



Unearthing Nietzsche's Bomb: Nuance, Explosiveness, Aesthetics

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Abstract

Friedrich Nietzsche's revolutionary philosophy is renowned for its shocking style, bombastic assertions, and apocalyptic visions. Whether lauded or spurned, Nietzsche is usually read in geography as the anti-foundationalist philosopher who self-identified with dynamite in order to detonate the "grand narratives" of Truth. Taking bearings from the work of Alenka Zupančič, this essay argues that an even more explosive Nietzschean bomb is possible. Zupančič rewires Nietzsche as follows: first, instead of simply reading Nietzsche as the postmodern big bang igniter of systematizing discourses, Nietzsche is also the "philosopher of the event" whose explosiveness is charged by the intense nuances of stillness, silence, and subtlety. Second, while Nietzsche is frequently praised for pitting multiplicity against the totality of the One, Nietzsche also affirms moments when "One turns to Two", that is, when totalizing discourses of representation, truth, and subjectivity become internally fractured. The essay explores these themes and their relevance to geography by telling the story of a Nietzschean "event" – the taking place of a positive correlation between nuance and explosiveness – that took place during the 2006 AAG Meetings in Chicago. The essay concludes by considering how Nietzsche can re-sensitize us to the aesthetics of everyday geographies.



Precisely the least, the softest, the lightest, a lizard's rustling, a breath, a wink, a blink of the eye – *a little* is the stuff of the *best* happiness. Still! (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 2006 [1883], 224; emphasis in original)

What is Nietzschean?

During his final interview, Michel Foucault (1988, 251) replied to a question about the misunderstandings surrounding his work by abruptly declaring: "I am simply a Nietzschean". What makes one of the most influential thinkers in critical geography Nietzschean? In terms of "Foucault's geography" (Philo, 2000), two Nietzschean traits are immediately discernible: first, Foucault's endeavors to map a "genealogy" of the "will to knowledge" in the microspaces, technologies, relations, and embodiments of power. Second, Foucault's participation in Dionysian marginal "limit-experiences" such as street-level activism in Paris, LSD trips in Death Valley, and sadomasochism in San Francisco (see Plant, 2007). Perhaps these latter exploits are the reason why telling another geographer that your research draws on Friedrich Nietzsche, once referred to as the first philosophical "prophet of extremity" (Megill, 1985), is tantamount to telling them that you are born under the astrological sign of Scorpio.² Both declarations will probably illicit one of the following responses: a knowing and respectful sense of awe bordering on trepidation; patronizing disbelief (perhaps accompanied with feigned interest) about the tenability of such a position; or, plain confusion.

In 2009, I suspect most *ACME* readers will greet the idea of Nietzsche and Geography in ways that resemble the first response. Although human geographers now readily use Nietzsche's work to rethink key themes such as landscape, power, and politics (e.g. see Rose, 2007), they also warn how Nietzsche's thinking can really "screw" you up – for better or for worse (Doel, 1999, 35). In geography and many other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, the moniker "Nietzsche" rarely elicits senses and sensibilities of indifference. In the early 1990s, for example, Nietzsche was regarded as both ally and adversary to humanistic geography. An ally because Nietzsche "sought to reintroduce questions of emotion and passion, volition and aesthetics to the discourse of human nature" (Buttimer, 1991, 15), and, an adversary because he did "not seem to have much of a heart and soul" (Chapell, 1991, 341). Even Sigmund Freud deliberately avoided reading Nietzsche (see Kingsbury, 2003). And, beyond the stuffy or what Nietzsche (1974 [1882], 5) called the "Teutonic" realms of the academy, Nietzsche is frequently depicted as the "bad boy of philosophy" (Conard, 2001, 60). In the *HBO* television series *The Sopranos*, for example, Anthony Junior (A.J.), son of Tony Soprano (a New Jersey mafia Don) uses Nietzsche (whom he pronounces

² Scorpio is the most notorious of all astrological signs in the Zodiac because it is aligned with the intensities of power, sex, desire, and death.

