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Circulations: Place, Movement, Belonging

Stéphane Gros and Thibault Fontanari¹

This introduction to the special issue, ‘In(tangible) Circulations: Pathways of Sociality in Highland Asia’, posits ‘circulations’ as a fundamental modus operandi of place-making and of forms of belonging that transcend geographical or physical boundaries. The notion of ‘circulations’ is conceived as the movement of material and intangible things and beings, the circuits of going forth and coming back, and their role in the continuous entanglements of people with their environment. These material and intangible movements generate what we call ‘pathways of sociality’ considered as sites for exchange that convey human relationships and values. Following these pathways compels us to look at circulations across worlds (human and non-human) and at different scales in their horizontal (societal) and vertical (spiritual) dimensions. The evolution of various circulations and the emergence of pathways contribute to the formation of relationships integral to people’s social landscape.

Keywords: Himalayas, space, mobility, place-making, social landscape

The Himalayas easily evoke secluded valleys, enclaves, and self-contained territorial units. The communities inhabiting these mountains are deeply localised, yet their

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territorial anchoring may vary significantly and is often linked to trans-local bounds. The rugged physical landscape greatly determines the routes along which connections can be established, and topography and climate are important factors that shape contrasted experiences of mobility. However, well-trodden trails crisscross the Himalayas, where many diverse communities have long been brokers across economic, political, and religious spheres. This connectedness is a crucial dimension of the Himalayan experience made of various forms of exchange that have for centuries tied together particular places in relation to circulation patterns.

With this collection of articles, we bring together several participants from the ‘Himalayan Journeys’ conference held in Paris in June 2022.² Our aim is to illuminate how circulations can be explored effectively through ethnographically informed case studies about people’s mobile engagement with their social and physical landscape. From the Karakoram to eastern Tibet, our authors examine the intricate relations people weave between them and with their broader non-human environment. They reveal how circulations at different scales unveil the ways people inhabit spaces, offering unique insights into how material and intangible movements constitute ‘pathways of sociality’ considered as sites for exchange that convey human relationships and values.

Connectivity appears to be a correlate of mobility for communities engaged in trade, bridging places and transcending the local through increasingly global networks. More generally, evolving forms of circulations have long shaped these communities, their histories, territorial imprint, and sense of being-in-the-world. As initially envisioned in the context of South Asia, the approach to circulations in Claude Markovits et al. (2003)

² This international conference was convened by Tristan Bruslé and Stéphane Gros on behalf of the Centre for Himalayan Studies at CNRS (France). Since January 2023, this centre has merged with another research team to create the Centre for South Asian and Himalayan Studies (CESAH).

emphasised Indian society from a larger global perspective to examine the connections and interactions of the subcontinent with the wider world. They noted, however, that circulation is more than mobility or trade, for circulations have a crucial importance in the *longue durée* in shaping communities at different scales. This point is also well demonstrated by the many contributions gathered in the volume *Chinese Circulations* (Tagliacozzo and Chang, eds 2011), although this latter volume did not elaborate on this notion. Overall, these studies help reveal that the movement of people is also the driving force behind the movement of material objects and immaterial flows, whose effects on the spaces they connect and the societies they affect are just as significant. All human circulation is necessarily inscribed in space and contributes to its organisation, and the changes it brings about can also find a translation in space.

With an emphasis on the contemporary period, Véronique Dupont and Frédéric Landy have proposed to go beyond a mere spatial framework and articulate the notion of circulation to that of territory to explore their reciprocal becomings in the context of the subcontinent (Dupont and Landy, eds 2010). Human circulations are not only inscribed in space, but they also contribute to its organisation as a form of territorialisation, and as they rightly point out: ‘[i]t is precisely the loop effect, the return, inherent in the notion of circulation, and the repetition of movement, that reinforce the transformative potential of this specific form of mobility’ (Dupont and Landy 2010, 14). Indeed, the notion of ‘circulation’ implies the idea of a loop (from the Latin *circularus*, circle) and, thus, a return to the place of departure. Circulations are, therefore, not mobilities in a generic sense, such as those that imply forms of permanent migration and do not lead to a rupture with the place of origin. In our view, and against reductionist connotations of people, culture, and place, ‘circulations’ shed new light on the nature of locality itself, not simply

because of the experience of globalisation and deterritorialisation but because of long-term relations and repeated exchanges that contribute to (trans)forming societies.

