

*Toward Spatial Humanities: Historical GIS & Spatial History*, ed. Ian N. Gregory and Alistair Geddes (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), 212 pp.

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In 2010, the Indiana University Press introduced its Spatial Humanities series with the publication of *The Spatial Humanities: GIS and the Future of Humanities Scholarship*. Edited by David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan, and Trevor M. Harris, the book and subsequent titles aimed to merge Geographic Information Systems/Science (GIS) with humanities scholarship, thereby giving the spatial turn in the humanities more grounding in geospatial analysis. Half a decade and eight volumes later, the series gives us *Toward Spatial Humanities: Historical GIS & Spatial History*. Edited by historical GIS (HGIS) expert Ian N. Gregory and geographer Alistair Geddes, this collection of essays shows the possibilities GIS presents, though it also insists that we are still far from realizing the potential of the spatial humanities or even establishing a “literary GIS.” The spatial humanities, however, are here; there is not as much to move toward as the editors suggest.

The subtitle, “Historical GIS & Spatial History,” reveals the book’s main limitation—it views the humanities solely through the lens of history. For the editors, history is the clear gateway discipline for GIS in the humanities. As HGIS matures, practitioners become spatial historians, moving from articles discussing method and technology toward those that investigate a specific “applied research question” (2). The structure of the volume itself reveals the journey; the first three essays model applied scholarship, while the second three return us to method and technology in circumstances where “conventional GIS technology does not easily do what the authors require” (89). Still, all of the essays remain grounded in history and geography.

Applied HGIS scholarship is possible because of the copious spatial data collected in the Western world since the middle of the nineteenth century. In their contribution, Robert M. Schwartz and Thomas Thevenin mix railway and agricultural data. Elsewhere, Niall Cunningham and Andrew A. Beveridge make separate use of over a century’s worth of census data to track, respectively, the distribution of religions in Ireland and the segregation of African Americans in US cities.

The first three—“applied”—essays feature advanced geospatial analysis to support their conclusions. Schwartz and Thevenin use geographically weighted regression analyses to test the relationship between wheat and cattle production as rail became more accessible. Cunningham, on the other hand, applies kernel-density smoothing to replace the many individual dots representing fatalities in Northern Ireland with an

isopleth map (contour lines), thereby making it easier to see where the violence of the Troubles was the most concentrated.

The cartography also deserves praise. The maps feature none of the common errors that GIS dilettantes exhibit all over the Internet, such as using a choropleth map—where polygons are shaded to show their value—to visualize either multiple variables or extensive variables. Furthermore, serving as examples from which the broader spatial humanities can still improve, the visualizations here are always stimuli for further analysis, as opposed to mere window dressing. The book shows that having a capable geographer on the team helps with clearer spatial analysis.

But humanists in general, wary of positivism and quantitative analysis, may view these analyses skeptically. The editors breezily address and move past these concerns, but their haste fails to convince. Instead, Schwartz and Thevenin's claim that, "In spatial history, however, HGIS works best as a junior partner" does a better job of reminding spatial humanists to work in concert with other humanistic methods (27). The novelty of maps or statistical analyses can lead us to forget that, for example, the dark band on the isopleth map is a disembodied representation of the many people who were killed in Belfast. The humanities excel at correcting that simplification.

For US literary historians specifically, Beveridge's chapter, mapping African American urban segregation using 130 years of US Census data, deserves special attention. The dataset for the study is mostly based on the Minnesota Population Center's National HGIS data repository, which includes census tract-level data dating back to their introduction in 1910. Data from the Urban Transition Historical GIS Project, which includes maps of the enumeration districts—comparable to census tracts—used in the 1880 US Census, adds another three decades to the study. It is now possible to track the segregation that already existed in Chicago from 1880, before the first Great Migration had even begun. Pushing back the temporal horizon of such granular data makes a whole new series of investigations possible for literary historians working on late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century urban literature.