“Nitch”) to justify his refusal to become a confirmed Roman Catholic. A.J.’s short-lived stance, however, is later ridiculed by a teammate during baseball practice who advises: “Let me tell you something. Nietzsche wound up talking to his horse.”

Because of the above characterizations of Nietzsche, the essay’s epigraph, which juxtaposes the stalwart name “Nietzsche” with “the least, the softest, the lightest”, may strike some readers as a little peculiar. I believe that the epigraph’s peculiarity can be an extremely instructive approach to the topic Nietzsche and Geography. Nietzsche is frequently perceived by geographers as the uncompromising anti-foundationalist postmodern philosopher who self-identified with dynamite in order to detonate the “grand narratives” of Truth (e.g., Guelke, 2003). Taking inspiration from the recent work of Alenka Zupančič, I hope to unearth an even more explosive Nietzschean bomb. Not simply the big bang igniter of systematic discourses, Nietzsche is also the philosopher of explosive “events” that are charged by nuances *qua* stillness, silence, and subtlety. In a nutshell, the notion of an “event” (frequently referred to in this essay) refers to the taking place of rupture and disruption (see Derrida, 1978 [1967], 278). Recalling the two Nietzschean traits in Foucault’s geography, my main objective in this essay is to illustrate the extent to which “micro” subtleties and ecstatic “limits” are *mutually affirming* in not only Nietzsche’s work, but also our everyday lives. To do this, I tell a story about an event that enlaced the micro and the ecstatic during the 2006 Association of American Geographers (AAG) Meeting in Chicago. The story is applicable to the essay because it affirms several of Nietzsche’s key beliefs: 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 is far more up to the task of world-writing (geographing) than “stodgy, heavy, dusty...ways of thinking” (Nietzsche, 1974 [1882], 5). I conclude by considering how Nietzsche after Zupančič – another Nietzsche for geography – can re-sensitize us to the joyful geographies of everyday aesthetics.

Nietzsche after Alenka Zupančič

In a recent reevaluation of Nietzsche’s work, Alenka Zupančič (2003) counters the widespread view that Nietzsche is the boisterous philosopher who resounds with shocking pronouncements, explosive critiques, and a bombastic “style”. For Zupančič (2003, 3), much of the “event of Nietzsche”, that is, what “makes Nietzsche Nietzsche” are his shocking “jolts” juxtaposed with affirmations of stillness, silence, and subtlety. According to Zupančič, Nietzsche’s highly-neglected endorsement of nuance is an “irreducible obverse” to his bombast. Zupančič (2003, 8) suggests that Nietzsche’s frequent associations of explosive “events” with silence helps to explain why Nietzsche proposes that “thoughts that come on doves’ feet guide the world” and the “time” of the event is midday – the

“ stillest hour” when “the stillest words ... bring on the storm”.³ Zupančič argues that all the many subtle, *almost* imperceptible nuances that Nietzsche champions – stillness, silence, dancing, perspectivity, fictions, differences, and appearances are “precisely the ‘bomb’ of the event” (2003, 9). In this Nietzschean world, then, nuances such as subtlety and stillness are concomitant with intensity and explosiveness. Thus, from Zupančič’s perspective, Nietzsche is no longer the plunger happy detonator of modernism’s “grand narratives” of Progress, Truth, and Reason, but rather someone who shows us how “‘nuance’ is nothing other than the expression, or, more precisely, the articulation of a grand narrative, of an event” (2003, 9).

How is a grand narrative expressed via nuance? Jacques Derrida’s Nietzschean inflected theory and method of deconstruction illustrates how a grand narrative takes place via nuance. For Derrida (e.g., 1994, 1998), the grand narratives of psychoanalysis and Marxism are neither wrong nor monolithic. Rather, they are charged and permeated with textual nuances in terms of what Derrida calls “différance”, “trace”, “supplement”, and “undecideability” etc. which bring to the fore the instability, partiality, and even parasitism that support *and* undermine any given discourse. For Derrida, these nuances are not neutral or benign: they are explosive and potentially lethal because these nuances subtend the categories, numbers, designs, and lines of political, legal, and cartographic discourses that have the power to decide the fate of individuals and world regions.⁴

