Himalayan Journeys

A mobile ethnography and philosophical anthropology

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ABSTRACT

Based on a mobile, multi-sited ethnography conducted in 2011 in Nepal and Northern India, and employing a phenomenological and philosophical anthropological approach, this thesis explores contemporary journeys to the Himalayan region as a form of pilgrimage. Situating the phenomenon in a historical framework, I explore how the practices, performances and narratives of contemporary travellers in the Himalayan region reveal broader socio-historical and recent cultural trends with regard to modernisation and global mobility. Reflecting the realities and perceived deficiencies of contemporary life, the attitudes, ideals, experiences and stories of global travellers as 'embodied cosmopolitans' expressed numerous overlapping themes. These included, for example, movement and reflection, disaffection and leaving alienated life, ideals of authenticity and utopian imaginaries. Through semiotic and phenomenological analysis and interpretation of interviews and participant observation, this thesis unfolds and critically discusses the relational politics inherent in contemporary journeys in the Himalayan region.

As a performance blending yet surpassing traditional genres of mobility such as tourism and pilgrimage, contemporary journeys in the Himalayas are viewed as a meta-social reflection of salient concerns of our times, including alienation, technologization and hyper-connectivity, relations between nature and culture and notions of 'the good life'. Such journeys are explored as reflexive quests for re-orientations or re-understandings, as well as travelling into imagined pasts and possible (alternative) futures. Being typically critical of

Western culture, travellers often demonstrated positive yet uncritical appraisal and nostalgia for all things perceived as exotic, non-modern and natural. Set against a perceived inauthentic, disenchanted and destructive West, the Himalayan region was often idealized for its natural and cultural purity and its aura as a spiritual, utopia. It is in such moral projections and utopian yearnings that we may read contemporary journeys such as those to the Himalayas and perhaps other global 'power places' as a paradoxical meta-critique and enactment of late modernity.

CONTENTS

IMAGES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lastly, I sincerely thank Dr Wendelin Küpers for his continuous inspiration, wisdom and friendship. I thank him for showing me the way into phenomenology and pointing me towards what Heidegger calls a 'path of awakening'. This thesis is dedicated to him, and to my brother Andy, who never ceases to teach me the fundamental lesson of anthropology: we could always be other than who we are.

INTRODUCTION

For roughly the past two and a half centuries, the middle Himalayan region – comprised of contemporary Nepal, northern India, Tibet and Bhutan – has captivated the Western imagination. Early travel accounts of the region by Christian missionaries, colonial explorers and early mountaineers, and later popular books and films such as James Hilton's famous *Lost Horizon* helped create and perpetuate an aura of enchantment, authenticity and utopia that continues to this day. In the past three to four decades, expanded opportunities for global travel and mobile lifestyles, increasing media and information technologies, enthusiasm for eastern spirituality, mountain landscapes and 'wild nature' have brought a steady stream of western travellers to the middle Himalayan region. Observing that travel here has and continues to be represented as and performed in ways that resemble pilgrimage, this research explores, among other things, how contemporary Himalayan travel may be viewed as pilgrimage.

By considering the imaginings, values and ideals that drive travellers from western countries to make journeys to the region, the experiences and the meanings ascribed to them, in this thesis I explore how contemporary Himalayan travel reflects broader historical, sociocultural, political themes and processes of late modernity. Interpreted from a historical and complexity perspective, I offer a dynamic, relational account that explores how contemporary approaches to travel exhibit a specifically late modern character, but also how they reflect seemingly perennial and archetypal dimensions of

the human experience. Following Victor and Edith Turner's (1978) notion that modern pilgrimage can be seen as a 'meta-social commentary' on the existing social order and issues of the day, I argue that contemporary Himalayan travel simultaneously signifies, enacts, critiques and reproduces key aspects of late modernity, namely rationalisation, globalisation, technologization and technological hyper-connectivity and increased mobility. On the other hand, contemporary Himalayan journeys appeared to reflect certain perennial themes of the human experience, such as wonder and curiosity, yearnings for paradise, concerns for existential meaning and transcending perceived limitations.

Although I began this study from an interest in contemporary religion and spirituality and wondering where actors in an allegedly 'secular age' (Taylor 2007) went in search of meaning and spiritual fulfilment, my attention was soon drawn to seeming paradoxes, tensions and inconsistencies. Observing certain late or 'post' modern ambiguities and contradictions found in contemporary forms of pilgrimage caused the project to move beyond an explicit focus on religion and spirituality.

In Kathmandu, early into the fieldwork, I visited Boudnath, the Tibetan Buddhist district of Nepal's capital and a significant pilgrimage centre for Buddhists across the Himalayan region. Staying in a monastery that also functioned as an impromptu guesthouse for foreign travellers, numerous times a day I found myself joining a procession of devout monks, local lay people and global travellers performing a *kora* – a ritual circumambulation – around the great stupa (pictured below) that is the centre of Boudnath and is reputed to contain relics of the Buddha

himself. Usually after several laps, I would step into one of many cafés where travellers and robed monks alike could be found side-by-side, sipping espresso and tapping away on laptops or smartphones. *Lattes and enlightenment* I thought. Such seeming paradoxes and contradictions continually caught my attention in Boudnath and other places in Nepal and India and told me that studying contemporary Himalayan journeys purely as a form of pilgrimage and a spiritual quest for 're-enchantment' – as I had first imagined – would not do justice to the multidimensional nature of what was indeed a twenty-first century phenomenon.

Image 1: Boudnath, Kathmandu

Photo by Author

Image 2: Monks drinking lattes, Boudnath, Kathmandu. March 2011

Photo by Author

Image 3: Traveller cafes in Dharamsala, India

Photo by Author. Note: One hundred meters down the road lies the Dalai Lama's temple and the seat of the Tibetan government in exile. April 2011

Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-enchantment?

At the time I was developing the proposal for what was to become this thesis, I was working as a tutor on an introductory sociology paper at Victoria University of Wellington. Making our way through the classics of social theory, I became especially interested in Max Weber's (1979) thesis of what – after the romantic poet Friedrich Schiller – he called the 'disenchantment of the world'. Although Weber's pessimistic forecast of almost exactly one hundred years ago about the coming of a rationally ordered, bureaucratized world abandoned by both gods and meaning was compelling (and frightening), I was led to wonder if the world really had become as disenchanted as the sociological forefather proclaimed.

In the new millennium, a wave of post-secularization literature suggested otherwise (Beck 2010; Bellah 2005; Bender 2003; Gordon 2011; Habermas 2008, 2010; Heelas 1998; Stark 1999; Taylor 2007, 2011). Such literature demonstrated that religion in a broad sense was not only still alive, but was morphing to the global, technological conditions of late modernity, taking on detraditionalized and deterritorialized forms (Heelas et al. 1996; Heelas 2005). One evidence of this 'post-secular' trend appeared to be illustrated by the fact that pilgrimage had grown in popularity around the world (Reader 2007). Initially, I took this as a sign that there was perhaps a trend in what I began thinking of as 're-enchantment' occurring. After all, if the world had once been enchanted but had become disenchanted, it seemed logical to suppose it could be become re-enchanted. If not a large-scale trend, at least there appeared to be sectors of contemporary Western societies that were still, if not increasingly concerned with religious and spiritual matters. I asked

myself how and where people from these supposedly disenchanted western societies were going in search of re-enchantment. Conjuring images of a spiritual utopia and what Weber (1971: 270) called an 'enchanted garden', the Himalayas struck me as one such place where the disenchanted might go in search of re-enchantment. Thus, the initial title of this thesis was going to be something romantic and grandiose, such as: 'The quest for re-enchantment: sacred travel in the Himalayas'.

Weber meant 'disenchantment' in two interrelated senses. On one hand, he meant it quite literally; as in, a world where there are no more magical or transcendental forces that order the cosmos and bestow meaning on human lives. Since the scientific revolution, Weber observed that the world had been undergoing a progressive 'demystification' as rational, scientific worldviews replaced magic as the means of understanding the workings of the universe. The 'rationalist prophecy', according to Weber, greatly reduced the roles played by substantive values and was leading to spiritual disenchantment and alienation of modern subjects, who found themselves trapped between 'the epistemological demands of enlightenment rationalism and the ontological pressure of a complete human existence' (Koch 1993: 143).

Observing the consequences of modernity, in 1918 Weber describes how 'increasing intellectualization and rationalization … means that there are no more mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means the world is *disenchanted*' (1979: 139). Critiquing science for being 'purely practical and technical', Weber sees scientific progress as ultimately meaningless when it comes to the existential questions

human beings have always asked, such as 'What shall we do and how shall we live?' How shall we arrange our lives?' 'What is the meaning of our own death?' According to Weber, under the logic of 'infinite progress', civilized life and death lose their meaning in the modern age.

