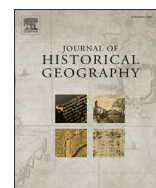




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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the elision of the 35th and 40th anniversaries of the History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group (HPGRG) of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) due to a coronavirus pandemic, the paper takes advantage of the anniversary twists and turns to deconstruct what is going to come without getting any closer and without moving any further away, and to hail the cancerous growth that is driving the revolution of geographical thought. With candles at the ready, my birthday wish is for geographical thought to perish, save the cancer (and the virus).

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A date gets carried away, transported; it takes off, takes itself off — and thus effaces itself in its very readability. ... Effacement or concealment, this annulment proper to the annulation, or ring, of return belongs to the movement of dating. And so what must be commemorated, *at once* gathered and repeated, is therefore, *at the same time*, the date's annihilation, a kind of nothing, or ash. Ash awaits us.¹

With candles at the ready we return whence we came: coming back to the future again. Once upon a time an anniversary returned. Once again, it turned and re-turned. Perhaps it evolved and revolved through 360°, over 365 days, or by way of four seasons and two time series, one tensed, the other not. Once again, we recall and roll call its name: the 'History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group' (HPGRG) of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) was born, reborn, still born, conceived, aborted, euthanized, resurrected, forgotten, revived, buried, and remembered yet again today. The HPGRG is getting carried away, it is carrying away, fraternal twins separated at birth: the *history* of geography on the one side and the *philosophy* of geography on the other, even as they run rings around one another via the edge of a Möbius strip. (Read them as *histories*

and *philosophies* of geography if you prefer multiplicity over unic-ity.) These strange geographical bedfellows — history *and* philosophy — were separated at birth. They were separated by an ostensibly benign joint — '*and*' — that turns out to be a malignant growth that ravages the name from the off: the history *and* philosophy of geography is getting carried away once again today, through anniversary returns and a cancerous joint. Their common denominators are geography and cancer. Why cancer? Because the '*and*' that holds together also splits apart, through a twofold process of fusion and fission, of division and deviation, of (dis)articulation and (dis)jointure, that proliferates more or less wildly: '*and ... and ... and ...*'.² Here as elsewhere, the erratic play of joints, of 'space' and 'spacing', interjects disorder into the very order that it makes (im)possible. The history *and* philosophy of geography is unhinged.³ Perish the thought. Save the cancer.⁴ And the virus, which, like cancer and spacing, also 'introduces disorder into

² Marcus A. Doel, *Poststructuralist Geographies: The Diabolical Art of Spatial Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 169.

³ Marcus A. Doel, 'The Unhinged Hinge: Pegged Out, Pinned Down, and Folded Away', *Literary Geographies* 9 (2023) 279–284.

⁴ The phrase 'save the cancer' is inspired by a passage in William S. Burroughs, *The Western Lands* (London: Picador, 1988), pp. 60–61, and my intention here is to echo the essay 'Sauf le nom (Post-Scriptum)' in Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 35–85. Save cancer. Spare cancer. Exempt cancer. Except cancer. Safe, the cancer. Cancer is safe and kept safe. Cancer keeps (itself) safe. Cancer as keepsake. Ditto: save space; save spacing. And the virus.

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¹ Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 20, original italics.

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communication' and 'derails a mechanism of the communicational type, its coding and decoding'.⁵ And then? The 'and ... and ... and ...' of a geographical research group is once again returning today through an anniversary proliferation that knows no bounds. At this very moment in the text something flickers in the candlelight. Stirring still — 'a process of cancerization of theoretical discourse'.⁶ All dead still, save the spacing, between each and every anniversary of the HPGRG, all of which are turning and returning at this very moment in the text.

