



# Editorial Introduction: Friedrich Nietzsche and Geography

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Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be understood without taking his essential pluralism into account. (Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 1983 [1962] 4).

## ***Ecce Neitzsche***

This special issue of “Friedrich Nietzsche and Geography” began as an “interactive short paper” session (co-organized by Paul Robbins, Keith Woodward, and myself) that was convened in Chicago during the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG). Each of the eight presenters chose an evocative passage from Nietzsche's works and discussed its relevance to geography. The wager of the AAG session (and this issue) was that Nietzsche's relevance to geography was best discerned not only by (re)evaluating his impact on the thinkers who shaped geographical scholarship, but also by direct and patient engagements with Nietzsche's writing itself. Deliberately open in scope, the session not only elicited a series of eclectic and inspired presentations, it also incited a series of unusually energetic conversations. Even without the commentary



of one participant, who was unable to attend the meeting, the effect of Nietzsche's (will to) PowerPoint projected text (reproduced below) on the audience was curiously stirring.

And there is a hidden mob in you, too. And although you are high and of a higher type, much in you is crooked and malformed. There is no smith in the world who could hammer you straight and into shape for me. (Nietzsche, 1961 [1883] 293)

It was a pleasure to participate in the session, but it is a greater pleasure and admittedly a daunting privilege to write an editorial introduction entitled "Friedrich Nietzsche and Geography". From the outset, let me make it clear that this editorial is not a primer on how Nietzsche has influenced human geography and its many subfields. Such an onerous task is taken up in part by the papers that follow, and more comprehensively by Richard Peet (1998, 194-246) who argues that Nietzsche's main influences on geography manifest themselves in postmodern and poststructuralist geographies of power, representation, and embodiment (see also Guelke 2003). Allow me, however, to make one editorial confession: of all the varied philosophical and social theoretical texts that I have read during my life as a geographer, few texts have the same effect on me as those written by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (b. 1844, Röcken (Prussia), d. 1900, Weimar (German Empire)). Notwithstanding considerations about how one categorizes Nietzsche as an "author" (Foucault, 1977, 118-119), as well as the status of Nietzsche's singular textual "style" (Derrida, 1979), my experience of reading Nietzsche never fails to evoke a heady range of feelings that usually include awe, surprise, shock, and intrigue. I think Nietzsche's writings are unparalleled in philosophy in terms of their capacity to *grip* and *move*. To paraphrase a long-standing and much-loved UK advertising slogan for a Dutch beer: Nietzsche refreshes the parts other philosophers cannot reach. And, I also contend that Nietzsche's writing, like certain names, poems, and novels "has a music of its own. It produces vibrations" (Wilde 2001[1895], 306). We'll return to these vibrations and their importance to geography below.

This *ACME* issue was created because the topic Nietzsche and geography is sorely under-examined. Arguably, geographers have yet to take fully into account the extent of Nietzsche's influence on the critical social theories that continue to inform human geography.<sup>2</sup> How so? In the contexts of Anglophone cultural geography, for example, most *ACME* readers will appreciate the profound influence of two of Nietzsche's European contemporaries - Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud - on shaping the subfield's major paradigms such as historical

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<sup>2</sup> Andy Merrifield (1995), for example, has argued that while geographers acknowledge the importance of the writings of Karl Marx and G.W.F. Hegel for Henri Lefebvre's, *The Production of Space*, they have yet to take into account the extent of Nietzsche's influence on this key text.

materialism (Mitchell, 2004), feminism (Sharp, 2004), and psychoanalysis (Kingsbury, 2004). But the paradigm most frequently associated with Nietzsche (in and out of cultural geography) is poststructuralism. Marcus Doel (1999, 3), for example, observed that “poststructuralist geography entails letting myself get taken up by” the Nietzschean “vibration[s]” of radical difference, becoming, and pluralism. And yet, in *The Companion to Cultural Geography’s* chapter on “poststructuralism” - a paradigm composed of thoroughly Franco-Nietzschean verses penned by Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard (see Schrift, 1995) - Nietzsche is mentioned only in passing (Dixon and Jones, 2004).

Another related reason for creating this issue is my sense that some geographers find Nietzsche’s writings somehow too philosophical, perhaps even too controversial for geography. To be sure, a number of philosophers, usually working within the analytic tradition, openly disparage the philosophical legitimacy of Nietzsche’s thought. Bertrand Russell (2004 [1946], 697), for example, stated:

I dislike Nietzsche because he likes the contemplation of pain, because he erects conceit into a duty, because the men whom he most admires are conquerors, whose glory is cleverness in causing men to die. But I think the ultimate argument against his philosophy, as against any unpleasant but internally self-consistent ethic, lies not in an appeal to facts, but in an appeal to emotions. Nietzsche despises universal love; I feel it the motive power to all that I desire as regards the world. His followers have had their innings, but we may hope that it is coming rapidly to an end.