In modernity, rather than life being governed by the prescribed morals, ethics and holy communion that characterize traditional religious societies, Weber (2003) saw modern individuals becoming entrapped in an 'iron cage of rationality'. Durkheim (1997), similarly concerned with the fate of the individual in modern society, saw modernisation and the decline in shared moral-religious systems leading to social disintegration and the fragmentation of social identities, what he described as *anomie*, the pathological state of capitalism. Without the unifying beliefs of religion necessary for the integration and regulation of the *conscience collective*, Durkheim saw the bonds of society and consequently the individual spirit severely weakening in the modern age. For Marx, capitalist modernity similarly signals a decay of traditional, collective values and human alienation. Classical social theorists saw these modern shifts as being part of an evolutionary process in which humanity – led by the West – was outgrowing a childish phase based on irrational, superstitious beliefs. While none of the three sociological founders thought humanity could or should 'go back' to religiously ordered times, they all saw modernity leading to a nihilistic collapse in meaning.

The popularity of pilgrimage and pilgrimage-like travel in the new millennium seemed to suggest that even in a late modern 'secular age', supposedly disenchanted subjects still express needs for existential meaning and transcendence that appears to reflect a perennial 'religious

instinct' (Eliade 1954; James 2008; Jung 1977). I thus wondered whether the phenomenon of people from Western societies travelling to the Himalayas might be seen as a quest for re-enchantment. Important to this hypothesis was that they were seeking re-enchantment 'out there', in Other, non-western cultures and peripheral places, far removed from the allegedly disenchanted, anomic, alienated societies they came from.

Both fieldwork and library research, however, caused me to see that contemporary Himalayan journeys encompassed many other dimensions that made an isolated focus on religious and spiritual matters untenable. Like Durkheim, Weber (1991: 268) had already foreseen that religion could not be viewed separately from sociocultural and political contexts:

> Of course the religiously determined organization of life is itself profoundly influenced by economic and political factors within given geographical, political, social, and national boundaries. We should lose ourselves in these discussions if we tried to demonstrate these dependencies in all their singularities.

As I discovered in Boudnath and other places, travel in the Himalayan region was a relational, interdependent event that far surpassed national boundaries and was rather enfolded in globalisation processes. Observing the significance of mobile technologies and media, global transportation networks and tourism infrastructure, the blending of work and leisure in mobile lifestyles, this thesis took on more than an explicitly religious focus. Rather than examine singularities, I set out on an exploratory path in which I aimed to consider contemporary

Himalayan travel as a complex, relational process taking place within the global context of late modernity.

My interest in travel and mobility was both personal and intellectual. Having been on the move since leaving my family home in northern California in the year 2000 and finding myself adrift in a 'liquid modern' (Bauman 2000) world marked by movement, fleeting encounters with people and places, networked technologies and social acceleration. By my late twenties, I found myself far from 'home' and wondering whether 'home' even existed anymore. After spending one year in New Zealand, completing a master's degree and seeing the country, I was pondering job offers in either Peru or Morocco. Deliberating on the decision to stay or go from my favourite café overlooking the Wellington harbour, I asked myself *what was the meaning of all this movement*? How had it happened that my life, as merely an instance of what Deleuze (2002a) calls *a life*, had become so globally dispersed and inter-placed? Why were so many people on the move, and where was everybody going?

As it turned out, there was a growing body of literature in anthropology, sociology, geography and other branches of human inquiry that were asking similar questions pertaining to movement (Bauman 1998; Beck 2006; Clifford 1997; Cresswell 2006; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Jackson 2000; Reader 2005; Urry 2007). So instead of boarding a plane for northern Africa or South America, I hunkered down in the deep South Pacific to think about the matter of movement. That is, until fieldwork took me to Nepal and India, with side-trips through Japan, Malaysia and Thailand, conferences took me around Australia, family visits took me to California and Chile. While the

present thesis represents what ensued from the decision to stop and reflect on movement, in the end, somewhat ironically it was written in and in-between eight or nine countries. The movement continues.

This thesis thus finds itself at home in the study of mobilities (Bauman 1998; Clifford 1997; Cresswell 2006, 2010; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Merriman 2012; Molz 2009; Sloterdijk 2009b; Urry 2000, 2007). In particular, it contributes to the anthropological and sociological study of pilgrimage and tourism. More generally, it enters into dialogue with the discourse of modernisation and globalisation. The place of religion and spirituality in contemporary society is another key area of engagement. While centred on the particular case of contemporary travel in the Himalayas, this thesis also addresses broader philosophical, anthropological and methodological questions and assumptions. Especially regarding the relationship of the body and technology – prominent themes in chapters five through seven – this thesis also enters into dialogue with post-humanism theory and immanent critique and argues for an anthropology that reconsiders the traditional subject of the discipline – the anthropos – in a post-anthropocentric sense. While this study remains true to an ethos of empirically driven ethnographic fieldwork, it is also a philosophical anthropology that revisits basic anthropological questions in light of the on-going evolution of ideas. Rethinking basic questions and assumptions regarding the human being are increasingly important as humanity faces the consequences of anthropocentric life modes as well as climactic shifts that may or may not be a product of human intervention. As global humanity enters what some geologists are calling a new planetary epoch – the Anthropocene – this thesis takes up

Latour's (1997a: 15) challenge to 'open up the question of humanity' in a critical effort to ask how things might be otherwise.

This thesis aims to situate contemporary Himalayan travel in a historical framework and interpret it from a perspective of complexity (Urry 2005). This means viewing the phenomenon as bound up in complex networks of relations – historical, socio-cultural, political, technological, biological and material. By considering the objective conditions that make journeys to the Himalayas and global mobility more generally possible, in conjunction with the subjective motivations, experiences and meanings journeys held for travellers, this research aims to integrate macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. The goal of this integral approach is to provide, as much as possible, a complex picture of what it means to make a journey to the Himalayan region in the context of late modernity.

Recognizing that pilgrimage has grown in popularity around the world, an aim of this research is to enquire how this may be accounted for. With Reader (2007: 216) I approached the trend in making pilgrimages with scepticism that it evidences rising levels of religious faith. Rather than being part of a 'religious revolution' or 'spiritual revolution', the growth in pilgrimage appears to be contingent upon and expressing many factors that go beyond institutionalized religion. One goal of this work then is to examine how contemporary approaches to pilgrimage are consistent with and different from those of the past. Another is to see why certain people choose to make pilgrimages or pilgrimage-like journeys specifically to the Himalayan region, as opposed to elsewhere. Viewing travel as a relational process that does not simply begin or end when travellers depart or return from

being 'on the road', I also explore the dynamic overlapping of imaginative, virtual and corporeal mobilities. This requires considerations of travel motivations and expectations that go beyond purely rational choices to encompass the role of media, memory and the imagination in pre-structuring travel experiences and reconstructing them after corporeal travel has taken place.

Regarding pilgrimage and journeys as universal, archetypal activities expressing human tendencies to wonder and wander, to seek meaning and broadened horizons, I explore the values, ideals and discontents that drive contemporary journeys to the Himalayas. Understanding the attitudes, imaginings and meanings subjects ascribe to their travels are integral to a broad goal of this thesis, which is to read such journeys as meta-social reflections on contemporary life. As such, here I engage with research that considers forms of mobility as social metaphors, which express the key features of the times they are situated in (Bauman 1996; Urry 2002a).

In the case of contemporary Himalayan travel, this means placing the phenomenon in the global conditions of late modernity, as a continuation of modernisation processes that have been unfolding for the past two hundred and fifty years or so. Considering Himalayan travel as a metaphor and meta-social commentary means considering how the phenomenon simultaneously critiques and enacts certain features of late modernity, such as technologization and networked mobilities, consumption and commodification, alienation and concerns for authenticity, spirituality and sustainable living. Once Himalayan travel as a 'pure' form of pilgrimage was untenable, this thesis largely became an exploration of the seeming tensions, ambiguities, paradoxes

and contradictions the subject seemed to present by virtue of its situatedness in the late or post-modern milieu. In this regard, I aim to illustrate how and to what extent Himalayan travellers are simultaneously participating in, responding critically to, and reproducing certain features of modernity.

For this, it was not enough to attend only to the realm of discourse in which travellers expressed and I interpreted the meanings of Himalayan travel. In order to overcome a linguistic bias and mind and body dualisms, I sought to explore the practical, bodily and affective dimensions of travel. Taking a phenomenological approach, I sought to write thick descriptions of how the body responds, copes and adapts to foreign environments, and how travel experiences generate tacit knowledge and an expanded set of bodily dispositions. In this sense, the aim here is to unfold not only what travel means in a semantic sense, but what travel as an embodied, pre-reflective practice and affective experience *does*. Guiding this pursuit are questions such as how and in what ways does travel as a bodily event shape and generate new experience.