Zupančič (2003, 8) suggests that Nietzsche (like Derrida) is interested in nuance as part of the “inner limits” and “inherent impossibilities” of a given discourse. That is to say, Nietzsche attempts to illustrate how discourses, especially positivism and Christian morality, are peppered with internal contradictions, impossible claims, hidden disavowals, limited insights, and odd omissions. One way to consider the inner limits and impossibilities of a discourse is via Jean-François Lyotard’s (1988) Nietzschean notion of the “differend”. Lyotard illustrates how socio-legal disputes, conflicts, and disempowerment (e.g. indigenous people’s claims to territorial ownership in colonial contexts) arise from the limitations of discourses of judgment. Now, Lyotard and Nietzsche do not nihilistically seek to expose or ridicule the blind spots and pressure points of a discourse. Zupančič (2003, 8) suggests that Nietzsche tries “to activate this precise point [the inner limit of a given discourse] as the potential locus of creation”. This

³ Nietzsche’s beautiful notion of “doves’ feet” (*Taubenfüssen*) suggests that many of the world’s events are guided by the silent realms of thought. The German word “*Taube*” also refers to a deaf person. For Parkes (2005, 307) the expression “doves’ feet” “is also used to mean ‘quote-marks’, which may suggest the special power that great thoughts have when they are quotable”. One explanation for this comparison is that doves’ feet and quote-marks are similarly shaped.

⁴ Alongside Derrida’s deconstruction, Foucault’s interrelated Nietzschean methodologies of “archaeology” and “genealogy” attempt to show modernism’s nuances in terms of its “microphysics” of the circulation, dispersion, and canalization of disciplinary power.

is why deconstruction is not about dismantling or destruction. To deconstruct is to affirm the generative play that is already at work in a discourse (see Derrida, 1978 [1967], 292). Equally, the differend is not simply a dead end or deadlock of justice. By attending to the differend, justice can be newly *created* as a part of the method of “just gaming” (Lyotard and Thébaud, 1985).

Zupančič notes that Nietzsche’s figure of noon – the “ stillest hour” – is the “time” of creativity and the “event”. Why? Because noon is the time when “One turns to Two” (2003, 8), that is, the time when the Oneness, that is, the assumed coherent totality of a master discourse that enlists master signifiers such as “truth”, “God”, “human”, “race”, “good”, and “evil” becomes fractured and internally redoubled.⁵ Nietzsche, then, is not simply a proto-postmodernist who affirms multiplicity or difference versus the totality or sameness of the One. Rather, Nietzsche alerts us to the instability, duplicity, and provisional essences that already reside in and operate as the One. But why align eventful creation with noon? First, because noon, composed of the number twelve, is the place where clock hands cross from one to two: “One turns to Two”. Second, because noon is

not the moment when the sun embraces everything, makes all shadows disappear, and constitutes an undivided Unity of the world; it is the moment of the shortest shadow. And what is the shortest shadow of a thing, if not this thing itself? Yet, for Nietzsche this does not mean that the two becomes one, but rather, that the one becomes two. Why? The thing (as one) no longer throws its shadow upon another thing; instead it throws its shadow upon itself, thus becoming, at the same time, the thing and its shadow. When the sun is at its zenith, things are not simply exposed (“naked,” as it were); they are, so to speak, dressed in their own shadows. (Zupančič, 2003, 27; emphasis in original)

Put differently, noon is not the moment of Enlightenment when shadows of doubt retreat. Noon is not the time when things become what they ‘really are’ in the cold light of midday. Rather, noon is the time of the “shortest shadow” when the sun, which is at its highest point, reveals nuance *qua* internal difference: the inherent shadowy gaps and tensions that lurk in things. Nietzsche’s figure of noon, however, is not simply an occasion of radical anti-essentialism. Noon is the moment of a split or edge wherein things are held “together at their *extreme* point: at the extreme point of their (in)commensurability” (Zupančič, 2003, 17; emphasis in original). That is to say, One turning to Two is not about inflicting crude divisions, rather it is soliciting an uneasy yet inventive breaking apart: a creative short circuit, a productive immanent critique that is exemplified by deconstruction

⁵ I thank the anonymous reviewer for alerting me to Alain Badiou’s (2007) central motif of “One becomes Two” in *The Century*.