Since time immemorial the anniversary of the HPGRG is going to come, turning and returning, without getting any closer and without moving any further away. At this very moment in the text it is here once again, an anniversary that is always returning whence it came. Whatever the revolution, whether faster or slower, the anniversary returns from the off again. Many happy returns. The HPGRG is so-and-so years old today. So-and-so years older than it was. And so-and-so years younger than it will have been. It is going to become older and younger once again today. 'This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present, ... to move and pull in both directions at once'.⁷ Returning to today, addressed to today, post-dated to today, the years are out and about. They stray. They wander. They drift. Turning and re-turning on each and every occasion, they take a step/not beyond (*Le pas audelà*).⁸ Perhaps for the worse. Years and years of truancy, vagrancy, and errancy. An anniversary is going to come whence it came again today. Turning and re-turning from the off again. Pause for thought. And then? Ever worstward with the cancer. Save the tumour, and the tuber: rhizome, assemblage, plateau, machine.⁹

At this very moment in the text it is January the 35th. Or else the 40th. Or even the 1st. Obviously, these Januarys are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. For here as elsewhere, the anniversary of the moment is inexhaustible and illimitable. It spreads out and fans out. It is January the 2nd and January the 46th. The anniversary (con)text goes on and on, turning and re-turning by way of an endless swarm of forking 'ands' and 'buts.' (Hold on to that word — 'on' — if you can. In a moment we will be invited to reflect on it; to reflect on 'on'. *On!* It is another carcinogen in the body of the text. One carcinogen amongst others: 'and,' 'but,' 'etcetera.' The cancerous (con)text goes on and on and on. There is nothing *in(side)* or *out(side)* of (con)text, aside from the cancer. (And the virus.) Save the cancer; perish the thought. *On!*)¹⁰ And so, at this very moment in the text it is January the whatever, and also March and August and May; the 3rd and 11th and 181st. At this very moment in the text we wait, have always waited, will always have waited, waited on and on, waited in turn, waited at every turn, for January the whatever to return, for whenever the whatever to turn and re-turn. Hold *on*, move *on!*, to the moment that is addressed to the anniversary remains of today in this labyrinthine garden of forking paths. If you can. (Is it possible? Is it permissible?) And then?

Once again then it is January, January the X. Hereinafter, X marks the spot where the cancerous body of the (con)text swells. Forking

elsewards at every turn and re-turn, January slips under serial erasure. And yet the foaming (con)text betrays its phantom presence. At this very moment in the text here it is. (And here we are. Together again as if for the first time.) It is January the 2nd and January the 23rd. At this very moment in the text we wait, wait in vain, for what is going to come, for what arrives by departing, for what recedes as it approaches, dividing itself, deferring itself, between difference and repetition, always finding itself, losing itself, elsewards; like you and I, once we are alone together, alone with ourselves, right here, right now. *Alone, together*.¹¹ The one already reading. The other still writing. I am belatedly putting pen (or flame) to paper. You are prematurely reading (or drawing) between the lines (or blinds) of a text that I have yet to draft. Where were we? *Alone, together*. With candles at the ready, we await an anniversary that is returning once again today. It is still coming. Still, coming. All dead still, save the swelling.

At this very moment in the text the anniversary of the HPGRG is going to come, coming to go, turning and re-turning, once again. For the umpteenth time its re-turn will come to pass by way of an unhinged revolving door. It is January the 42nd. More or less. Always more. Always less. Once again. January the whatever wherever whenever is coming again. And then? It was January when I began writing, in August, and it will be January when I conclude, in March. And for the time being, as I compose and recompose these words on the page in what purports to be 2022 and 2024, it will have remained January from dawn until dusk. It is January 1980, January 1981, and January 1985. Why January? (Perhaps I should interject here, parenthetically, that the embryonic and formative years of the HPGRG are partially relayed in a series of reports on the annual conference of the IBC, then held peripatetically each January, published in the March issue of the IBC's *Area* journal. The first is a report by Richard Harrison and David Livingstone, published in March 1981, which refers to the inauguration of 'a new working party on the history and philosophy of geography at the [January 1981] conference'.¹² The second, which came two years later in March 1983, ends by reporting that the existence of the working party 'for the past three (sic) years has opened the door to some rapprochement between physical and human geography by exploring the common historical evolution of geographical concepts'.¹³ The HPGRG was divided from the off, divided between human *and* physical geography, and its fission has arguably continued ever since. Symptomatically, a session organized by the Group at the IBC's 53rd annual conference in January 1986, was entitled 'The Unity of Geography', and while it examined many 'unities and disunities within geography' the final diagnosis appears to have been cancer: 'The current state of disunity may or may not be more than skin deep'.¹⁴ By the end of the decade, the disciplinary diagnosis was arguably much more dire: internal disarray and terminal postmodernism.)¹⁵ I repeat. It is January 1980, January 1981, and January 1985. We will return to them sooner or later. Bend back — *re-reflect* — on them. Many happy

⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'The Spatial Arts: An Interview With Jacques Derrida', in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, ed. by Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 9–32 (p. 12); Keith Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* (London: Athlone, 1993), p. 97.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (London: Athlone, 1990), p. 1.

⁸ Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992).

⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone, 1988).

¹⁰ Robert Harvey, *Witnessness: Beckett, Dante, Levi and the Foundations of Responsibility* (London: Continuum, 2010).

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹² Richard T. Harrison and David N. Livingstone, 'Institute of British Geographers, Annual Conference, University of Leicester, 5–8 January 1981, Reports of Sessions. History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought', *Area* 13 (1981) 70 (p. 70).

¹³ David N. Livingstone and Richard T. Harrison, 'Institute of British Geographers, 50th Anniversary Annual Conference, University of Edinburgh, 5–8 January 1983, Reports of Sessions. History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought', *Area* 15 (1983) 84–85 (p. 85).

¹⁴ Elspeth Graham, 'Institute of British Geographers, Annual Conference, University of Reading, 6–9 January 1986. The Unity of Geography', *Area* 18 (1986) 71–72 (pp. 71–72).

¹⁵ Michael Dear, 'The Postmodern Challenge: Reconstructing Human Geography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 13 (1988) 262–274.

returns. For this is, after all, an anniversary edition, marking and remarking the anniversary of the HPGRG (née HPGSG).¹⁶ Such an anniversary turns and returns. It revolves and resolves. It accumulates annulations and annihilations, as it winds its way elsewhere, folding and unfolding elsewhere and elsewhere during its eternal return. Going to come. Coming to go. Stirring still. All 'life-death' still, save the cancer.¹⁷ *On and on! ... and.*

Returning to January 1984, the IBC's Working Party on the History and Philosophy of Geographical Thought contributed a session entitled 'Can there be progress in geography?' to the Institute's 51st annual conference. In their report of the session, Elspeth Lochhead and Elspeth Graham referred to 'the working group (sic) on the History and Philosophy of Geography', rather than of 'Geographical Thought', and to its resolution to become a 'full study group', which had transpired by the time of Graham's report on the occasion of the HPGSG's inaugural contribution to the IBC's annual conference in 1985.¹⁸ All of which begs the question of what became of 'geographical thought' during the titular transition from a once explicitly thoughtful working party to a seemingly thoughtless study group.¹⁹ Pause for geographical thought. May it rest in pieces as we mourn the return of the anniversary of the History and Philosophy of Geography (without Geographical Thought) Research (née Study) Group of the RGS-IBG once again today.

Sudden aside to the effacement of geographical thought. Is it possible or even permissible for there to be some (the more or the less) history and/or philosophy (whether progressive or not) *in* geography? Is it possible/permissible for there to be some history and/or philosophy *of* geography *in* geography? And what of the *geography* of all that? And what of the *history* of all that? And what of the *philosophy* of all that? Etcetera. The history and philosophy of geography would then be concatenated, invaginated, and pullulated through endless self-reference. Here, then, are even more malformed twins separated at birth, twins that can be reduplicated to infinity and beyond. Fraternal? Identical? Cloned? It is the 1980's, after all. A decade of disturbing divisions and of struggling in vain to overcome those divisions, despite the collapse of so many walls that ostensibly wanted to fall. Binary divisions characterized the discipline long before the advent of the so-called digital age and they continue so to do. The history *and* philosophy of geography research group still bears the scars of violent partition, and it reopens those wounds wherever and whenever one recalls its name. I wager that geography's only common denominator is long division, and a recurring remainder that resists integration. *And. And. And.* The cancer spreads through every joint. Joy of joys.