While exploring the bodily aspects of travel from a phenomenological approach, I also sought to understand foreign travel as an embodied intercultural encounter. Taking foreign travel in the broad sense, I included anthropological and ethnographic travel in this study. Thus, while this thesis focuses primarily on travellers who are not professional anthropologists, the analysis of foreign travel also serves as a meta-reflection on anthropology itself, as a discipline and profession in which perhaps more than any other, travel is central. While traditional Malinowskian ethnography held a certain allure, the

romantic, orientalist and colonialist associations made me uneasy. Although I am all for exploring the varieties of human experience, I found myself questioning the interests and intentions of anthropologists, including my own. From my excursions into social theory, I joined the camp that maintains anthropology should begin first and foremost at home. Anthropology of this variety requires greater critical reflexivity and epistemological vigilance, a thorough objectification of the objectifying subject if it is to be more scientific and politically neutral. I thus decided not to peer into the world of the other, but to observe the relational dynamics of travel as an embodied, inter-cultural and political encounter between selves and others. With these aims and intentions in mind, the following outlines the path this thesis follows.

The road ahead

Chapter one revisits the quest as an archetypal theme in human experience that reflects a concern for existential meaning and a seeming 'religious instinct'. Tracing certain continuities and discontinuities between past and present modes of pilgrimage and tourism, I argue that a 'pilgrimage model' persists from ancient to modern times, albeit in adapted forms according to changing historical conditions. While the basic narrative structure and meaning of pilgrimage as a ritual process centred on transformation remains relatively in place, I show how contemporary studies of pilgrimage go beyond traditional definitions of pilgrimage as an explicitly religious phenomenon. Contemporary studies of pilgrimage often demonstrate a shift in focus towards the subjective meanings and self-interpretations of pilgrims themselves. This has also meant a shift away from place-centred approaches

towards more phenomenological concerns with pilgrimage as an embodied, reflexive process in which the meaning is largely in the movement itself. After surveying basic definitions, conceptualizations and the groundwork of seminal pilgrimage scholars such as Victor Turner and Mircea Eliade, the chapter explores the overlapping of pilgrimage and tourism in late modernity. The growing popularity of pilgrimage is shown to be closely intertwined with tourism, information technologies and expanded opportunities for local and global travel. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of how different forms of mobility can be viewed as metaphors and meta-social reflections on given epochs.

Chapter two traces the history and evolution of the Himalayas as a place of pilgrimage. Drawing on Durkheim's theory of 'collective representation', I focus on how a dominant set of representations have reproduced an imagery of the Himalayas as a place of purity, mysticism, power and enchantment. This occurred first in the local context from the tales of wandering Hindu ascetics who consecrated various sites, after which Himalayan pilgrimage became institutionalized. The chapter focuses mainly on the western encounter with the Himalayas, however, and attempts to situate the representations of colonial explorers, early mountaineers and later those following the 'hippy trail' in the discourse of modernity. I pay particular attention to the utopic imagery surrounding the Himalayas as a place geographically and symbolically removed from a 'modern' world, and particularly the significance of mountains as symbols of anti-structure, transcendence and timelessness. I consider the emergence of mountaineering in Europe, demonstrating how the

counter-modern Romantic Movement instilled desires for 'returning to nature' and seeking bodily challenge and adventure in the mountains as an antidote to the boredom, disenchantment and meaninglessness of modern life. The Himalayas, as 'the mountain of mountains', took on a quasi-sacred status for modern mountaineers and became represented as a place where westerners could find 'real' adventure. For members of the sixties counter culture following the 'hippy trail' overland from Europe to Asia, the Himalayan region and in particular Kathmandu, as the 'end of the road', became a pilgrimage centre. As in earlier times, the region continued to symbolize freedom and escape from the so-called 'malaises of modernity' (Taylor 1991), but also promised opportunities for spiritual enlightenment, legal drugs and alternative living for the counter culture. In the new millennium, remnants of the hippy trail remain, but have given way to mass and backpacker tourism. Despite the transitions and discontinuities, I argue that the Himalayas remains represented as a utopic destination, despite the ubiquitous commodification occurring in recent times.

In chapter three I discuss the methodological pathways I followed in this research, as well as the research methods and techniques I employed. Applying the journey as a metaphor for the research process, the chapter chronicles how the project took shape and became what the reader encounters within these pages. The reader will notice that this was an exploratory study that did not begin from within any methodological paradigm or predetermined framework, but was rather a nomadological process emerging from dialogical interactions between the author, participants, ideas already in currency and life-worldly

experiences in the field. In this way, the research presented in this thesis is both exploratory and data driven.

Based on pre-fieldwork and fieldwork interviews, chapter four addresses the specific question of why certain contemporary actors choose to travel to the middle Himalayan region, while exploring the broader question of why people travel at all. Focusing on the role of the imagination, I draw connections between memory, media representations and the values, ideals and goals of travelling to the Himalayan region. Highlighting how pre-travel imaginaries impinge upon corporeal journeys, I identify how contemporary Himalayan travel tended to revolve around three common themes: coming to the source of spiritual traditions, becoming immersed in local life-worlds and seeking bodily challenge via trekking in the world's highest mountains. These three themes were typically intertwined and connected to broader reflexive life projects and trajectories.

Hinging on the themes of authenticity and alienation, chapter five explores the relational dynamics of Himalayan travel as a historically situated inter-cultural encounter between the so-called 'West and the rest'. Here I examine certain romantic attitudes and utopian projections of authenticity onto the Himalayan region by western travellers, who simultaneously expressed critical, dystopian attitudes towards their home societies. Interviews with travellers typically revealed perceptions that the world could be divided into two distinct spheres: a modern, alienating and inauthentic world on one hand, and a premodern, authentic world that was still an 'enchanted garden' on the other. Considering these two contrasting poles, I explore how contemporary Himalayan travel reflects not only a uniquely western

'imperialist nostalgia' (Rosaldo 1989), but perhaps a universal 'nostalgia for paradise' (Eliade 1957) and a 'utopic impulse' (Bloch 1986) that is part of the human condition more generally. Focusing particularly on the role of technology as a way of mediating and revealing the world to human beings, by considering travellers' perceptions of the ways in which Himalayan villagers dwelled in high altitude mountain environments, I open up broader anthropological questions regarding the plurality and contingency of being-in-the-world.

Chapter six continues with the theme of travel as an embodied encounter between relative worlds. Viewing the body as inscribed with cultural schemes, habits and tacit knowledge, from a phenomenological perspective I interpret travel as a boundary crossing in which embodied 'home worldly' dispositions are brought into contact with unfamiliar 'alien worlds'. These interactions materialize in everyday, practical activities in which travellers experience themselves feeling relatively out of place by virtue of being out of practice. Being in liminal states, outside of normal habituated action and predictable routines, in alien worlds travellers suffer innumerable minor breakdowns in practical sense. Experiences of being off balance were found to facilitate learning according to the ancient formula of *mathein pathein*, learning through suffering, and the generation of new embodied knowledge. I interpret this as a process of becoming well-travelled and a generative form of embodied cosmopolitanism. Concerned with the visceral, bodily dimensions of travel, here I also explore the role of affect and pathos in travel, particularly through experiences of arrival in a foreign country.

Through a phenomenological understanding of place and the developed notion of 'inter-place', chapter seven focuses on the role of

mobile technologies in mediating travel experiences. Finding that most travellers in Nepal and India travelled with laptop computers, smart phones or other portable media devices, I consider how such technologies impacted upon their travel experiences. Building upon the idea developed in the previous chapters that travel is not an isolated, singularly emplaced event, but one that takes place in and in-between various times and places, I explore how mobile technologies alter corporeal experiences of place. Noticing the tendency of travellers to drift in and out of local and 'planetary landscapes' (Augé 2008), I draw upon Heidegger's (1977) notion of Ge-stell (enframing) to discuss the implications of a digitally enframed era characterized by paradoxical hyper + dis-connected and mobile lifestyles (Elliott and Urry 2010).

What follows is a study of pilgrimage and travel that is more than a close examination of certain people on the move. As a paradigmatic quest that is both inwardly and outwardly directed, pilgrimage symbolizes a universal expression of the search for fulfilment by people inhabiting what is perceived as an imperfect world (Morinis, 1992: x). Yet by virtue of being situated in much larger socio-historical processes, contemporary quests in the Himalayan region and other global 'power places' paradoxically may be contributing to the reproduction of the very 'imperfect world' travellers wish to escape and transcend. As global humanity journeys into uncertain planetary futures, questions of travel become increasingly salient, especially regarding the political, ecological and ethical dimensions of mobility. In the pages that follow, I wish to tell a story about travelling, focusing primarily on contemporary travellers in the middle Himalayan region - exploring

their desires, ideals and experiences. At the same time, I will be telling a story about modernisation and its consequences.