(see Doel, 1999, 51). One turning to Two is about nuance because its elemental movements gather indeterminate and introverted shades of glacial calving rather than spectacular fiery bust-ups.

Let me now turn to illustrate what takes place when One turns to Two by telling a mock Nietzschean epic, that is, a little story about a little joke that carries profound theoretical ramifications (cf., Copjec, 1994, 30; Lacan, 1977, 95). Specifically, I offer a split narrative that couples Nietzsche's (2006 [1883]) writings on Zarathustra's speeches on "The stillest hour" and "At Noon" with the retelling of an event that took place during the 2006 AAG Meeting in Chicago. The purpose of the double narrative is to directly present Nietzsche's words, as well as enhance the story's explosive nuances of unease, suspense, and stillness. Rather than focus on the meetings' usual "big bang" events such as the Dionysian intensities of late night and early morning sessions, my story is about the detonation of a bomb of nuance.

Unearthing Nuance

And this is how it happened – for I must tell you everything, so your hearts do not harden against the one who must depart abruptly!
(Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 2006 [1883], 115)

It was late and so we left. We walked across the lobby of the Palmer House Hilton hotel, swiftly over the polished floor, around the corner to the elevators, and were joined by a pair of businessmen each pulling a rollaway luggage case. Everyone stopped and waited before the elevators. There was quite a crowd in the elevator.⁶ Wall to wall smoky mirrors reflected two charred geographers and two clean businessmen fresh from a red-eye flight and each the personification of Jimi Hendrix's "white collar conservative mister business man".⁷ After some elevating, fidgeting, and glancing, I planted a Nietzschean bomb of nuance in the elevator. Giving generously to consonants and affecting former altar-server tonality, I slowly hatched the question: "What's brown and sticky?"

Yesterday, at the stillest hour, the ground faded from me, the dream began. The hand advanced, the clock of my life drew a breath – never had I heard such stillness around me so that my heart was terrified. (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 2006 [1883], 115)

⁶ Thanks to David Bissell for directing me to Terry Caesar's (2000) insightful article "In and Out of Elevators in Japan". For additional insights on the ideological space of elevators, specifically the placebo or fake participation of elevator buttons see Slavoj Žižek (2006, 34-35).

⁷ From the song "If 6 was 9". At first glance, the elevator seems thoroughly masculine: two business men faced with two mischievous "boys [simply] being boys" (to paraphrase a concerned reviewer). And yet, does not the joke strategically sexuete (to use a Lacanian and therefore queer term) the elevator space according to the feminine logic that affirms language and being are fragmentary or "not-all" (see Copjec, 1994, 217-227)?

The glib yet cruel joke, which brilliantly “combines the absurd with the vulgar” (Reed, 1969, n.p.), drew breath from and created explosive stillness in the elevator. The joke split the world of the elevator by turning hushed Oneness into the hum of the Two. How so? Because the joke silently and performatively declares the following: you heard the words and now you are thinking these thoughts; we were all confined in the squeaky clean shiny elevator but now we’re full of brown and sticky thoughts. The joke triggered a Nietzschean event for two reasons. First, because an event brings forth “the feeling of ‘this cannot be so,’ ‘this is not happening,’ ‘this is not me’” (Zupančič, 2003, 14). That is to say, an event involves superlative improbability: when situations and things suddenly dress in their own shadows, when something doesn’t act like itself, when something grabs you all of a sudden, something you wouldn’t expect from somebody, something that comes out of the blue of noon.⁸ Second, because the joke evinces the Nietzschean notion of the “*capacity of a given practice to produce its own object*” (Zupančič, 2003, 7; emphasis in original). For Nietzsche, philosophical events do not merely rely on duplication, display, or (re)presentation. Rather, the philosophical event is first and foremost an act of creation. Nietzsche’s work is an art of making something out of nothing, making worlds out of words, breathing life into the barren, transforming values, showing the shadows of uncertainty in things. Moreover, the joke “what’s brown and sticky?” does not create or make an “art-object” (Zupančič, 2003, 11). Rather, the joke as an event *is* the art-object because it was inherently creative and transformative. How so? Because the joke jokes about itself: it implicitly mutters the answer as part of its question. The joke truly *made a difference* because it transformed the cramped world of the elevator. My friend’s face changed expression. Now urgent, now zealous, now arrested. The businessmen became stiffer and unbalanced. We were all rattled. The elevator continued its silent ascent.