It is still January. It remains January. The remainder recurs. It is coming and going, going to come and coming to go, again and again. I only mention this time warp because of the invitation to reflect — that was the word: 'reflect' (bend back) — on the history and philosophy of geography. (And there's that word again: *on!*) You will have seen, perhaps with your mind's eye, that I am endeavouring to reflect on the history *and* philosophy of (or in)

geography *without* looking, without looking either forwards or backwards, without looking *in-on-to* the past or *in-on-to* the future, without looking *in-on-to* history, philosophy, and/or geography. Since we are marking and remarking an anniversary, through its countless turns and re-turns, you may have 'clocked' that my reflection is a re-flection: a bending away, drawing away, and leading astray; a folding, unfolding, and refolding of the history *and* philosophy of geography by way of errancy, truancy, and vagrancy, by way of forking paths and forking tongues: *and ... and ... and ...* 'Dear Marcus', the email said in February 2020. 'On the occasion of HPGRG's 35th anniversary in 2020, I would like to invite you ...' But thanks to the fortuitous intervention of the coronavirus pandemic the anniversary in question slipped almost unnoticed into 2021. 'We will then be able to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the foundation of the original HPG Working Party in 1981 instead of the 35th anniversary of the upgrading to a fully fledged HPG Study Group in 1985'. It is 1981, the anniversary of 1981, and of 1985, in 2020 and 2021, and in 2023 and 2025, and thereafter and therefore. Suffice to say that while history *and* philosophy have always seemed very strange bedfellows to me, I am glad that the group's name was at least switched, perhaps deliberately or else carelessly, from the history and philosophy of *geographical thought* to the history and philosophy of *geography*. For I wager that it will have been impossible to distinguish a 'geographical thought' and a 'geographical concept' worthy of the name.²⁰ The usual suspects have already been found wanting: 'space,' 'place,' 'location,' 'distance,' 'relation,' etcetera. And the newfangled ones are not faring any better. Aside from the cancer, one will struggle in vain to think (or unthink) a specifically, peculiarly, exclusively, essentially, and properly 'geographical' thought or 'geographical' concept. As the 45th anniversary of the HPGRG turns and re-turns under the shortest shadow of Cancer, I propose that the research group adopt a new pen name: the Cancerous Geography Research Group. And then? Let a hundred-thousand tumours and tubers swell in the fleshed-out fabric of the anniversary (con)text. Joy of joys. Now where were we? About to put flame to paper. And save the spacing of an erased geographical thought. Sudden flash. The anniversary is coming around again. It is turning over and twisting over, wrapping itself and warping itself around the edge of a revolving band, without coming any closer and without moving any further away. Candles at the ready. (...).

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¹⁶ The IBC's Research Groups were originally called Study Groups.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Life Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

¹⁸ Elspeth Lochhead and Elspeth Graham, 'Institute of British Geographers, Annual Conference, Durham, 4–7 January 1984, Reports of Sessions. The History and Philosophy of Geography', *Area* 16 (1984) 77–78 (p. 78); Elspeth Graham, 'Institute of British Geographers, Annual Conference, 7–10 January 1985, University of Leeds. The History and Philosophy of Geography', *Area* 17 (1985) 80 (p. 80).

¹⁹ The same questions could be asked of the *Commission on the History of Geographical Thought*, which was launched in 1968, by the International Geographical Union (IGU) and the International Union of the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (IUHPST), and re-launched after a brief moribund period, in 2008, as the *Commission on the History of Geography*.

²⁰ Daniel Smith, 'An Event Worthy of the Name, a Name Worthy of the Event', *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 29 (2015) 387–394.