CHAPTER ONE

Questions of Travel

I move, therefore I am.

    Murukami Haruki (2011: 29)

Travelling, exploring, questing and making journeys represent central aspects of the human experience. Throughout history, humankind has been *on the move*; from climbing down from jungle canopies and walking in the plains of Africa to the earliest migrations in search of improved climate and more bountiful resources, to trade and exploration, territorial and politico-economic conquests, to peregrinations in search of spiritual transcendence and self-transformation, to curiosity and desires to 'see the world'. Indeed the story of humanity, like the travelling planet humans travel in and dwell upon, has always been and continues to be one of movement (Greenblatt 2010; Sloterdijk 2006). In this chapter, I survey the particular forms of travel known as pilgrimage and tourism.

The search for meaning: the religious sense and the origins of pilgrimage

Wonder, curiosity, cosmic terror and enchantment gave birth to what Durkheim (1915) has called humankind's 'elementary forms' of

religion. As a socio-cultural practice that evolved with the dawning of spiritual consciousness and concern with existential meaning, pilgrimage may be seen as an expression of a 'religious instinct' or 'religious sense' that is common to humankind, despite diverse cultural expressions (Durkheim 1915; Eliade 1954, 1957; Eliade and Frye 1968; Eliade 1998; James 2008; Jung 1977). According to Guissani and Zucchi (1997), the 'religious sense' is part and parcel of the human condition, expressed in the perennial human tendency to ask 'ultimate questions' and search for final meanings of existence. Understanding the practice, meanings and functions of pilgrimage is thus at the core a holistic consideration of humanity.

Mircea Eliade (1957) dubs humankind 'homo religious' and maintains that human beings are predisposed to seeking worldly transcendence and regaining a divine state of affairs by returning to *illo tempore* – the beginning of time. Heidegger (1995) similarly observes human beings' inherent concern with the meaning of their own existence and propensity for asking metaphysical questions. Like Eliade, Heidegger attributes such concerns to the human capacity for time consciousness and an acute awareness of life's finite condition; a facticity whose understanding and expression is made fundamentally possible by language. One plausible source of evidence supporting claims of a basic 'religious sense' is found in the fact that pilgrimage can be found in nearly every religious tradition, past and present, and in many cases extends beyond the realm of organised religion (Coleman and Elsner 1995; Coleman 2001; Collins-Kreiner 2010a; Morinis 1992b; Preston 1992; Raj and Morpeth 2007).

Pilgrimage has played a central role in the world's major religions and is also connected to broader historical processes of cultural transmission and diffusion. As Griffin (2007: 17) points out, much of the Old Testament is a journey by the Jewish 'chosen people', beginning with their exodus from Egypt and subsequent journeying through the desert and eventual entering of the Promised Land. Following this, Israelites made pilgrimages to the holy city of Jerusalem three times a year. Such literal and allegorical journeys played a significant role in the forging of Jewish and Christian identity, as both religions came to view pilgrimage as an overarching symbol for the religious life (Robinson 1997: 2). Most likely inspired by notions of Jewish and Christian pilgrimage, the prophet Mohamed made pilgrimage to Mecca a central component of Islam, a practice that became a pillar of Muslim identity (Campo 2009; Coleman and Elsner 1995; Eickelman and Piscatori 1990). Pilgrimage, however, is in no way unique to the monotheistic religions of the near-East and West and has and continues to play a major role in the Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist and Shinto traditions of Asia, as well as in indigenous religious systems throughout the world (Ackerman et al. 2007; Bernbaum 2009; Bhardwaj 1973; Eliade 1984; Hoshino 1997; Khoon San 2001; Raj and Morpeth 2007: 4; Reader 2005; Shuo et al. 2009).

While religious pilgrims continue to make journeys of devotion, in recent times diverse forms of quasi-religious, spiritual and secular pilgrimages are being performed at ancient and newer sites around the world (Arellano 2004, 2007; Badone and Roseman 2004; Bleie 2003; Campo 1998; Devereux and Carnegie 2006; Olsen and Timothy 2006; Reader 2007; Rountree 2005; Singh 2005). Characteristic of more recent

approaches to pilgrimage is a 'post-modern' blending of religious traditions and sites with forms of new-age spirituality, the sacralisation of certain cultural or natural sites, as well as incorporating the global tourism industry and information technologies (Fox 2008). Although newer approaches appear to stretch the boundaries of traditional notions of pilgrimage as a quest oriented towards spiritual transcendence and 'ultimate meanings', certain continuities between ancient and contemporary pilgrimage practices persist. This may be due to the fact that while pilgrimage is often thought of as having emerged out of organised religions, the prototypical model of pilgrimage appears to precede the major world religions and is an expression of a more basic aspect of the human condition. As Behara (1995: 44) observes:

> Every culture has had its archetypal quest, and in every age, this search has been given expression in journeys to places that embody the higher values of the culture. Man seeks the tangible symbols of his ideals.

Tracing the quest to earlier mythologies and cosmologies, Elsner and Rubiés (1999: 7) note that ever since Homer's depiction of the epic voyages of the hero Odysseus, the 'pilgrimage model' has played a central role in the cultural history of the West. At least since the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the voyager as an allegorical character who faces outer challenges that allow for inner transformation has been an enduring motif in Western culture. The theme of transformation via journeying can be found in western literature spanning from Homer to the New Testament and Saint Augustine, from Cervantes to Goethe and in the modern writings of Conrad, Kafka, Hesse and Kerouac, to name a few.

In short, stories of journeys, at once literal and metaphorical, abound and may be linked to the human propensity for narrative more generally (Bruner 2002; Polkinghorne 1988; Ricœur 1984).

While the basic 'pilgrimage model', denoted by a spatio-temporal sequencing in which the hero or protagonist ventures into a previously unknown world, faces a series of trials and tribulations before returning home transformed, has in many ways remained in place, changing cultural conditions have given way to updated forms of pilgrimage-like travel, such as the early modern European 'Grand tour', the exploration of uncharted, 'exotic' lands, romantic flights from civilization and eventually modern tourism (Adler 1989a, 1989b; Badone and Roseman 2004; Clifford 1997; Cohen 1979; Crick 1989; Graburn 1983, 2001; Nash 1996; Rinschede 1992; Smith 1992). While the hero Odysseus was largely in the hands of the gods on his epic, twenty year voyage, over time the individual wayfarer came to have greater agency and different relations to the causal forces at work on the journey (Arnoldi 2009: 26-29). The status of individual agency, immanence and transcendence and relationships to causal forces will be important concerns in the present study of contemporary journeys to the Himalayan region.

The mythical origin of the hero quest, however, is by no means limited to the Western context and is found in many cultures worldwide. In the Chinese and East Asian context, a clear example can be seen in the popular folk story *Hsi-yu Chi*, or *Journey to the West* (Wu 2006). In one hundred mythopoeic episodes, the story chronicles the adventurous pilgrimage of the monk, Hsuan Tsang (602-664 ADE), who travels from the Tang dynasty capital, Chang-an, to India in order to retrieve Buddhist scriptures for the Emperor. The circumambulatory journey,

which took seventeen years and is historically documented as having taken place, went on to become a popular folk story, well known in China and throughout Asia. Infusing the fantastic with moral and religious allegory, *Journey to the West* was first transmitted orally and performed in theatrical form, later published by Wu Cheng-en during the Ming Dynasty (circa 1590 ADE). Narrated as an adventurous pilgrimage, *Journey to the West* blends elements of ancient Chinese mythology and cosmology with religious and philosophical themes, often counterpoising the three competing Chinese traditions – Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Like the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and other epics such as *Don Quixote*, beneath the comical and adventurous surface narrative of *Journey to the West* lies an allegorical meta-commentary on society, morality, religion and 'human nature' at a particular moment in Chinese history (Howard 2003). This thesis will similarly be concerned with reading contemporary journeys to the Himalayan region as meta-social commentaries on life in late modernity.

India too has a long tradition of pilgrimage that is bound up in early Hindu mythology, as well as indigenous traditions and later Buddhism. While wandering ascetics had been making non-institutionalized pilgrimages for centuries, a spiritual fervour caught India from the eleventh to firth centuries B.C.E. with the spread of the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. With the popularization of the *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas* (Hindu scriptures on myths), pilgrimage, or *tirtha yatra* became an inevitable ritual of Hindu living (Singh 2005: 219). Literally thousands of shrines and sacred sites from the *Mahabharata* crisscross the entire Indian sub-continent, creating what Bhardwaj (1973: 173) calls 'a pan-Indian holy space'. Pilgrimage continues to be a highly

significant socio-cultural practice in India which is rooted in early mythical thought.