Then without voice it spoke to me: “You know it, Zarathustra?” – And I cried out in terror on hearing this whispering, and the blood drained from my face, but I kept silent. Then it spoke to me once more without voice: “You know it Zarathustra, but you do not speak it!” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 2006 [1883], 115)

We were held in the thralls of a Nietzschean “edge” of “doubleness” and “duplicity” (Zupančič, 2003, 16): simultaneously bonded and strewn across a question and answer, split and linked by the shiny Hilton surfaces and some brown and sticky Thing. Here was a Nietzschean edge: a topological location where insides become outsides, a place beyond binaries such as “good and evil” (see Kingsbury, 2007). Earlier, I suggested that the edge is where things are held together at their *extreme* point: glued by the extremes of shininess and stickiness, speaking the unspeakable, thinking the unthinkable, profound silliness, unbearable

⁸ See George Bataille’s (2002[1935]) seminal Nietzschean novella: *Blue of Noon*.

lightness, just gaming. That is to say, the edge is a place where things *nearly* coincide: between speaking and the unspeakable (“Did he really just say that?”... “How could he say that?”... “Should I reply?”... “Do they want me to reply?”... “We all know it, but we do not speak it!”), as well as thinking the unthinkable (“Well, the answer has got to be shit hasn’t it?”... “No, surely it can’t be?”... “It’s a trick question isn’t it?”... “Maybe the answer is—?”) (see also Olsson 2007, 198). What goes on in your mind? You do not speak it!

Several seconds later, I delivered the answer: “a stick”. In response, one of the businessmen let out an ever so fragile, ever so delicate, and ever so beautiful “Oh”. What a Thing! Upon hearing the “Oh”, we heard the clock of his life draw breath. And once more, we encountered ourselves in another place and time. Another split took hold. One turned into Two again: in the quietness and stillness of the elevator, this exquisite quavering wavering syllable was far more explosive than anything mustered by the rude skill of the question. And then the elevator bounced to a stop. With the bell’s ding, the doors opened and my friend and I clambered out. Leaving the businessmen behind, we brewed up with laughter and turned the corner onto a carpeted hallway neatly lined with complimentary newspapers.

What happened to me: listen! Didn’t time just fly away? Am I not falling? Did I not fall – listen! – into the well of eternity? – What’s happening to me? Still! Something is stinging me – oh no – in the heart? In the heart? Oh break, break, heart, after such happiness, after such a sting! – What? Did the world not become perfect just now? Round and ripe? Oh the golden round ring – where is it flying now? I’ll run after it! Rush! (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 2006 [1883], 224)

I can still hear that round and ripe “Oh”. And I can barely remember my friend’s words in the hallway that decreed he had just witnessed the acme of my life. Well, in any case, the stillest words had brought on a storm.

For Aesthetic Geography

Anyone with a very loud voice is almost incapable of thinking in subtleties (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 1974 [1882], 216)

This essay is an attempt to set off discussions in geography about what is so shocking about Nietzsche’s writings. Taking inspiration from Alenka Zupančič, I hope to alert geographers to another Nietzsche: the philosopher of the explosive nuances of intense stillness and subtlety. Zupančič’s project is significant because it not only provides a radically new reading of Nietzsche, it also recharges Nietzsche’s writing itself. Zupančič (2003, 3) asserts that Nietzsche’s ability to *selectively* amaze or “jolt” the reader is a fundamental part of the experience of

reading Nietzsche. For Zupančič, however, much of Nietzsche's jolts have been largely "reduced to the level of opinions" (2003, 3) by many academics, including Nietzscheans themselves. Zupančič can help geographers reevaluate the usual measures through which we either praise or denounce Nietzsche. In so doing, we can read Nietzsche with Nietzsche, that is, to handle the Nietzschean bomb with care in a way that registers his explosive subtleties *alongside* his bombastic pronouncements.⁹ For instance, it is important to remember that if Nietzsche (2005 [1888], 155) tells us to "philosophize with a hammer" it is in such a way so that spurious idols may be "sounded out ... as with a tuning fork" rather than be brutally smashed.¹⁰