In addition to the conventional material focus of the study of circulations—as a to-and-fro movement of men, goods, or ideas—and the infrastructure that enables them, we wish to emphasise the intangible quality of various circulations, their sensory modalities, and the spiritual forces they call into being. A century-long anthropological tradition, starting with Marcel Mauss and Bronislaw Malinowski, pays particular attention to the circulation of gifts, goods, and people and their role in generating mutual social obligation and cultural forms. A case in point is that of the famous *kula* exchange that links participants to local and extralocal places and to the pathways between them, giving form to what Nancy Munn describes as the specific ‘spacetime of exchange’ of circulation that transcends that of actual specific transactions (Munn 1986, 58). Undoubtedly, the contemporary period altered both the way people, ideas, and commodities move around and the intensity of their circulation, leading to new ways to think about the spaces, networks, flows, and values that bring communities into relationships (Appadurai 1996; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]). In this sense, circulation can be seen as a cultural process contributing to the performative constitution of social and collective imaginaries (Lee and LiPuma 2002).

All these perspectives have enriched the notion of ‘circulations’ conceived as the movement of material and intangible things and beings, the circuits of going forth and coming back, and their role in the continuous entanglements of people with their environment. How do circulations simultaneously manifest a sense of place and a connective potential? How do the mobile engagements of people with their immediate surroundings and their historical and contemporary landscapes relate to forms of anchoring in the natural environment and culturally valued sites? How do the intangible

quality of various circulations, their sensory modalities and the spiritual forces they call into being, take place? These questions, together with the dimensions of the notion of ‘circulations’ highlighted above, outline what we suggest calling ‘pathways of sociality’ that focus on how territorial anchoring and circulations interplay and contribute to various forms of territorialisation. Following these pathways, as we further expound below, compels us to look at circulations across worlds (human and non-human) and at different scales in their horizontal (societal) and vertical (spiritual) dimensions.

This collection takes ‘circulations’ as a fundamental *modus operandi* of place-making and of forms of belonging that transcend geographical or physical boundaries: it explores how various circulations and the emergence of pathways contribute to the formation of relationships integral to people’s social landscape.

Relational places

The distinction between the English terms ‘space’ and ‘place’ is not straightforward. While they are usually taken to carry different meanings, there is often some overlap. Furthermore, their distinction is not always equivalent in other languages, such as French, where *espace* and *lieu* cannot simply be translated by space and place. Given our topic, such a terminological discussion is relevant to clarify how circulations, generally conceived to occur *across* space and *between* places, are also suggestive of other relational topographies.

For example, ‘space’ can be conceived as a larger field in which ‘places’ are brought to life through practice: an interpretation of space as ‘activated places’ that owes much to the phenomenology of Michel de Certeau.³ One problematic corollary of the

³ Michel de Certeau’s post-structuralist theory of space as a ‘practised place’ reverts the conventional use of these notions. For him, a place is ‘an instantaneous configuration of

vision of places and landscapes, as inscribed onto a 'blank space', is the dualism between a universally given world of nature and the diversely constructed worlds of culture.

Other developments in anthropology are also informed more particularly by the influential line of thought coming from Henri Lefebvre's neo-Marxist materialist conceptualisation of space. In *The Production of Space* (1991), he treats space as a social dynamic that manifests itself through places that offer a particular grounding.⁴ Social space assigns 'appropriate places' to the social relations of reproduction and the relations of production (1991, 32). In other words, social space 'localises' these relations, and every society (mode of production) produces its own space. Such an interpretation allows Andrew Merrifield, in an attempt to reconcile space and place through their dialectic relation, to offer a Lefebvrian definition of place, which reverses de Certeau's formulation as a 'practised space' (Merrifield 1993, 525).

In sum, much discussion has revolved around two positions, whereas space — following de Certeau—is an inter-subjective actualisation of a static place, while conversely—as for Lefebvre—place is the momentary suspension of the social dynamics of space. Generally speaking, contemporary discussions contributed to challenging previous understandings of space as immobile or abstract and the limits of a (modern) conceptual split between senses of place on a continuum from a generalised location (that is, space) on the one hand and a particularistic place on the other (see Agnew 2011).

positions' whereas space 'is composed of intersections of mobile elements' and 'actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it' (de Certeau 2004, 117). In other words, while 'place', in de Certeau's terms, is considered as the realm of fixity and territory, 'space' stands for a realm constituted by more fluid and relational boundaries.

⁴ This social dynamic operates as a dialectic between what Lefebvre calls 'conceived space' (representations of space), 'lived space' (representational space), and 'perceived space' (spatial practices).