Tales such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey Journey to the West*, the *Mahabharata* of India, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Goethe's *Faust* and other mythical stories chronicling the trials and tribulations of archetypical heroes on transformative journeys are often read as allegories expressing the morals, values and ideals of the cultures they emerge from (Campbell 1990, 1999, 2008). What is interesting is that trans-culturally and trans-historically, the fundamental structure and archetypal themes of the 'pilgrimage model' persist through time, being recycled and updated according to changing historical conditions. The popularity of *Journey to the West*, for instance, has endured for over a thousand years in China and beyond and can still be seen today in adapted media forms ranging from television series and films to comic books and novels, theatre productions and even video games.

The same can be seen in the consistent reworkings of Homer's *Odyssey*, which appear at a surprising rate in literature, theatre and film. Just a few notable examples include Joyce's *Ulysses*, Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, Charles Frazier's 1997 novel cum film, *Cold Mountain*; David Wallace's 1998 novel cum blockbuster

Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions; the 1997 American television series 'The Odyssey'; Jean Luc Godard's 1963 film 'Le Mépris'; the Coen brothers' 2000 film 'Oh brother where art though', Zachary Mason's 2007 collection of short stories, *The Lost Books of the Odyssey* and Costa-Gravas' 2009 film, 'Eden is West'. A similar example can be seen in the case of Wagner's Ring cycle, itself adapted from ancient Nordic

mythology and most recently recycled into the immensely popular film trilogy, 'Lord of the Rings', followed by the Hobbit trilogy (all being adaptations of J.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* novels and *The Hobbit*). The Himalayan region is also a place with a long history of mythical associations, which are expressed in the early writings of wandering ascetics and mystics, and later in literature and films. The mythical representations reproduced in these media exert a power in the imagination which continues to inspire certain people to make their own Himalayan sojournes. The compelling substance of these various journey myths that keep them recycled in cultural currency is not only their narrative ability to transport readers, listeners or viewers into their adventurous plots, but their emphasis on the possibility of transformation and finding deeper meanings. Since many cultures and languages use the concepts of travel and movement as metaphors for describing an individual's life, the passing of time and explorations or searches for higher ideals and spiritual meaning, journey myths appear to resonate with human concerns for transcendence, existential meaning and self-understanding (Mikkonen 2007).

Mythical thought, as Lévi-Strauss (1979: 45) observes, does not vanish or disappear, but merely passes into the background of modern consciousness. For Lévi-Strauss and other scholars of mythology, such as Frazer, Müller, Durkheim, Freud, Jung, Barthes, Campbell and Eliade, mythology continues to exert strong, if subliminal influences on cultures even in the modern age (Baeten 1996; Campbell 1990, 1999, 2008; Csapo 2005; Eliade 1954, 1957, 1998; Lévi-Strauss 1970). It appears that myths based on transformative journeys were instrumental in establishing the 'pilgrimage model' and this influence persists in

contemporary pilgrimage, including more secular forms, as well as tourism, as this thesis will demonstrate.

The discussion here thus goes beyond notions of pilgrimage as a purely institutionally sanctioned religious practice. I consider pilgrimage as an outward expression of deeper, more fundamental human needs and desires for existential meaning, transformation and actualizing potentialities. While the search for higher meanings may reflect a 'religious instinct', it need not be limited to institutionalized religions. The present study thus not only goes beyond considerations of pilgrimage as a strictly institutionalized religious practice, but also to critically engages with the charge that tourism is necessarily a meaningless, superficial activity of alienated moderns (Boorstin 1964; Dann 1977; MacCannell 1976; Urry 2002b). Following Graburn (1983, 2001, 2007) and building on the work of Victor and Edith Turner (1969, 1973; V. Turner and Turner 1978; 1982), I consider modern tourism as a ritualized practice with important linkages not only to religious pilgrimage, but to mythological thinking that precedes organised religion. Despite debates over the sacred versus secular orientations of pilgrimage and tourism, much recent scholarship subscribes to the notion that modern tourism evolved out of pre-modern pilgrimage and there are significant overlapping features between the two (Coleman 2002; Devereux and Carnegie 2006; Digance 2003; Ediger 2005; Graburn 1983, 2001; Morinis 1992b; Nash 1996, 2004; Nolan and Nolan 1992; Pfaffenberger 1983; Reader and Walter 1993; Reader 2007; Rinschede 1992; Smith 1992; Swatos and Tomasi 2002; Swatos 2006; Tomasi 2002; Vukonic 1996).

What is pilgrimage? Who is a pilgrim?

Perhaps the first to address the hazy sacred-secular overlap of pilgrimage and tourism were Victor and Edith Turner (1978: 20), who famously noted, 'a pilgrim is half a tourist, if a tourist is half a pilgrim'. Before considering the groundwork laid for future pilgrimage and tourism studies by these anthropologists, it is important to consider the origins and various definitions of the term pilgrimage. While the primary definition of pilgrimage, according to the OED reads: 'A journey (usually of a long distance) made to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion', a secondary definition reads, 'a journey undertaken to a place of particular significance or interest, especially as an act of homage, respect, etc.' A third definition describes pilgrimage as 'a journey; a period of travelling or wandering from place to place; (in early use) a period of exile, a foreign sojourn'. From these three definitions we can see that the term 'pilgrimage' may encompass a wide range of travel and in the past was not limited to purely religious contexts. Etymologically, we should also note that 'pilgrimage' derives from the Latin *peregrinari*, which translates simply as 'to travel or sojourn abroad' or 'to go from place to place'. It appears that it wasn't until the Middle Ages that 'pilgrimage' came to acquire a strictly religious connotation in the Anglo-Norman Middle English, becoming strongly associated with the Christian crusades to recover Jerusalem (OED). Cross-cultural conceptions of pilgrimage also help us recognize the specific nature of Western definitions.

In India, pilgrimage is known as *tirtha yatra*, with *yatra* referring literally to the act of travelling, and *tirtha* being an ancient Sanskrit verb for crossing of a river ford. As Coleman and Elsner (1995: 138) explain,

tirtha yatra encompasses 'the idea of crossing over – the possibility of moving between human and divine realms, or at least mediating between them…'. Bhardwaj (1973: 2) notes that *tirtha yatra* is best understood in a metaphorical sense and does not necessarily refer to a physical journey to a holy place, but implies 'mental and moral discipline' connected to the basic underpinnings of Hindu philosophy. Thus a *yogi* or lay devotee may remain in seated meditation, while making an inner pilgrimage to sacred shrines across India. Morinis (1992b: 7) usefully points out that we are thus 'justified in including non-geographic sacred journeys in the territory of the anthropology of pilgrimage, largely because most cultures make this inclusion'. After surveying the important theories of Victor and Edith Turner, followed by Eliade, the discussion will move to more recent and refined definitions and conceptions of pilgrimage which acknowledge not only more secular forms, but also grapple with the overlapping with tourism and entanglements with global mobilities more generally.

Pilgrimage as ritual process: the groundwork of the Turners

Most academic discussions of pilgrimage almost invariably begin with the ground-breaking work of Victor and Edith Turner. Prior to Victor Turner's seminal article, 'The Centre out There' (1973) and the following book, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (V. Turner and Turner 1978), co-authored with wife, Edith Turner, pilgrimage as a 'marginal practice' had been left all but untouched by the social sciences. Taking definitions from the OED, the Jewish Encyclopaedia and the Encyclopaedia of Islam as his reference point, Turner does not offer his own precise definition of pilgrimage. Rather, he appears to

take the standard definition that a pilgrim is '[o]ne who journeys to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion' (OED, cited by Turner 1973: 197) at face value and almost exclusively deals with Christian notions of pilgrimage. Rather than offer a precise definition, Turner (1973; 1992: 29-47) and Turner and Turner (1978) instead focus on describing the symbolic and functional characteristics of pilgrimage, which is understood as a ritual process *par excellence*.

Turner sees the pilgrimage process as analogous to van Gennep's (1909) formulation of the *rite de passage*, emphasizing how the 'anti-structural' and *liminal* states characterizing both rituals led participants to states of *communitas* with fellow members. Communitas as a heightened sense of oneness and non-duality experienced by pilgrims or initiates is, according to Turner (1973: 218), marked by a temporary idealised state in which 'solitude and society cease to be antithetical'. Building on van Gennep's (1909) structural analysis of *rites de pasSage*, Victor Turner (1969; 1973; 1982) probed and expanded the social significance of liminal positions. The Latin root of liminality – *līmen* – refers to a threshold or pasSageway, a state of being between two different existential planes. In this it is similar to the Sanskrit notion of *tirtha*, or the crossing of a river ford into a new territory or plane of being. Turner (1982) describes liminality as an ambiguous, often ahistorical condition that exists outside of usual social structures. The liminal experience is characterized by individuals or entities being 'neither here nor there' but 'betwixt and between' their normal, assigned social positions (1969: 95). Such a precarious mode of being makes them vulnerable and 'in a sense, dead to the world', while in turn liberating them from structural obligations (1982; 1992: 49).

