Humanities

an interest in the human condition connected with the materiality and processes of the Earth itself

an interest in how proximities and distances, whether absolute or relational, and the spatial imaginaries that underpin these, such as Cartesian, topographic and topological, are fundamental to such a condition.

Geography/Humanism/the Humanities

“Geo” and “Humanities” emerged hand in hand during Renaissance

Humanities and Natural Science (Natural Philosophy) bundled together and opposed to Theology.

Attention diverted from “heavens” to “earth”

“geo” an enabling device in flourishing of humanistic thought

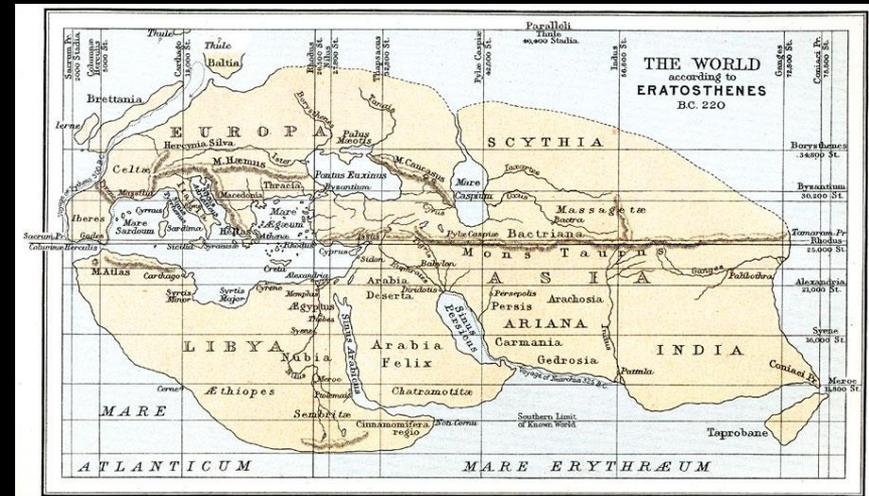
Bridging the Divide?

Herodotus 485BC – 425BC

The priests of the gods in other lands wear long hair, but in Egypt they shave their heads: among other men the custom is that in mourning those whom the matter concerns most nearly have their hair cut short, but the Egyptians, when deaths occur, let their hair grow long, both that on the head and that on the chin, having before been close shaven: other men have their daily living separated from beasts, but the Egyptians have theirs together with beasts: other men live on wheat and barley, but to any one of the Egyptians who makes his living on these it is a great reproach; they make their bread of maize, which some call spelt

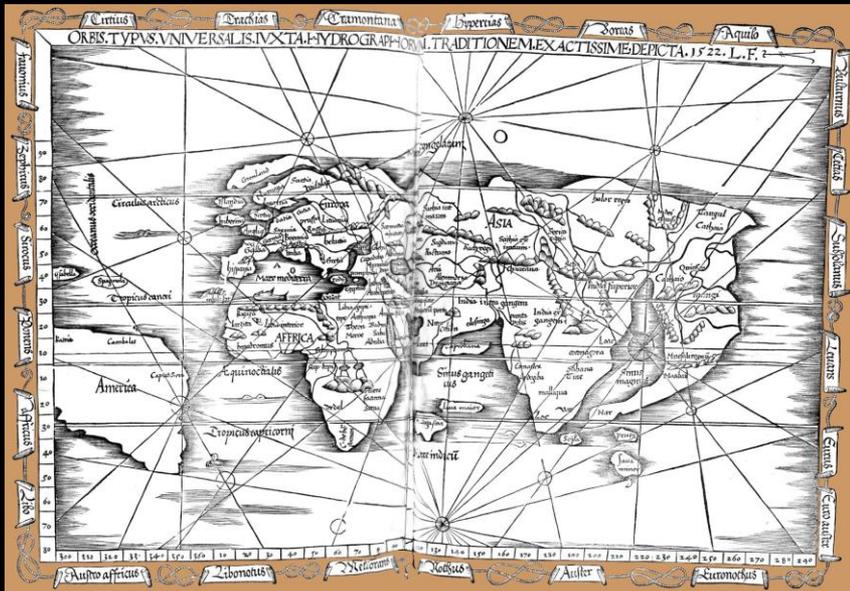
(Herodotus “An Account of Egypt”, 450BC)

Eratosthenes 276BC – 194BC



Bridging the Divide?

