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ARRIVALS: RE-SITUATING KNOWLEDGE ON THE GEOHUMANITIES PLATFORM

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Abstract

Although the subject of Geohumanities is well-established, many who wish to contribute to it remain bound by the modern disciplines which institutionalize our research. Although these conventions anchor many of our interests, they also limit some of the trajectories we would like to explore. This paper draws on reflections shared by participants in the inaugural event of the Geohumanities Platform – an emergent community seeking to shape, through practice, new ways of doing artistic and academic research. These reflections focus on how disciplines are experienced in practice, how research trajectories may be limited as a consequence, and the liberating potential offered by the Geohumanities.

The paper argues that the emergence of the Geohumanities both reflects and reminds us to pay attention to various forms of 'situatedness' in academic and creative work. Informed by feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critiques of partial knowledge, it draws renewed attention to how our knowledge is 'situated' – not only in terms of identity, politics, and affinities, but also in terms of our disciplinary orthodoxies. Congregating on the Geohumanities Platform was prompted in part by a reminder of our situatedness in epistemic and disciplinary limits, and an awareness that positioning ourselves in other 'situations' may help us challenge and re-constitute our 'knowing'.

Introduction

The Geohumanities Platform intends to be a site in which scholars interested in exploring the Geohumanities can collaborate, experiment, and explore their interests in the combined worlds of Place / Literature / Augmented realities / Theatre / Fiction / Originality / Reality / and Media (or PLATFORM), broadly conceived. It is envisaged as an opportunity for contributors at any stage of their academic or creative career, from any and all subject areas, to share their ideas as they are forming: it will be a site where our process will be our product.

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The Geohumanities Platform is therefore intended as a space to give ‘light and air’ (after Swords, 2017) to these often-marginalised interests, help them develop, and through doing so, showcase the continued emergence of this new interdisciplinary world. The inaugural event of the Geohumanities Platform was held in person in Cardiff University in 2025. This short paper (the first of 3) shares key reflections raised during this event regarding the experience of being disciplined within the academy, and why participants are interested in pursuing work beyond these (b)orders (see Anderson, 2021), principally in the geohumanities. As this paper demonstrates, the Geohumanities Platform intends to be a place to record our travel as it happens, and hopefully provide momentum to translate this work into more conventional academic and artistic forms in the future.

The subject of the Geohumanities is, for many, a well-established interdisciplinary. There are vibrant and strong clusters of geohumanities researchers at key universities, there are individuals who enjoy formal professorial positions in the subject, and its pioneering journal – GeoHumanities – has entered its second decade (see Christou, 2024). From Dear’s recollection of the journal’s inception (2015), the realisation of the geohumanities was never predetermined or inevitable, its impression was a consequence of a conference (a ‘dent from an event’ to echo Gillot’s phrase (2025:11), and its emergent nature reflects something not only of the experimental potentiality of the subject matter, but also the intended approach to it.

As the inaugural editors of the first edition of the GeoHumanities journal note, their intention was to bring together research interests that have never sat easily within modern disciplines; their vision was to be:

“attentive to past endeavors over the course of the twentieth century” (Cresswell, Dixon, Bol, and Entrikin, 2015: 2),

whilst also being,

“properly plugged into the extraordinary flowering of spatial and platial thought and theory that has emerged in the last three decades or so under the remit of critical social and cultural theory as well as within our own discipline” (ibid.:7).

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Although set in motion by individuals who may have felt an affinity with the ‘resolute experimentalism’ (Dewsbury et al, 2002: 440) integral to the ‘new’ cultural geography of the late-twentieth century (see, for example, Cosgrove and Jacksons, 1987; Thrift, 1996; then Massey, 2005), the geohumanities was not in its inception anything ‘novel’ per se. Rather it was a fresh reframing of attention towards an array of long-standing interests that could not be contained within any (sub)discipline. Emergent from what now may be understood as shared ‘currents’ of praxis (including the cultural, spatial, creative, and perhaps more notably the relational, see for example Anderson, 2025 for an overview, and below), geohumanities sought to highlight the creative overlaps consistently and intentionally overlooked by the modern tendency to compartmentalise research. For the original GeoHumanities editors, attention refocused upon a “mode of knowing the world [with] a deep lineage. [... A] creative reservoir *for thinking not only about the world and our place within it, but the nature of human being itself*” (Cresswell et al, 2015: 2, our emphasis).

The appeal of this broad ‘mode of knowing’ continues to resonate with those congregating on the Geohumanities Platform. Geohumanities continues to draw researchers¹ who have found an academic and creative home in a wide array of disciplines – sociology, art, anthropology, human geography, literary studies, and digital humanities (for example), along with a range of methodological specialisms: including academic, and other forms of creative, writing, phonography, photography, ethnography, autoethnography, documentary making, GIS, painting, collage, graffiti, community art (to name but several). Participants’ experiences resonate with the notion that their initial interests tend to overlap modern disciplinary (b)orders; as one articulates:

“When I applied for my PhD, I had the same project that I applied to a sociology department, an education department, and a librarianship department. The same thing could go in three different places”.

Yet over time, for this participant and others, a variety of praxes had the effect of compartmentalising - or disciplining - their interest into specialist areas:

¹ We use the term ‘researchers’ to refer to both academics and artists, in the spirit of Picasso’s observation of his own work: my, “painting are but research and experiment. I never do painting as a work of art. All of them are researches” (as cited in Hawkins, 2021: 11).

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“... I think I've silently made the shift to now being almost too attached to the capital-S sociology side, when I felt quite uncomfortable with that for a long time; I thought I needed more humanities, more literary... I didn't know – and still don't know – if I really *fit* within sociology. And it's almost, like habit and environment and reinforcing [practices from] people around me. It's like: 'Oh, now I'm a sociologist' {pause}– but I still read lots of geography...!”