For Turner, liminality and anti-structural positions are the necessary conditions for rites of pasSage and pilgrimages to have transformative effects on individuals, who once the ritual cycle is complete, (ideally) return to society re-bonded to the group and often at a new life-stage. According to Turner, the liminal experience facilitated by such rites of pasSage, from Ndembu circumcision to religious pilgrimage, works by temporarily liberating the individual from the profane obligations and constraints of everyday life (e.g. work, family), as well as lessening the sting of structural divisions between social classes (1973: 213-22). Removed from socially structured time, pilgrims and initiates are said to enter ahistorical time, a sacred, timeless time associated with the gods, creation and eternity. During these times away, rituals aimed at communing with the divine, bonding with cohorts and transcending the self are carried out. While such ritual behaviour typically expresses religious or mythical thought, for Turner such rites serve a symbolic social function. As Turner (1973: 221) explains:

> …since one aspect of oneself consists of the cherished values of one's own specific culture, it is not unnatural that the new 'formation' desired by the pilgrims should include a more intense realization of the inner meaning of that culture. For many that inner meaning is identical with its religious core values.

This view echoes Durkheim's (whom Turner was openly influenced by) functionalist and secular understanding of religion as a system in which the sacred is an embodiment, or collective representation of societal ideals. Turner (1973: 191-201) and Turner and Turner (1978: 131) illustrate this Durkheimian understanding by asserting that as

33

performative components of religious systems, pilgrimages have historically served the functional purpose of maintaining social order and group solidarity. Referring to the work of Wolf (1958: 34), Turner (1973: 208) for instance discusses the role the Virgin de Guadalupe plays in Mexico, where the national patron saint allegedly functions as a 'master totemic symbol' and serves as 'a collective representation of the history, culture, values and ideals of Mexico itself'. The Turners (1978: 95) observe the socially unifying function by the fact that 'every diocese in Mexico has an allocated day of pilgrimage in the annual schedule, as do hundreds of individual parishes from all over Mexico'.

While Turner is professedly Durkheimian in that he regards social facts as 'things', he attempts to go beyond Durkheimian functionalism to take into account the subjective explanations and interpretations of pilgrims themselves. The thoughts and feelings of pilgrims, as well as those of the participant observer, for Turner (1973: 205), constitute merely a further set of social facts. In this sense, Turner's thinking goes beyond Durkheimian positivism in recognizing how by its own situatedness in culture and history, social scientific research is inherently subject to the values, biases and presuppositions of individual researchers. While Turner's approach is largely functionalist, he is careful not to discount the 'real' possibility that the ritual act of pilgrimage may lead individuals to states of communion with divine forces or beings. However, like Durkheim's work on totemic religions in aboriginal Australia, the Turners' analysis of pilgrimage is largely theoretical and based mainly on historical and secondary sources, as opposed to ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with actual pilgrims (with the exception of fieldwork on the Guadalupe pilgrimage in

Mexico). Moreover, the Turners' work on pilgrimage is generally focused on Christian pilgrimage or comparisons with rites of pasSage. In the less functionalist aspect of his work, Turner draws heavily upon his then University of Chicago colleague, Mircea Eliade, who had previously discussed pilgrimage as a quest for an *axis mundi*, a mythic, spiritual centre of a given cultural world (Eliade 1957, 1963, 1984).

Nostalgia for paradise: Eliade on the quest for axis mundi

Building extensively on Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and the profane, Eliade posited that a pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred centre, or *axis mundi*, where humans can 'recover the active presence of the gods' (Eliade 1957: 92). While his explicit discussion of pilgrimage was limited, his notion of the *axis mundi* fits into his general theory which proposes that as a being fallen from grace, humans have a subconscious 'nostalgia for paradise', 'a longing for transcendent forms' (Eliade 1963: 385) and 'a desire to live in the divine presence and in a perfect world (perfect because newly born)' (Eliade 1957: 92). Such nostalgia, according to Eliade, reflects the human 'desire to be always, effortlessly, at the heart of the world, of reality, of the sacred and to transcend by natural means, the human condition and regain a divine state of affairs (1963: 385).

In Eliade's view, *homo religious* is predisposed towards seeking communion with the sacred, which is always at once primordial and eternal. Due to an inbuilt 'religious instinct' and an alleged 'nostalgia for paradise', mundane social life ultimately proves unfulfilling. For Eliade, this accounts for *homo religious'* yearnings and searching for *illud*

tempus, an ideal eternal present that provides a transcendent meaning to life. As we can see, temporality is central to Eliade's phenomenological-theological understanding of religion. Echoing Husserl (1999, 2012) and Heidegger (1996) who view time consciousness as the most important of all phenomenological problems, Eliade (1957: 71) writes, 'time constitutes man's deepest existential dimension'. It is the distinction between sacred and profane time, however, which interests Eliade:

> …religious man lives in two kinds of time, of which the more important, sacred time, appears under the paradoxical aspect of circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present that is periodically reintegrated by means of rites. This attitude in regard to time suffices to distinguish religious from nonreligious man; the former refuses to live solely in what, in modern terms, is called the historical present; he attempts to regain a sacred time that, from one point of view, can be homologized to eternity (1957: 70).

For Eliade, it is *homo religious'* 'nostalgia for paradise' and the desire to live *in illo tempore* – an eternal mythical present – that underlies a journey to an *axis mundi*. As opposed to profane experience, 'the mythical experience of primitives is equivalent to *a journey back to the origins,* a regression into the mythical time of Paradise lost' (Eliade and Frye 1968: 64). According to Eliade (1963: 373) it is only in a consecrated 'centre' that 'there exists the possibility of breaking through from the level of the earth to the level of heaven'. Drawing on Eliade and Durkheim, Turner (1973) observes how the sacred centre is typically far removed from the surrounding profane social space.

Connected to its typically remote location, a pilgrimage to a sacred centre is said to be 'arduous and fraught with peril because it is, in fact, a rite for passing from the profane to the sacred, from the passing from the illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to God' (Eliade 1963: 382). Moreover, Eliade (1963: 373) makes the distinction that a 'sacred place is never "chosen" by man; it is merely discovered by him'. This statement thus makes the *apriori* assumption that a pilgrimage site has an innate sacred quality, or what Preston (1992) calls 'spiritual magnetism'. Such 'magnetism' suggests that external forces or transcendental powers draw pilgrims to sacred sites, as opposed to it being forces of social reproduction.

Despite the rigor and immense scope of Eliade's grand theories regarding the sacred and the profane, humankind's 'nostalgia for paradise' and his notion of 'the myth of eternal reoccurrence' present a range of ontological and epistemological problems which are vulnerable to many-sided critique, not least of all concerning their empirical verifiability. Moreover, his claim that humans have an innate desire to 'abolish time' and 'escape the terror of history' is said to represent the often romantic and theistic strain of his thought (Olson 1992: 150-51). Eade and Sallnow (1991: 9) point out that for Eliade, the sacredness of the centre is 'taken *sui generis*, internally generated, its meanings are largely predetermined'. In the introduction to their edited volume, *Contesting the Sacred* (1991), the authors emphasize the multiplicity of meanings and perceptions that pilgrims bring to a sacred site. Writing in the peak of postmodern theory, their aim was to deconstruct the notion of any singularly understood and experienced sacred site and sacred time. Such deconstructive critique continues to

run through most recent pilgrimage studies, which have shifted from the universalizing theories of Eliade and Turner to more critical, interpretive approaches that take into account the multiplicity of motivations and the subjectively experienced and constructed meanings of pilgrimages (Badone and Roseman 2004; Belhassen et al. 2008; Brayley 1999; Campo 1998; Coleman 2002; Coleman and Elsner 2003; Coleman and Eade 2004; Collins-Kreiner and Kliot 2000; Collins-Kreiner 2010a; Devereux and Carnegie 2006; Mustonen 2006; Narayanan and Macbeth 2009; Olsen and Timothy 2006).