Ptolemy 90AD – 168AD



Strabo 64BC – 24AD

Arts, forms of government, and modes of life arising from certain [internal] springs flourish under whatever climate they may be situated; climate, however, has its influence, and therefore while some peculiarities are due to the nature of the country, others are the result of institutions and education. It is not owing to the nature of the country, but rather to their education that the Athenians cultivate eloquence, while the Lacedaemonians do not; nor yet the Thebans, who are nearer still. Neither are the Babylonians and Egyptians philosophers by nature, but by reason of their institutions and education. In like manner, the excellence of horses, oxen, and other animals, results not alone from the places where they dwell, but also from their breeding

(Strabo quoted in Glacken, 1967)

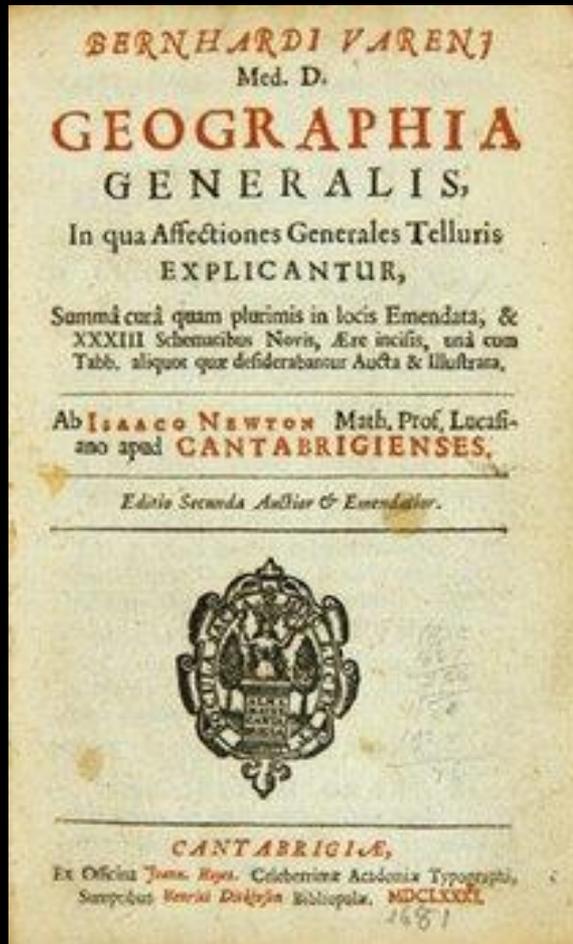
Bridging the Divide?

Raphael, *The School at Athens*
(1509)

Ptolemy and Strabo



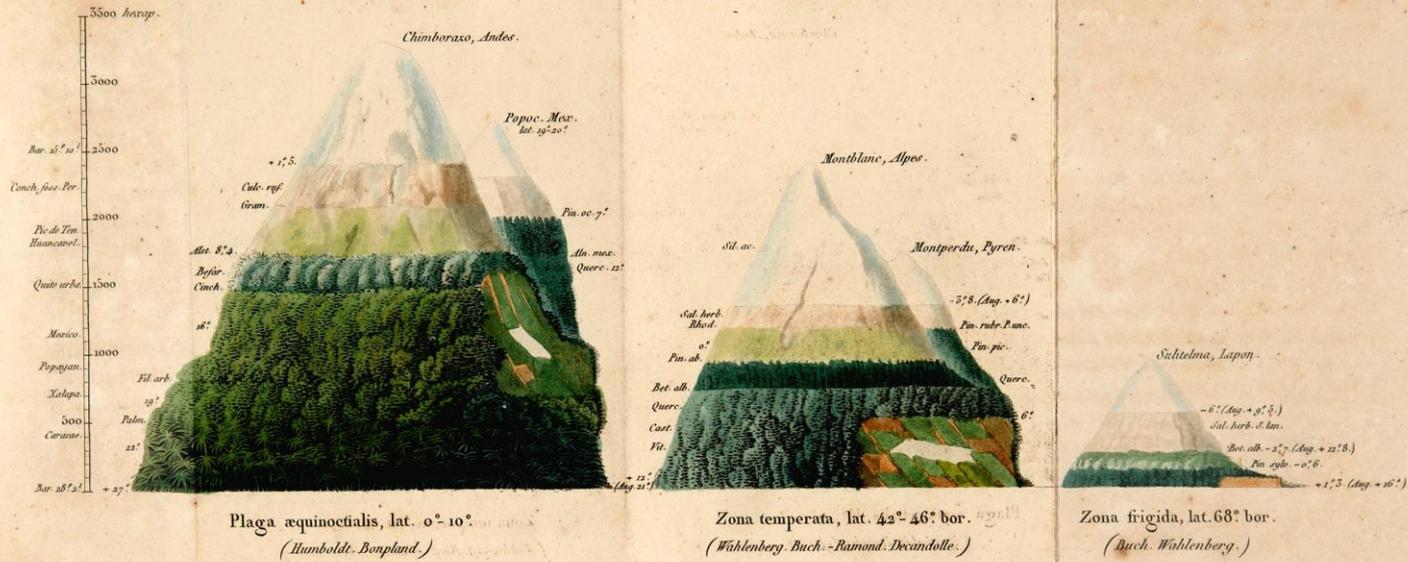
Bridging the Divide?