Our approach here relies on an understanding of place informed by these wide-ranging and often cross-disciplinary explorations. Still, our main concern is less with abstract conceptualisation than with forms of lived emplacement to consider how people interact with their surroundings, the ongoing relationships implicated in livelihood practices, and the many local meanings linked to the embodied experience of place.

The ‘spatial turn’ in the social sciences was greatly influenced by advances in the field of geography and, depending on disciplinary engagements, the meaning of place has varied accordingly. Still, overall, the trend has been toward a relational understanding of place as socially constructed. This ‘relational’ view has become dominant within geography and many other disciplines, sometimes to the point of generating a dizzying proliferation of spatial tropes.

We refer to ‘relational places’ in the context of this special issue because we consider that places are more than just positions or sites, just as they are not simply physical, nor uniquely cultural or social. Here, our focus is on how ‘circulations’ contribute to senses of place and on how people relate to places and the particular social and spatial dynamics of these relations. The notion of ‘relational places’ is a conceptual tool that allows us to combine material realities, spatial processes, and socio-symbolic constructions. This notion can be understood as a constellation of meanings relative to the human experience of the milieu, beyond its value and meaning as a ‘natural’ or ‘cultural’ environment linked to livelihood strategies. Hence, it also overlaps, to some extent, with the notions of landscape and territory with which several of the articles

engage.⁵ Further clarification of some anthropological conceptualisations of this constellation of terms might be helpful to frame this special issue's contribution.

Of particular relevance to our focus, one dominant approach associates the production of place with the construction of identity and pays special attention to local knowledge and culturally specific processes. The conventional vision of an isomorphism between place and culture has been criticised for some time (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Olwig and Hastrup 1997) and clashed with a contemporary vision of a globalised and deterritorialised world. In other words, anthropologists have often used 'place' as the idiom to represent territorially and culturally bounded societies.

In line with other attempts at bringing space and place back together, we bring home insights, developed in the field of geography, regarding how the social is 'stretched out' in space (Massey 2005) but not in a reductionist opposition to place seen as the local and stable 'home' to hold on against the global. In other words, as Tim Creswell and Peter Merriman (2011, 7) have proposed, space, place, and landscape may be best approached as 'verbs' rather than as 'nouns', and we do not consider 'places or landscapes as settings, surfaces or contained spaces through and across which things move', but instead are interested in the multifarious 'processes of "spacing", "placing" and "landscaping" through which the world is shaped and formed' (see also Merriman et al. 2008).

The various Himalayan or Highland Asian communities exemplify a strong sense of place and belonging that is not limited to a sedentary rootedness but is made up of

⁵ As others have argued before us, the definition that French scholars give to *territoire* (territory) is close to what is attributed to 'place' in English. See for example Smadja ed. (2013, 9–10). Of particular relevance to our understanding of place are the contributions by Casey (1997), Feld and Basso (1996), Hirsch and O'Hanlon (1995), and Tilley and Cameron-Daum (2017).

repeated circulations that tie people, non-human entities, and places together. Of particular relevance to these questions are the ‘powerful places’ and spiritual or ‘potent landscapes’ that compose historical matrices of sites and pathways linking past and present, the inside and the outside, the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead (for example, Allerton 2013; Guillou 2017; Huber 1999; Smadja 2009). Such places and pathways are constitutive of territories associated with multifarious entities, spirits, or forces intimately tied to soil, forest, water, mountains, or resources on which people depend for their subsistence. In everyday life, people interact with their landscape, enliven it with their daily activities and memories, and may activate its agency through ritual acts and speeches. Landscapes are much more than containers of social life or mere cultural representations; they are animated by flows of vitality and the mobile entanglements of people’s activities and movements. Some religious traditions are territorialised in ways that bring together the lived space and the spiritual or ancestral realm, and proper knowledge of the landscape may have important implications regarding rituals to be performed at particular sites along the way (see articles by Lee, Nawa, Schlemmer, this issue).

What we call ‘relational places’ here is a way to characterise processes of place-making or how particular ‘worlds’ come into being. In so doing, we more specifically want to recognise the relational epistemologies of religious traditions often labelled ‘animism’ that inform our formulation and that are well illustrated in several of the articles in this issue. An everyday lived emplacement coheres in particular landscapes but, more generally, places are constructed out of the articulation of social relations through a movement within and between places, a process of boundary work. The notion of circulation allows for a practice-oriented exploration of how movement constitutes a

‘connective tissue’ against the backdrop of subsistence activities, rooted cultures, and identities inscribed in particular landscapes.