For Eliade, people travel to sacred centres in order to transcend their temporally bound, finite human condition in order to re-actualize 'primordial mythical time', or an ahistorical, eternal present. As subsequent research demonstrates, however, a single, unified theory of why people make pilgrimages is untenable (Behera 1995; Campo 1998; E. Cohen 1992b; Coleman and Eade 2004; Digance 2003; Eade and Sallnow 1991; Olsen and Timothy 2006; Pfaffenberger 1983; Reader and Walter 1993; Reader 2007). Behera (1995: 61) points out that 'Eliade's grandiose claims are too broad to encompass the more functionalist motives of certain pilgrims'. Empirical research, for example, suggest that journeys to various pilgrimage centres around the world often exhibit market ideologies based on symbolic exchange between the devotees and various divinities (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 24). Based on fieldwork in Thailand and India, both Cohen (1992b) and Morinis (1992b) point out that at many 'popular' pilgrimage centres, pilgrims often have practical, 'worldly' motives, rather than purely transcendental ones. These may include anything from asking for good fortune in business or romance to asking for one's hair not to fall out

(Morinis 1992: 19-20). Thus, it is erroneous to assume that all pilgrims have the more existential, transcendental motives put forth by Eliade. Due to the variation found in pilgrimage, Behera (1995: 61) rightly notes that 'not one single theoretical perspective will do justice to this diverse socio-cultural phenomenon'.

The centre out there theory

For Eliade and Turner, a pilgrimage is a religiously motivated journey to the spiritual centre of a cultural world. A sacred centre, according to Turner (1973: 241), is typically peripheral to population centres, being 'located beyond a stretch of wilderness or some other uninhabited territory... in the "chaos" surrounding the ordered "cosmicised" social world'. Pilgrimage centres in part maintain their sacred quality by virtue of remaining separate from the profane, workaday world of the village, town or city. Under the Durkheimian logic employed by both Turner and Eliade, a sacred centre serves as a totemic symbol that collectively represents certain unifying values over the more divisive values of everyday life (Cohen 1992b: 34).

A pioneer in the anthropology of tourism and pilgrimage, Erik Cohen (1992b) elaborates on the theoretical significance of the typical 'remoteness' of pilgrimage centres, pointing out that their peripherality removes them from the power structures and class distinctions found in the *polis*. In other words, the sacred centre is said to represent anti-structure and equality, where the playing field is levelled and regardless of social class or status, everyone simply becomes 'a pilgrim'. This social levelling, along with the distance from the profane concerns of everyday life purportedly allows pilgrims to undergo spiritual

transformations as they turn their attention away from mundane concerns and towards the divine. Possibilities for such transformations are not only afforded by the distant geographic location of sacred centres, but also by pilgrims' altered perception of time during liminal, anti-structural periods. Despite Turner's strong emphasis that pilgrimage centres are always located 'out there', Cohen (1992b: 36) argues that '(a) comparative theory of pilgrimage must acknowledge the existence of different types of pilgrimage centres *within* the same religion or society'. Based on fieldwork in Thailand, Cohen demonstrates that pilgrimage centres may sometimes be located within capital cities such as Bangkok or other populated areas. This is especially so in places where religion and politics are highly intertwined, such as the traditional monarchies found in south and south-east Asia, and historically in capitals such as Rome, Kyoto, Chang-an and Jerusalem.

Revising understandings of pilgrimage

Although devotional pilgrimage is still widely practiced around the world and in record numbers due to increased mobilities infrastructure, forms of secular pilgrimage have proliferated in late modernity and can be traced at least as far back as the post-renaissance 'Grand Tour' of Europe. Disputes over precise definitions of pilgrimage coincide with the longstanding problem of offering precise, global definitions of highly contested terms such as 'sacred', 'ritual' 'spirituality' and 'religion'. For this reason, anthropologists Coleman and Eade (2004: 18) advocate referring to pilgrimage not as a single entity, but as diverse processes that sacralise movement. Their use of the verb 'sacralise' over the noun 'sacred' emphasizes the 'often partial, performative and

contested' character of religious or spiritual journeys. As will be seen in later chapters, however, pilgrimage and tourist mobilities entail multiple phases, with some phases being more 'sacralised' or endowed with special meaning than others.

The view of pilgrimage as a diverse and contested practice fits with certain scholars who argue that the phenomenological study of religion and spirituality can and should extend beyond devotional religious practices (Bellah 1970; Bender 2003; Berger 1967; Digance 2003; Heelas 1998; Luckmann 1967; Olsen and Timothy 2006). Under this purview, what counts as 'sacred' is understood to be in the eye of the beholder. In the *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James (2008: 31) encourages understanding religion as 'the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine'. Research informed by a more experience-based view of religion and spirituality suggests that contemporary pilgrimage need not be limited to institutionalized religions. With Turnbull (1992: 273) we can ask, '(i)s a journey to a place called Lourdes or Mecca or Jerusalem or Gang tori or Bodh Gaya any more sacred than a journey to the forest, and is participation in formal divine worship any more sacred than dancing with the moon?'

Finding agreement with this perspective, I utilize Morinis'(1992b: 4) more phenomenological, subject-centred definition of pilgrimage as 'a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal'. For the devout religious pilgrim, a 'valued ideal' may be a shrine, a holy mountain or river with particular significance to their religious system. On the other hand,

Morinis (1992: 4) points out that 'one who journeys to a place of importance to himself alone may also be a pilgrim', and that 'some sacred journeys are wanderings that have no fixed goal'. This conception of pilgrimage is more appropriate for encapsulating the diverse forms of meaning-centred journeys which need not be limited to institutionalized religion.

The blurring boundaries of pilgrimage and tourism in late modernity

A pilgrimage today may thus be to a museum or historical monument, one's ancestral homeland (real or imagined) or the home of a revered author or celebrity (Bell 2002; Campo 1998). World-heritage sites and so-called 'power places', designated by perceived scenic beauty, cultural significance and 'spiritual magnetism' such as Machu Picchu, Delphi or the Himalayas have also become global pilgrimage sites in late modernity (Arellano 2004, 2007; Campo 1998; Olsen and Timothy 2006; Preston 1992; Reader 2007; Singh 2004, 2005). Tomasi (2002: 20) observes that while over time 'the form of pilgrimage may have changed, its meaning is still the same as it was in the past … the typically human desire to seek out the sacred, though what symbolizes or articulates "the sacred" today may be different from the past, even at the same site'. Moreover, as tourism continues to grow exponentially the lines dividing pilgrimage and tourism continue to become ever-more blurred (Badone and Roseman 2004).

Contemporary research demonstrates that pilgrimage and travel for spiritual purposes has grown in popularity worldwide (Belhassen et al. 2008; Coleman and Eade 2004; Fox 2008; Raj and Morpeth 2007; Reader

2007; Rountree 2005; P. Russell 1999; Swatos 2006). Religious sites, both ancient and those more recently constructed or appropriated, have been seeing rising numbers by domestic and foreign visitors. As research shows, visitors often have multiple motives for making their trips and their behaviours may span the touristic and pilgrim spectrum (consciously or unconsciously) (Pfaffenberger 1983; Smith 1992). Such religious sites and pilgrimage routes receiving increasing numbers of visitors each year include Santiago de Compostela, the eight-eight temple pilgrimage of Shikoku, Japan, Lourdes, Fatima, Jerusalem, Mecca, Bodh Gaya and the river Ganges, among others (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot 2000; Eade 1992; Frey 1998; Gooch 2009; Reader and Walter 1993; Reader 2005; Shapiro 2008; Singh 2005; Slavin 2003).

Sites associated with cultural and national heritage are also seeing rising visitor numbers, many of whom approach these sites in a manner resembling that of a pilgrimage. Such sites range from Stonehenge to Elvis' home in Graceland, the Vietnam War Memorial to Ground Zero, Lenin's tomb and Nelson Mandela's former prison on Robbins Island, South Africa (Campo 1998; Collins-Kreiner 2010a; Davern 2006; Digance 2003; Reader 2007; Shackley 2001). Research also demonstrates that pilgrimage is not always place-bound and may take the form of wandering, peregrinating to a certain living person or even travelling to and participating in a temporary event, such as a Star Trek convention or the Burning Man Festival in the Nevada desert (Morinis 1992: 12-15; Porter 2004). Voluntourism, an increasingly popular form of 'altruistically' inspired tourism, has also been recognized as a form of 'postmodern pilgrimage' (Mustonen 2006).

The intersections of pilgrim and tourism are not limited to recent times alone, however, as pilgrimage has always been a multi-dimensional socio-cultural practice (Digance 2003; Eade 1992; Graburn 2001; Morinis 1992; Smith 1992; Turner and Turner 1978). As Olsen and Timothy (2006: 6) observe, probably the longest-standing theoretical problem in the academic study of pilgrimage has had to do with the often blurred lines distinguishing pilgrims from tourists. Referencing Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Victor and Edith Turner (1978: 20) noted that a typical feature of pilgrimage is the mixing of pleasure and pain. In Chaucer's story, pilgrims are found consuming alcohol and buying prostitutes at the inns they stayed in as they made their way to sacred sites. In another early ethnographic study entitled, 'Serious pilgrims and frivolous tourists', Pfaffenburger (1983) describes how pilgrims in Sri Lanka would often engage in the ludic activities of tourists, while tourists would frequently assume the role of a pilgrim when visiting a temple. Other cases of such tourism-pilgrimage blending was also found in the case of North American Christian Zionists visiting Israel (Shapiro 2008), as well as the goddess pilgrims (also largely from North America) who travel to certain sacred sites in the Mediterranean for neo-pagan spiritual pursuits and to enjoy a holiday (Bittarello 2006; Rountree 2002, 2005).