Geography, itself, falls into **two parts**: one **general**, the other **special**. The former considers the earth in general, explaining its various parts and general affections. The latter, that is, special geography, observing general rules, considers, in the case of individual regions, their site, divisions, boundaries and other matters worth knowing. But those who have so far written on geography have discussed at length special geography alone... and have explained very little relating to general geography, with much that is necessary being neglected and omitted...geography itself scarcely preserves the title of science.

(Varenius [1622-1650] in Unwin, 1992)

Bridging the Divide

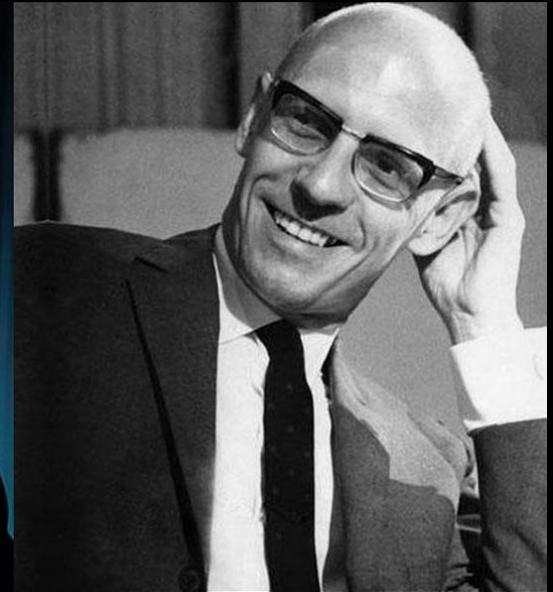
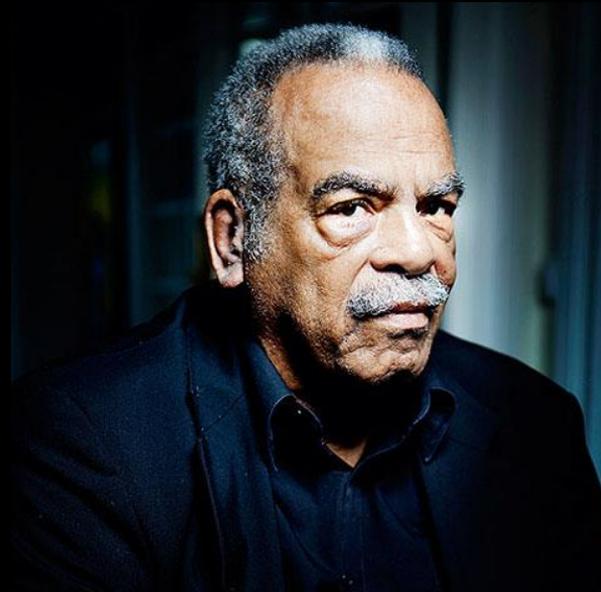


Geographiæ plantarum lineamenta.