Movement

As Karen Fog Olwig and Kirsten Hastrup (1997, 5) noted almost thirty years ago, movement was often ‘regarded as a special and temporary phenomenon’, such as migration or tourism, and there long remained a ‘difficulty of seeing movement as an aspect of social life in general’. Since, place lost its capacity as a dominant metaphor for culture and many have explored how movement generates various experiences and senses of place, leading to considerations about place itself considered as a field of relations and not just locality.

People have always moved, but as the contributions to this issue illustrate in various ways, particular circulation patterns are generative of spatial configurations. Practices of seasonal trade or migrations are among the kinds of circulations that contribute to the continuity of forms of territorial anchoring (Nawa, this issue). Here, movement points to specific dynamics that do not necessarily imply changes and discontinuities but a cyclic or evolving connection between people and place. Nomadic pastoralism, even more obviously, relies on a specific ‘circulatory regime’ of the herders with their animals to pasture and then for the trade of products to maintain a livelihood. Nomadic life ‘entails a sense of changing places in a routine pattern of movements’ (Tan 2018, 5). These moves involve an engagement with interwoven sites and paths within a landscape and they engender particular habitus and territoriality. Among the various processes involved in people’s ways of dwelling, there are practices such as pilgrimage that exemplify a different relation to places: these ‘sacred’ sites—or ‘powerful places’ as alluded to above—can draw pilgrims from faraway to circumambulate them without

however creating a lasting connection. Religious merit and good fortune can be attained through the movement of circumambulation in a temporary relation to the place.

These few examples suffice to convey that our concern here is not with movement in relation to the intensity or speed of mobility in the context of globalisation but with how movement '(re)locates' people and generates imaginaries of roots and return or belonging (see Lee, this issue). Of course, we see tension unfolding in the Himalayan region with the emergence of improved communication and transport, regular labour migration, and new ways in which people expand their social worlds that affect the way they relate to places (see Nawa, Schlemmer, this issue). What is different is the scale of movement and how different people may relate as they move.

Nataša Gregorič Bon and Jaka Repič (2016, 1) have recently discussed how not only people, things, information, or ideas move around, as seems particularly characteristic of today's world, but that places themselves 'might shift along with these movements'. In a sense, going beyond the processual constitution of places as discussed previously, they point out the role movement plays in the emergence of 'relative locations'. Such a perspective relies on understanding location as a point of relationality, a gathering together that makes visible relations between things. What matters in these formulations is the importance of the indexical nature of places, which are always meaningful locations made up of bundles of relations: a coming together of people, sites, things, and ideas in historically specific ways.⁶

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this introduction to trace the genealogy of some of these ideas, but the works of Strathern (1995) and Green (2005) are particularly inspiring in relation to discussion around the notion of 'location' and 'gathering'; see also Casey (1997).

In the various ways people inhabit places and, more generally, their surroundings, movement acquires particular values. It is part and parcel of the ‘undercurrent circulating throughout social life’ (Kirby 2009, 2). It provides insights into the nature of social relations and the modalities of their formation and maintenance. It suggests that social life, in all its aspects, is not just lived out in places but may also ‘occur’ on the move (Ingold and Vergunst 2008) as a kind of ‘journeying’: a historical process of interaction between humans and non-humans, the visible and the invisible. This notion is taken further here to capture how movement contributes to the multidimensional transformations of people’s lived world (see Nawa, this issue), or how giving and walking become intertwined and embedded in forms of ethical and political relations that merge together progressing along a path and journeying towards Allah (see Fontanari, this issue).

Communities are localised, ‘placed’, or ‘territorialised’ through chains of relations. This form of connectedness is an essential dimension of life that takes shape along ‘pathways’, as Martin Saxer (2016) argues, which are more than just connecting lines between locations but constitute ‘socio-spatial constellations’. Such pathways tie together particular places in relation to circulation patterns that are embedded in the landscape; they aggregate people’s stories and memories, historical variables, and changing infrastructures through repeated movement.

Pathways and circulations shape each other and participate in the formation of lived environments. Trails, routes, and roads channel or constrain the movement of social life just as much as they emerge from how people move across the physical landscape and experience it: the rhythm and temporality of this movement, the trajectories that are followed, and the sequences in which places along the way are encountered (for example, Ingold 2007, 2011; Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017). Such movements reflect people’s

experience of their material and spiritual environment. They also reveal forms of sociality, made of internal and external constituents that nurture smaller intimate worlds and tie people to particular places and to each other (see Johnson, this issue).