Over time, participants acknowledge that a process of alignment occurs, even to the extent that experiences are recounted through inference to subject-literate notions and concepts (perhaps Bourdieu's sociological 'habitus' (1987) for example, or Casey's geographical 'incoming' and 'outgoing' (2001)). Regardless of our pre-disciplinary starting points, in this shared reflection we recognise how far we have become moulded as 'epistemic subjects', constituted through and by the disciplining regimes in which we professionally reside (after Kobayashi, 2009: 138).

The significance of this epistemic 'situating' of our knowledge is manifold. If one suitably aligns to the disciplinary regimes of our subjects, one can upskill and feel at home within a specific area; for example:

“Well, I think it's important to some extent to remind myself [I am now aligned with a discipline], in my case as a human geographer, because that reminds me of stuff I've got, and shouldn't take for granted. So when you're talking to people, it can be a while before you remind yourself that they don't even know the basics [of my specialism, in this case GIS mapping]. Often you think everyone knows what you're talking about because [within my specialism] we all use the same languages and methods. So I often think that everyone knows what mapping is. Everyone knows what it is! And I've got to sort of pull myself back and think, well, actually, I've got this special set of knowledges because I'm a 'human geographer'. And not everyone has them”.

This extended process of habituation resonated with those now rooted in explicitly creative praxis, as one participant acknowledged:

“Calling yourself 'an artist', I mean, that's complicated! It takes years before you can start having confidence to call yourself 'an artist'. It's a weird thing, it's such a heavy word that's kind

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of got all this crap associated with it. But then when you do say you're a visual artist, it's like, oh, okay!. Yeah, you're so intoxicated".

For those congregating on the Geohumanities Platform, the strengths of our current situatedness are recognised. We appreciate the intellectual insights provided by our respective subjects and training, as well as the (relative, perhaps overestimated) security of being housed within formal epistemic architecture (see Papers II and III). But through this reflection also comes an acknowledgment that disciplines by their very nature limit what we have been able to turn our hands – minds, and the rest of our bodies – to. In sum, we come to articulate how as individuals, we have restricted autonomy over the nature of our creative work:

"Yes, I think there's a kind of institutional or disciplinary label [you need] in order to be able to get things done, and you need this in order to be able to provide leverage for funding, or opportunities, or students, or whatever it is you're after".

"Yet, as researchers, we are limited in terms of what we can do and what we can change. You learn it's about how you sell [your ideas, and yourself] to stakeholders, be it institutions or funders: they have the power."

There is a recognition therefore that disciplines situate an individual's work – rendering it readable for the researcher's market – 'this' is what we are, and 'this' is what we do. The discipline becomes a useful 'shorthand' to situate the researcher within a larger set of practices, with the trade-off involving the individual contributing to these ongoing performances, and to some extent becoming subsumed through this re-production; as the following participants put it:

"publishing is a huge aspect of reproducing the discipline... through this I've learned that what you're doing with your citations, for example, is just being like: 'you can trust me, I'm citing from the journal that I'm trying to be published in', and it would be a clear disadvantage if you're drawing from all over the place.

"I've got to spend a third of the paper, but also a lot of my time, just conforming, before I even get to my idea. It does make you remember there are boxes that I need to tick, and I

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do this to speak to an existing audience, rather than establish a new audience, a *different* audience. So you only get authority and credibility given to you if you do this”

“I get the sense that a lot of the editors want to just be like: I can tell who you are – and that you belong - because of your citations”.

Through the need – and desire – to be published, individuals reproduce a disciplinary identity for ourselves, our journals, and our colleagues, through publishing choices and citation practices (and we return to this theme in Paper III). As stated above, this process can become ‘intoxicating’, rewarding certain performances which in turn territorialise and solidify the boundaries of a subject. As a consequence, strong but ultimately small disciplines are formed, with contributions to this process incentivised with status, influence, and career progression. Yet, as these dimensions are acknowledged, so too is a sense that original interests have been marginalised; our new situatedness means that there is a sense that:

“We end up living in bubbles”,

“We discipline ourselves with labels,” and,

“disciplines are still important, yeah..., but the policing of them is definitely not.”

Conclusion.

Congregating on the Geohumanities Platform means participants acknowledge the strengths of their home disciplines but also recognise their partiality, and as they do so they experience a renewed urge to continue exploring beyond these limits. This becomes a move to counter subject-alignment in isolation, and to recognise the risks of operating in disciplinary silos. Indeed, in a broader context of public discourse being thoroughly challenged by media-driven echo chambers and synthesising AI, the need to pay renewed attention to our academic ‘situation’ becomes vital.

In this context, the interdisciplinary promise of the geohumanities offers a different ‘situatedness’. In contrast to the meanings associated with the interdiscipline to date, it is possible for the ‘geo’ prefix to transcend formal reference to ‘geography’ as a disciplinary silo, and reorient participants to a position in the middle of complexity broadly put (again echoing Gillot). This new situation

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demands from us a commitment to use any means available – before, beyond, or across many disciplines of endeavour – to try to understand our position with and through the world. As we will see in the remaining papers in this opening series, those on the Geohumanities Platform do not wish to exile themselves absolutely from their disciplinary homes, and they acknowledge the potential risks involved in dividing their labour in new areas; however, they embrace the possibilities of going beyond their disciplinary (b)orders to learn new insights, collaborate on new 'graphies', open up new audiences, and demonstrate the impact of doing so to funders. Through doing so they ultimately hope to not only help transform the situation of the world, but also our means of operation within it.

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