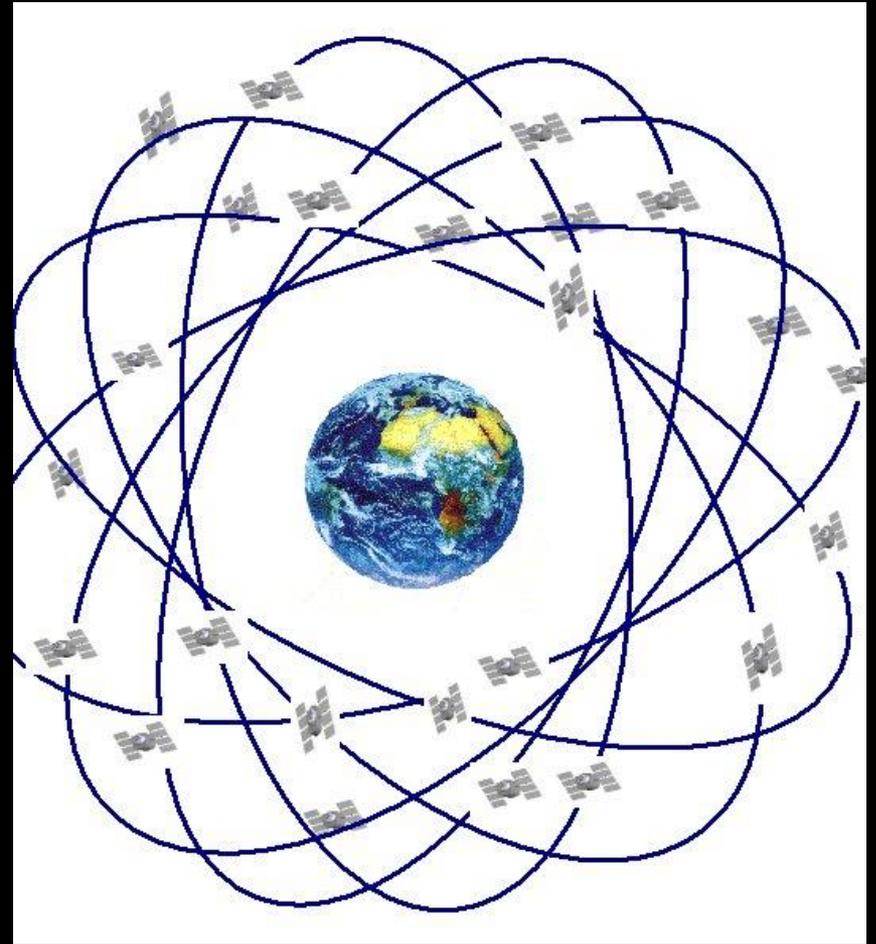
Plantarum nomina appositurus ea altitudine qua quæque crescere desinunt. Numeri nudi significant temperaturam mediam annuam, Thermometri cent. gradibus expressam: numeri ancis inclusi, temperaturam mediam mensis Augusti.

1. hexap. = 6 ped. par. = 1^m 95.

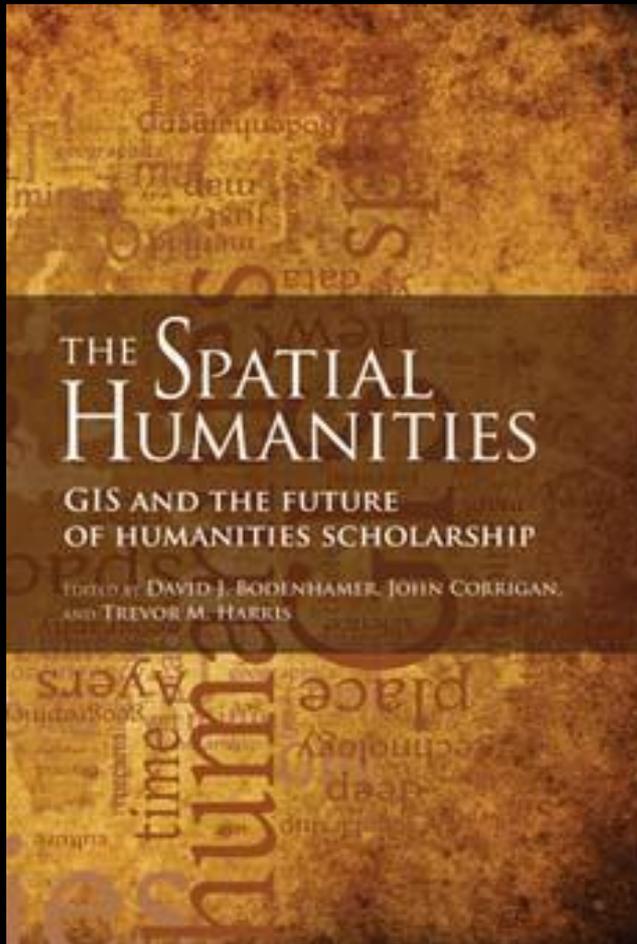
The Reassertion of Space in Social Thought