In line with phenomenological perspectives, Tim Ingold's place is 'delineated by movement, not by the outer limits to movement' (Ingold 2009, 34, cf. 2011). Movements produce a variety of ways and directions, and they are drawn into sets of lines, creating a meshwork or a 'world' of dwelling. Ingold's inspiring conceptual relations between movement, which he calls 'wayfaring', and places show that places are made through wayfaring. Hence, movement is a process most intrinsic to human life. In the context of Highland Asia, Saxer (2022) has discussed how the notion of wayfaring enables us to grasp the myriad of interactions that take place along the path. But this notion also meets its limits given the particularity of the terrain and the need for basic infrastructure for such wayfaring to actually take place (see Schlemmer, Fontanari, this issue) or given other forms of engagement with the environment that instead require restrictions or avoidance of particular movements and flows (see Pearce, this issue).

Beyond, considerations about movement bring into the discussion the need to consider multiple temporalities in our understanding of place. While the natural cycles of the moon and sun or various geomorphological events have always deeply impacted places and their perceptions, the recent decades and succession of so-called 'natural disasters' have signalled quickly changing ecological rhythms. To open space and place to movement implies exploring the temporal structures at different scales and the everyday processes that (re)produce connections between people. In this regard, the work of Lefebvre, briefly alluded to above, has much to offer because his approach to what he calls 'concrete space', as the spaces of everyday life, advances some pioneering insights about the micro-scale of the body and the realm of spatial subject formation which are

relevant in the context of this issue (see Johnson, Fontanari, this issue). Made of the repetition of innumerable quotidian routines and habits, a regular ordering of activities, the ‘rhythmic attunement to space’ happens at various scales, from the body to the community or even the nation (see Edensor 2010).

Belonging and Sociality

The analysis of circulations as movements generating social constellations and forms of belonging, both local and trans-local, is an effective lens for understanding aspects of continuity and change. The varied social milieux—in all their extensions—constitutive of the lived experiences of the denizens of Highland Asia are interrelated with shifting contexts and environmental, economic, or political changes. The sense of mutuality, the emotional and material attachment that the notion of belonging evokes, differs from the boundedness of categories of identity in its more cross-boundaries specificities (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011; Toffin and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2014).

Our focus is to locate sociality in the activities and practices linked to ever-evolving forms of circulation rather than pre-existing stable structures. In doing so, we consider the processuality of social relations; our shared view in this collection is that the variety of movements and rhythms involved in circulations engender particular socialities. These exceed material co-presence and bind practice and representation in forms of ‘extended sociality’ (Sillander and Ziegler Remme, eds. 2017).

For example, environmental affordances and changing socio-political conditions greatly shape women’s domestic routes and routines from which emerges a particular sociality of gendered agrarian labour (Johnson, this issue). Perceiving the movements of the environment and, in particular, the obstacles along the way, plays a crucial role in

relationships of mutual help and the social commitment to one's community that enable people to move forward and progress spiritually (Fontanari, this issue).

Several of the articles in this issue also illustrate the dynamic relationship between moving experiences along a series of named places, ancestors' migration pathways, and funeral practices that involve sending back the soul of the deceased to a place of origin. They exemplify a circulatory spatial configuration of sociality (see Lee, Nawa, this issue) and the pathways that allow for the circulation of the dead may evolve along with the relationships established with the outside world, including the State and its transformative powers (see Schlemmer, this issue). Forms of extended sociality may also present risks and dangers that rather necessitate the disentanglement of the co-presence of self and environment. The avoidance of places occupied by other potentially harmful beings demands to redraw boundaries and restrict movement (see Pearce, this issue).

Discussions within and beyond anthropology about social becomings have often drawn from Ingold's conceptualisation of human and non-human, organisms and persons not as nodes in a network but 'as knots in a tissue of knots, whose constituent strands, as they become tied up with other strands, in other knots, comprise the meshwork. [This] tangle is the texture of the world' (2011, 70, 71). According to this approach, beings inhabit the world in a much fuller sense than simply occupy it, as the paths they thread through the meshwork become entangled, with various levels of interdependence, and together contribute to the evolving weave of the world they compose. This is what we broadly refer to as 'sociality': a weaving together of relations of co-existence, which constitute a 'dynamic matrix of relations' (Long and Moore 2013).