Fortunately, Russell’s miserly misgivings were eclipsed by the continued innings of Nietzsche’s ‘followers’ who included not only the “poststructural” thinkers mentioned above, but also Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, Luce Irigaray, Richard Rorty, Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale whose scholarship, editing, and translations helped to rehabilitate Nietzsche for Anglophone scholarly inquiry after World War II. We can only guess what the 3rd Earl Russell’s reaction would have been if he had witnessed critical geographers stepping up to bat for Nietzsche in the early twenty-first century!

Crucially, Nietzsche is not only relevant to us in terms of his influence on critical geography’s various subfields and paradigms. I also believe Nietzsche can usefully contribute to the teaching of critical geography. For more than five years, I have used Nietzsche’s texts in graduate and undergraduate seminars to elucidate the historical contexts of geography’s various socio-spatial theories. I teach that in the early essay, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (Nietzsche, 1982[1873],

46-47), we find a dazzling passage that could pass as a slogan for much of critical geography:

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. We still do not know where the urge for truth comes from; for as yet we have heard only of the obligation imposed by society that it should exist: to be truthful means using the customary metaphors – in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all.

In this brief passage, Nietzsche enlaces critical geography's keywords and concepts: spatial and temporal variation ("mobile"), power ("army"), representation and discourse ("metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms"), society ("sum of human relations"), fetishism ("enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically"), ideology ("seem firm, canonical, and obligatory" and "illusions"), materiality ("sensuous power"), and value ("only as metal, no longer as coins"). In order to pedagogically drive home the relevance of Nietzsche's short essay to poststructural geography, Vincent Del Casino and Stephen Hanna's (2003) chapter "Mapping identities, reading maps: the politics of representation in Bangkok's sex tourism industry" makes for an excellent supplement because it can be so readily interpreted via Nietzsche's brief passage.

## **To the papers**

The special issue will show, I hope, that what is at stake in the conjunction of "Friedrich Nietzsche and Geography" is more than clarifying and balancing the books of Geography's indebtedness to Nietzsche. What is ultimately at stake in the merger or juxtaposition of an author and discipline are the meanings, values, and research opportunities that can be *created* from the very notion of "Friedrich Nietzsche and Geography". In the issue's opening paper, Jane Jacobs asserts that it is important to consider how the works of a philosopher such as Nietzsche are received by geographers "by way of traceable pathways of reading and living networks of colleagues". What matters for Jacobs in any formulation of 'Philosopher X plus Geography' is "whether or not it produces more sophisticated geographies". Engaging geographers' increased interest in questions of everyday morality and ethics, Jacobs argues that Nietzsche's philosophy is indeed valuable for geographers because its "epistemology converged with the sophistic model of

knowledge in that it was conditional and anchored in the specificities of situations”. Focusing on the contexts of “settler-indigenous relations in Australia during the 1990s”, Jacobs draws on Nietzsche’s views on the maintenance of the conditions of “morality” to investigate how “remembering settler violations against indigenous people is central to the inversion required by a postcolonial imaginary”. For Jacobs, Nietzsche can help explain why and how “this structure holds in place because of what he dubs the ‘pathos of distance’: that feeling that one can *be* superior because one *is* superior and *is* good” (emphasis in original).

In the second paper, Joel Wainwright contends that Nietzsche “could be seen as one of the great geographers” because of his abiding interest in the seriousness of what it means to think and write about the world. Wainwright’s main premise, however, is that “Nietzsche has lessons to teach us – albeit not as Geographers, but as thinkers of geographical problems”. Wainwright draws on Nietzsche to consider three “*problem-spaces*” that “do not appear on any map of the real world - indeed, they *oppose* the real world” (emphasis in original). These problem-spaces or “spaces defined by problems that solicit thought” include the “*value of the truth* of the real world”, the political conditions *qua* “a pyrophilosophy of local fires through which the [real] world endures”,<sup>3</sup> and “Europe” in terms of “not the elusive dividing line between Europe and not-Europe, but the productive flow of [the Turkish river] *Büyük Menderes* that spaces Europe”. For Wainwright, the latter problem-space of Europe is “best approached through a postcolonial, transcritical reading”.<sup>4</sup> Wainwright illustrates how this reading is also a Nietzschean approach to Nietzsche because it evaluates Nietzsche according to his own standards.

Having traversed Jacobs’s and Wainwright’s papers, *ACME* readers will hopefully become a little more savvy about how to (re)situate Nietzsche’s works. In Andrew Comrie’s paper, textually graphed with its impassioned peaks and forthright *Rillenkarren*, we meet a Nietzsche who is not only relevant to critical geographers, but also “physical geographers and fellow scientists to reconsider their roles as scientists and to make their work more action-oriented and powerful”. Elaborating on “the false mystique of science”, Comrie addresses Nietzsche’s specific ways of opposing “the notion of science as a detached process, a dispassionate assessment of facts that speak for themselves”. But Comrie is not content to merely follow this “well-trodden path in the philosophy of science and a field now known as science studies”. Comrie engages, by way of “the power of

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<sup>3</sup> Wainwright’s bold assertion that “perhaps we have never had geophilosophy at all, but rather pyrophilosophy” (emphasis in original), seems particularly apt when I imagine the following true story: a Professor of Philosophy in Utah could only cope with the shear intensity of reading Nietzsche aloud to students in lecture by lighting-up a cigarette.