GeoHumanities/Spatial Humanities/Digital Humanities

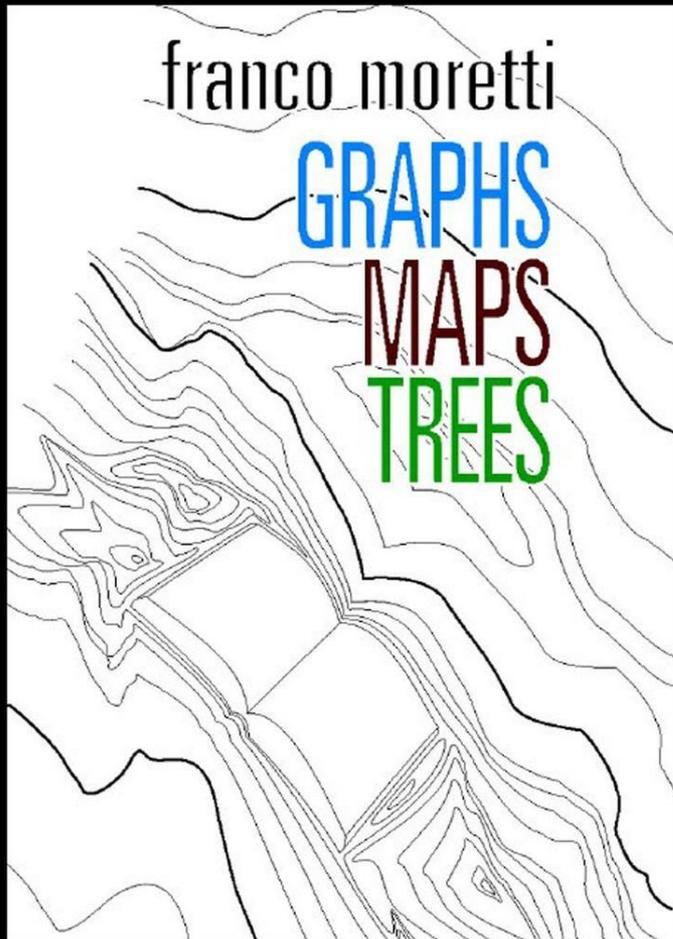


Geohumanities/Spatial Humanities/Digital Humanities



Spatial humanities, especially with a humanities-friendly GIS at its center, can be a tool with revolutionary potential for scholarship, but as such, it faces significant obstacles to knowledge that, at first glance, rest on different epistemological footings. Humanities scholars speak often of conceptual and cognitive mapping, but view geographic mapping, the stock in trade of GIS, as an elementary or primitive approach to complexity at best or environmental determinism at worst. Experts in spatial technologies, conversely, have found it difficult to wrestle slippery humanities notions into software that demands precise locations and closed polygons. At times, applying GIS to the humanities appears only to prove C. P. Snow's now-classic formulation of science and the humanities as two separate worlds. (Bodenhamer et al, date: viii).

Geohumanities/Spatial Humanities/Digital Humanities



Our banal social lives become digitally mediated and can be subject to quantitative encapsulation through lexical analysis. For instance, Alan Mislove and colleagues applied a word-rating system – scoring positive and negative connotations – to US-based geolocated tweets to produce stunning time lapse maps of the ‘mood of the nation’. Similar approaches have correlated postings with stock market movements, and yet so far the conclusions have been banal. The poetics and affective power of the visualisation have often been more powerful than the supposed ‘result’ (Mike Crang 2015, 354).

“Geo”

as predisciplinary interest in
humans and the earth – earth to
be both measured and understood

“Geo”

as location and locatedness (the
neo- “geo” of digital worlds)

“Geo”

of earth as soil/ground

GeoHumanities

Centering Space and Place in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary enterprise

Reaching between humanities disciplines

Reaching across the Art/Humanities/Science divides – a concern for the earth.

Involving creative arts disciplines who are doing great things with both locational data and engagements with the earth.

Engaging developments in Digital Humanities (keeping them embedded in wider discussions of spatial theory)