Following these insights, it seems important, however, to avoid an over-focus on the individual as the subject of perception, as if outside of social bounds. Precisely, and perhaps differently from the vision of the meshwork of life as occurring along paths in a

state of perpetual flux, we see the ‘pathways’ playing an important role in what may compose a collective and its inscription in particular places. We also understand location in a non-static way as a knot of relations itself, and as such, constitutive of modes of existence: in other words, ‘relative locations’, as alluded to above, generated by evolving social and spatial relations (see Gregorič Bon and Repič 2016). It follows that not all places are equal and can become central or marginal according to cultural, political, historical, or economic determinations.

In this issue

The authors in this special issue draw on detailed ethnographies to engage with notions of place, movement, and belonging and to address the connections between forms of circulation and sociality. The articles explore this set of notions through approaches of diverse and composite life worlds co-created by humans and many other actors, each opening an additional dimension of circulation as a form of ‘doing’ together.

Figure 1: General map showing the localisation of the case studies in this issue (Map design by Jérôme Picard)

Katsuo Nawa and Wen-Yao Lee both show the importance of the temporality of circulations in the formation of a sense of place inclusive of ancestors and spirits, which results in the weaving of individual life cycles into long-term histories. The experience of seasonal migrations and trade expeditions continues to shape the narratives of movement of the Rang trans-Himalayan traders of Nepal discussed by Nawa, despite changing economic conditions. Nawa emphasises these narratives’ various layers—historical, geographical, and biographical. In the case of the Pumi of Yunnan in Southwest

China, the routes followed by the souls of the deceased are inseparable from the roots communities establish within the homeland they dwell in. As Lee demonstrates, the burial of the cremated bones of ancestors is an active process of place-making exemplary of the continuous dialectic connections between movement and locality.

There are indeed different kinds of roads, for both the living and the dead. In his article, Grégoire Schlemmer shows us that their materialities and representations evolve along with the relations between the worlds they connect. Based on his ethnographic research among the Kulung of Nepal, Schlemmer combines an analysis of the journey on which the souls of the deceased embark with that of the role played by actual roads in the circulation of religious ideas to demonstrate how the trope of the road enables an interpretation of the multifaceted changes that have affected the political and religious life of the Kulung.

Among the lay Buddhists of Ladakh, the paths taken by spirits closely tail those followed by people during their daily activities. Protecting oneself from the harm caused by spirits requires curtailing movement and setting boundaries. Callum Pearce's article concentrates on the inhabitation of places according to the social relations the inhabitants maintain with invisible beings and the positive and negative potency of their spiritual landscapes. Drawing on some of the phenomenological approaches to the topic of landscape discussed above, Pearce emphasises acts of avoidance, restrictions on movement, and control of non-human movement as forms of what he calls 'negative wayfaring' in reference to Ingold's coinage.

Such an involvement with phenomenology is taken further and in different directions in the contributions by Thibault Fontanari and Amy Johnson, who each tackle the complex intertwining of place and personhood in the course of daily journeys and bring to the fore the role environmental affordances play in the construction of the

inhabitants' being-in-the-world. Johnson shows that environmental affordances contribute to the construction of gender of the Tarai women of Nepal, as well as to the formation of their bonds in a space dominated and controlled by men. In her exploration of physical and conceptual fields, Johnson approaches women's daily activities as generative of spaces of autonomy, their 'hidden worlds'. Their practice of hiding (*lukne*) and their other movements are what weave together particular places and meanings, and Johnson's approach here aptly shows how these practices are ways to 'activate places', in de Certeau's sense, according to what she calls 'eco-social rhythms'. These place-based practices are essential to the gender politics she uncovers.

The building and maintaining of infrastructure to enable circulation is a collective endeavour imbued with multiple meanings for the people of Shimshal, Pakistan. Walking along the roads or pathways in the valley, crossing bridges, is to recount the history of the many forms of solidarity the locals mobilised to build them. In his article, Thibault Fontanari argues that the actions taken by the people on their way to clear and repair roads blocked or destroyed by landslides are gifts given and received that contribute to their spiritual journey and social recognition.

In sum, the articles in this collection examine various forms of circulation and movement as sites of ethnographic enquiry to reveal their ambivalent role in the generation of sociality. Together, they contribute to an understanding of circulation as a form of engagement or disengagement, a 'spatial breathing' of social life. They show that forms of circulation and belonging shape each other and must therefore be analysed in a combined manner.

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