By unearthing Nietzsche's bombs of stillness and subtlety, we can finally begin to fade out the well-worn postmodern nihilist and tune into the philosopher who attends to the profound significance of what Freud (1965 [1933], 81) dubbed life's "small indications" – the psychoanalytic equivalent of "nuance". Like Karl Marx's (1977 [1843], 12) project of "a ruthless critique for everything existing", Nietzsche's works also provide a radical critique of people's everyday lives. To be sure, Nietzsche's vast range of topics including morality, power, language, affect and emotion, the body, and aesthetics read like a list of critical geography's "key words". Alongside Buttimer (1991, 15), however, I believe it is on the question of aesthetics that Nietzsche (after Zupančič) has the most to offer geographers. Why? To begin with, while geographers have already explored the coincidence of intensity and finitude in terms of, for example, the "micro" (Woodward, Jones, and Marston, 2007), "time-space compression" (Harvey, 1990), "minor theory" (Katz, 1996), minimalist art (Olsson, 2007), minimal differences such as those between "*the* tomatoes and *a* tomato" (Doel 1999, 51; emphasis in original), and the "little things" such as "files" and "words like 'the'" (Thrift, 2000, 380), as well as "gestures, movements, performances, cringes, frustrations, tedium" (McCormack, 2005, 119), geographers have barely addressed the aesthetics of the compressed, little, and micro (see Doel and Clarke, 2007; cf. Jacobs, 2006).¹¹ The above story about explosive stillness and the shadowy otherness in things brings to the fore the taking place of sensory values and judgments of taste. That is to say, the joke about the stick was primarily registered in terms of the visceral, affective, and emotional.

⁹ Reading for the subtleties in Nietzsche is exemplified by Joan Picart's (1999) brilliant analysis of Nietzsche's wiring-up of resentment, the feminine, and womb-envy.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Joel Wainwright for this insight.

¹¹ Notably, "little things" permeate the Nietzschean social theories of Walter Benjamin's obsession with the minutiae of everyday urban life, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's writings on the "micropolitics" of desire and the spectral and nomadic ontology of "becoming-imperceptible". See also Fredric Jameson's (2002 [1981], 61) notion of the "ideologeme": "the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes".

Second, I believe that aesthetics, so often opposed to or eclipsed by 'the political', is one of the most undervalued categories in human geography. Nietzsche's vast corpus provides geographers ways to map the aesthetic taking place as both part of *and* separate from the social and the political. Too often in critical geography, our engagements with aesthetics involve impatient and arguably reductive appeals to their more 'serious' socio-economic and political dimensions. It is also important to inquire into why certain things are considered by certain people to be beautiful or alluring in the first place (see Copjec, 1999). Arguably, while many critical geographers "try to respect the otherness of other persons, our interpretative practices do not respect the otherness of art" (Dean, 2002, 38). Nietzsche's notion of explosive nuance provides one way in which to keep in play the barely translatable enigmas of art, as well as the otherness that resides in the aesthetics of the everyday (see Kingsbury and Jones, forthcoming).