<sup>4</sup> “Transcritical” is a reference to Kojin Karatani’s notion of transcritique: a “project... [that] forms a space of transcodings between the domain of ethics and political economy, between the Kantian critique and the Marxian critique” (Karatani, 2003, vii).

human meaning” and Nietzsche’s figure of “the desert of science” the possibilities in physical geography for renewing self-reflexivity, attending to the role of process, and considering the role of value in scientific practice. According to Comrie, Nietzsche productively challenges physical geographers “to move away from doing ‘dry’ physical geography, ‘dry’ science, to literally change the world”. In so doing, Comrie calls on physical geographers to move their “science towards a new physical geography” that goes “beyond Nietzsche’s meaningless facts to action based on interpretation, meaning and power”.

The final paper in the issue is my attempt to reevaluate geography’s usual character profiling of Nietzsche “as the uncompromising anti-foundationalist postmodern philosopher who self-identified with dynamite in order to detonate the ‘grand narratives’ of Truth”. Taking inspiration from Alenka Zupančič’s (2003), *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two*, I aim to show how “Nietzsche is also the philosopher of explosive ‘events’ that are charged by nuances *qua* stillness, silence, and subtlety”. Taking seriously the Nietzschean axioms “that life is the terrain and resource *par excellence* for philosophical inquiry; that the everyday teems with creative contingencies; [and] that risky, joyful, and experimental scholarly praxis” are extremely valuable for practicing geography, I discuss Nietzsche’s affirmation of the coincidence in life of explosiveness and nuance. To do this, I tell “a mock Nietzschean epic” of an event that hotwired intensity and subtlety at the 2006 AAG Meeting in Chicago. I conclude by considering how Nietzsche can attune us to the prospect of an “aesthetic geography” that can reckon with “all the fine ecstasies and cruel pains that beauty charges, begets, and accumulates”.

Continuing with the theme of aesthetics, the issue closes with an Afterword that contextualizes Nietzsche via the power of art and place. There are two interrelated reasons for using the artistry of ink and photography to close this issue. First, it is important to understand how Nietzsche’s influence is not confined to the realms of philosophical or social theoretical musings. Nietzsche has had a profound influence on a diverse range of artists who publicly acknowledged their love of Nietzsche including Pablo Picasso, Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan, Rainer Maria Rilke, Khalil Gibran, Wang Guowei, Franz Kafka, and Jim Morrison. Second, I take seriously the rich possibilities for different kinds of expression afforded by etymology of geography: earth-writing. There are a myriad of media through which we ‘write’ the world: chalk, paintbrushes, spray cans, digital cameras, fingers in wet sand, footprints, icing, lipstick, tears — in short, with life itself. In addition, my paper’s call for an “aesthetic geography” capable of acknowledging all “the fine ecstasies and cruel pains that beauty charges, begets, and accumulates” aims to cast a rope between the articles and Afterword pieces. With Pamela Mullins-Baker we encounter the “eternal return of colonialism” in Ghana; Carl Dahlman leads us to the edge of a “hollow crater of a mass grave” in Bosnia; and alongside Caroline Joan Picart we reflect on Nietzsche’s “geophilosophy” and the “complex interplay

of Apollonian [ordered and restrained] and Dionysian [intoxicating and chaotic] forces” in the Philippines. I think each of these beautifully arresting pieces provide yet more signposts towards the singular possibilities of twinning Friedrich Nietzsche with geography.

### **ACME Affirmations**

Let me close the editorial with a pleasant warning. Some *ACME* readers will already be quivering with expectation and/or confusion over an “International E-Journal for Critical Geographies” devoted to Nietzsche. Perhaps some *ACME* readers, having read the issue, will lose some of their bearings and scholarly marbles and feel a little disorientated like the cartoon character Wile E. Coyote. He is the luckless and wanton coyote in the *Looney Tunes* cartoon *Road Runner* who is continually buffeted and sometimes run over *yet always activated* by an *ACME Corporation* truck. Perhaps some lucky *ACME* readers will be renewed by this issue and follow in the lightening quick steps of the Road Runner (an *Über*-bird if ever there was one!) by outfoxing and outrunning all those wily feelings of guilt, insecurity, and fear that seem to snag the tasks of living in and out of the academy. In any case, both reactions support the main aims of this issue of *ACME* and its

Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. (Derrida, 1990 [1967] 292, emphasis in original)

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