Also notably, Beveridge uses quantitative indices to measure segregation. For example, the dissimilarity index describes how evenly a group is spread out over an area. The analysis leads to two conclusions. First, unsurprisingly, urban segregation increased in the 80 years before the Civil Rights movement, even as African Americans' total share of urban populations grew. More provocatively, Beveridge shows that though segregation has played out differently in various regions, it has been especially extreme in Chicago, complicating the claims made by sociologists like Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess about Chicago's standing in for any US city. It may be, in Richard Wright's

words, “the *known* city,” but it can no longer be the paradigmatic city. This is a place where quantitative spatial analysis can complement more “traditional” literary study, as the baseline knowledge of Chicago’s extreme segregation and isolation invites new comparisons between the Harlem and Black Chicago Renaissances, for example.

The second group of essays covers topics closer to the kind of spatial humanities that the book hopes to call forth, but they fall short. The first two return to the discussions of method and technology. Humphrey R. Southall describes the immense labor involved in establishing a massive HGIS project, and the closing reference to the UK’s Research Excellence Framework underscores the growing need to convince external institutions that this scholarship is worth funding, lest the projects disappear from a lack of care. Elijah Meeks and Ruth Mostern unveil their Digital Gazetteer of the Song Dynasty, from which they draw conclusions about the competing pressures of war-making and revenue extraction. They also go into detail about using an Intentionally-Linked Entities database to guide their organization of spatial data that changes over time. With the final contribution, the only one written outside either history or geography departments, Julia Hallam and Les Roberts employ the City in Film database of 1,700 films about Liverpool to model Roberts’s idea of “cinematic cartography.” As the essay seemingly least linked with HGIS, it should be the most tantalizing view of on-the-ground spatial humanities, but the wholly speculative conclusions are dissatisfying. For this volume, the spatial humanities is always still to come.

Some of Hallam and Roberts’s conclusions do appear, however, in another book in the Spatial Humanities series, their coedited *Locating the Moving Image: New Approaches to Film and Place* (2014). Similarly, Cunningham’s essay builds on the dataset used in an earlier book in the IUP series, *Troubled Geographies: A Spatial History of Religion and Society in Ireland* (2013), by Cunningham, Gregory, and other co-authors. Over half of the authors in this collection have work appear elsewhere in the series, meaning that *Toward Spatial Humanities* resembles a greatest hits compilation. Repeating authors suggests that the spatial humanities is a cartel of a few dozen scholars contributing to each other’s volumes, rather than a rich and rapidly growing field populated by entities like the GeoHumanities Special Interest Group of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations or the American Association of Geographers’ new journal *GeoHumanities*.

Finally, the editors’ speedy dismissal of concerns regarding positivism reveals a missed chance for better engagement with the audience of potential spatial humanist converts. They should have made more than a passing reference to GIS work that nurtures political, critical, and nonpositivist epistemologies such as Meghan Cope and Sarah Elwood’s *Qualitative GIS: A Mixed Methods Approach* (2009) and Nadine Schuurman’s introduction to “critical GIS” in *GIS: A Short Introduction* (2004). Worse, the feminist GIS

practitioners developing and promoting a nonpositivist GIS, like Mei-Po Kwan and Marianna Pavlovskaya, are wholly ignored. These voices are precisely those that current and future spatial humanists need to hear from more, considering both their epistemological concerns and spatial methods are closely aligned with our own.

In the 2000s, David Cooper and Gregory's use of the journals of Thomas Gray and Samuel Taylor Coleridge to map the English Lake District was an inspirational example of what they called a "literary GIS." Today, a map from that project serves as the cover for *Toward Spatial Humanities*. In that intervening time, perhaps we have already arrived at the spatial humanities. Now what we have to move toward is making it both better, with more sophisticated analysis and cartography, and broader, with a wider acknowledgment of the many spatial humanists already at work and the many ways that they do their work.