I suggest that we take more seriously (or at least catch up with) the interdisciplinary Nietzschean scholarship on "geophilosophy" (Bonta and Protevi, 2004) and "geoaesthetics" (Shapiro, 2007; see also Del Caro, 2004). By considering the Nietzschean bomb of nuance, we can apprehend the extent to which the world fizzes with places and things that are as intense as they are subtle as they are beautiful. What I have in mind is research on people's attachments to places and things comparable to a scene in Marcel Proust's novel, *In Search of Lost Time*, where the elderly writer *Bergotte* suffers a fatal attack of giddiness upon encountering the "*petit pan de mur jaune*" (little patch of yellow wall) in Johannes Vermeer's painting *View of Delft* (see Renzi, 1999). In other words, Proust highlights how the things that we most treasure or obsess about are so often those little, subtle, singular things. Or, in Nietzsche's words: "the least, the softest, the lightest" (see epigraph). For how often does our love for certain songs, poems, films, recipes, people, and places etc. rely on the support of a tiny yet precious detail? For example, on the website *songmeanings.net*, a fan called "keylargo" comments on Indie rock band *Bright Eyes*' lead singer Conor Oberst's delivery of a single word in "Cleanse Song": "First of all, it is a beautiful song. The way 'Manhattan' is pronounced is almost a story in itself, and the death & rebirth theme is oblique yet simple".¹² How can a single word such as "Manhattan" be a story in itself? "Manhattan" appears in the song as follows:

Hear the chimes, did you know that the wind when it blows
 It is older than Rome, and all of this sorrow
 See the new pyramids down in old Manhattan
 From the roof of a friend's I watched an empire ending

¹² See <http://www.songmeanings.net/lyric.php?lid=3530822107858654370&offset=25&page=2#comments> . "Cleanse Song" appears on the album *Cassadaga* (2007). Another example of the coincidence of intense beauty and subtle pronunciation is the "immediate and universal appeal" of the word "America" in the early modern transatlantic world (see Gillies, 1994, 63).

Heard it loud and long the river's Om
Time marching on, to a madman's drum...

In the song, which reflects on the 9/11 attacks on New York, Oberst's tonal delivery of "Manhattan" is a beautifully worked compression of the song's larger tonal swing that is onset by the "chimes". Thus "Manhattan" obliquely gestures (expressed via "Man-hat-tan"-s scalar inflections) toward the (tonal) falling of New York's buildings and the (tonal) upwelling of dust and sorrow. All of this in the space of one word!? Of course, because all of this potentiality (as artists and scholars in the humanities know only too well) is precisely what lyrical poetry is about: nuance *qua* explosive subtlety, turning the One (word, sentence, stanza...) into Two (fractured association, doubling meanings, words wording, sounds sounding...) (see Staten, 1990). No doubt you can think of better examples.¹³ My main point, however, is that Nietzsche offers us a way not to reveal or enumerate the wherewithal of the beauty of intensely subtle events, but rather, a way to map their mystery, to attend to their luminous opacity, to their "life" – Nietzsche's preferred term for what is ultimately at stake in philosophy (see Nietzsche, 1997 [1874]).

Given the limits of this small essay, it is impossible to do justice to the prospects of considering aesthetics *qua* the positive correlations between nuance and explosiveness. I do hope, however, that my tale about a stick that split a world goes some way towards increasing the odds of the following scenario in the geography of the future. Telling another colleague that your research draws on Nietzsche will be akin to telling them that you are born under the astrological sign of Gemini: a place that quietly twins intensity and nuance. With all the fine ecstasies and cruel pains that beauty charges, begets, and accumulates strangely absent from geographers' accounts of the world, it is time for aesthetic geography.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the attendees at the 2006 Association of American Geographers meeting and David Butz for his editorial efforts. The comments of David Bissell and two anonymous reviewers are especially appreciated. This paper is dedicated to the shared memories of all those fiercely beautiful Nietzschean events that graced the Lynagh's *communitas* in Lexington, Kentucky.

¹³ A good example of taking seriously the aesthetics of music *qua* intense nuances is publisher Continuum's much-acclaimed series of short books entitled, "33 1/3", which each explore in loving detail the lyrics and sounds of individual music albums. Other examples of intense nuances include Tony Wendice's (Ray Milland) momentous back-tracking to his apartment that demonstrated his role in a foiled attempted murder in Alfred Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* (1954); the discovery of a "hatch" buried in the soil of an apparently deserted island in the ABC television series *Lost*; the difference a few yards can make in a vineyard or *terroir* in deciding whether a wine is reasonably or extortionately priced; and, the intense micro-spaces of taste, timing, and texture in molecular gastronomy.

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