Tourists and Pilgrims: classificatory schemes and categorical confusion

Despite previous efforts to create neat typologies that bracket off pilgrims from tourists, it is generally recognized that tourist or pilgrim identification lies in the inner motives and subjective interpretations (phenomena not readily perceived by the outside observer) of the

travellers themselves. Behera (1995: 44) puts it simply: 'a person is on a pilgrimage when he consciously sees himself to be so'. Due to the methodological challenges posed by subjective interpretations, exacerbated by the cultural *bricolage* epitomizing the global era, Olsen (2010) advocates avoiding rigid definitions for pilgrims and tourists based on 'ideal-types'. He points out that the definitions frequently employed by many scholars and theologians are 'superimposed on reality, with travellers being grouped into pre-determined categories dependent on *a priori* criteria'. He also claims that comparing pilgrims and tourists is a fruitless exercise because the meaning of "pilgrim" and the medieval context of pilgrimage has changed over time and therefore is 'not a valid comparative partner with the modern tourist' (Olsen 2010: 849).

Previously, both Cohen (1992a) and Smith (1992) proposed placing pilgrims and tourists on continuums based on a spectrum of motivations and behaviours. Rather than assuming tourists are a homogenous breed, in his seminal article, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences', Cohen (1979) recognizes five 'tourist types' based on five general modes of tourist motivations and behaviours: *recreationary*, *diversionary*, *experiential*, *experimental* and *existential* tourists. As a quest to an 'elective spiritual centre', the existential tourist mode, according to Cohen (1979: 77-80) is 'phenomenologically analogous to a pilgrimage'. An important distinction between the two, however, lies in the fact that for the existential tourist, the spiritual centre journeyed to is not one of her culture of origin, but to an 'elective centre' that is chosen or converted to (ibid 78). Examples of such cases which demonstrate the existential tourism-pilgrimage phenomenon includes ashram tourism in

India (Sharpley and Sundaram 2005) and 'voluntourism' (Mustonen 2006), kibbutz tourism in Israel (Cohen 1979), 'spiritual tourism' in India and Spain (Norman 2011) and certain forms of eco, nature-based and adventure tourism (Davidson and Stebbins 2011).

Cohen's (1979) typology is similar to Smith's (1992: 4) pilgrimage-tourism continuum. Despite 'sacred pilgrimage' being placed on one end and 'secular tourism' on the other, with 'knowledge-based religious tourism' in the middle, Smith points out that such 'designations are by no means immutable'. Smith thus takes into account that tourists and pilgrims often have 'multiple motives' and may switch roles (consciously or unconsciously) in the course of their journeys. The heuristic schemes proposed by Cohen and Smith are useful so long as they are kept flexible and allow room for movement, as pilgrims and tourists often shift roles numerous times within a single journey (Badone and Roseman 2004; Belhassen et al. 2008; Bittarello 2006; Bleie 2003; Cohen 1992a; Collins-Kreiner and Kliot 2000; Digance 2003; Morinis 1983; Nolan and Nolan 1992; Pfaffenberger 1983; Turner and Turner 1978). Based on the literature and confirmed by the analysis of Himalayan travel presented in this thesis, with Olsen (2010), I advocate that researchers should avoid imposing rigid, 'ideal-type' definitions on so-called 'tourists' and 'pilgrims'.

Given the ambiguity of these terms, an ambiguity I observed and grappled with first-hand during fieldwork in Nepal and India, I decided to refer to the participants simply as 'travellers'. This choice was also made not least of all because this is typically what they called themselves, if they called themselves anything at all. Precise terminology, as this thesis will demonstrate, is highly problematic in a

late modern milieu where the lines dividing work and leisure, pilgrimage and tourism, here and there are ever blurred (Rojek 2010) Although definitions of pilgrimage and tourism are important, here I am less concerned with precise labels and neat categories, than with exploring the experiences, practices, meanings and self-interpretations of contemporary Himalayan pilgrim-tourist-travellers in all their ambiguity and seeming contradictions. The problem of paradoxes and contradictions in fact may not be with the actors themselves, but with the tendency of social science to impose rigid classifications on what was fluid and interlaced from the start.

Researching pilgrimage and tourism in late modernity

Newer approaches to the study of pilgrimage call for greater engagement with the lived experiences and reflections of pilgrims themselves (Frey 1998; Mustonen 2006; Singh 2005; Slavin 2003). Turnbull (1992: 261) encourages anthropologists to sacrifice their overly rationalised, intellectual selves and participate as much as possible alongside the pilgrims they are studying, pointing out that '...we cannot fully understand either the outer or the inner journey in isolation'. Only in this truly 'participant observer' mode can anthropologists embody the ideal cosmopolitan philosophy which the discipline is founded upon. Turnbull (1992: 274) asserts, '...it is surely a gross intellectual arrogance to suppose that we can understand a phenomenon that others say directly relates to the existence of Spirit while we openly deny it'. This view echoes Morinis' (1992b: x) reflection that pilgrims and anthropologists share similarities in that they are both 'people of culture' and that ultimately 'an anthropological study of pilgrimage is a

conversation about life, suffering, and the pursuit of ideals and salvation'. Morini(1992: x) further explains:

> ...the study of pilgrimage is much more than the microscopic examination of a sample of humanity on the move. Pilgrimage is a paradigmatic and paradoxical human quest, both outward and inward, a movement toward ideals known but not achieved at home. As such, pilgrimage is an image for the search for fulfilment of all people, inhabiting an imperfect world.

Morinis' statement here reflects the Turners' (1978: 237) claim that pilgrimage, while previously overlooked by the social sciences for being a marginal or extra-ordinary practice, may be read as critique or 'meta-social commentary' on given historical epochs. Despite prior neglect, pilgrimage, along with tourism, has in the past several decades become legitimate and important areas of enquiry with amassing academic literatures. Much of this increased interest stems from the recognizable fact that pilgrimage, and pilgrimage-like tourism, has grown in popularity in many parts of the world (Badone and Roseman 2004; Bleie 2003; Coleman and Eade 2004; Collins-Kreiner and Kliot 2000; Collins-Kreiner 2010b, 2010a; Raj and Morpeth 2007; Reader 2007: 211). This has taken place in conjunction with tourism becoming the world's largest industry in the past two decades, accounting for eleven percent of the world's economy (WTO, 2010). Amidst the unprecedented growth of the tourism industry, along with renewed interest in cultural heritage and the wealth of information and services made available by information technologies, in many contexts the lines dividing pilgrimage and tourism have become increasingly blurred.

While it has long been recognized that pilgrimage and tourism are historically contingent, characteristic of today's journeys is the mixing of religious and spiritual traditions with leisure activities on an increasingly global stage.

Connected to globalisation processes, Coleman (2001: 11447) points out that studies of 'sacralised forms of travel' complement other areas of social enquiry, including 'how social, cultural, and political units are being transformed by developments in technologies of mass travel and communication'. For instance, transnational diasporic communities – displaced from their 'traditional homelands' – increasingly travel back 'home' in manners akin to pilgrimage (Coleman 2001: 11447). This can be seen in recent immigrant groups – such as those displaced by violent conflicts or poverty, or by certain groups such as African Americans who set out in search of their 'heritage' or 'roots' in the 'motherland'. On the other hand, this pursuit need not necessarily be tied to ethnic identity, as certain people may travel to Africa on pilgrimage-like journeys to explore the 'roots of humanity', or the cradle of civilization as a whole. For instance, several years ago my father, a former physical anthropologist with a passion for primate evolution, fulfilled a lifetime dream of climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro and going on safari in East Africa. My father's African journey, made with an old biologist friend, took on the quality of a pilgrimage and also reflected Cohen's notion of 'existential tourism'. The difference from a traditional, mono-culturally-bound pilgrim, for Cohen, lies in the fact that for the existential tourist, the centre is not necessarily the centre of his own culture of origin; but an 'elective centre which is freely chosen and converted to' (1979: 77). Such a centre, which need not be strictly a geographic location, may

represent an 'embodied ideal', thus fitting with Morinis' (1992b: 4) phenomenological definition of pilgrimage, or Digance's (2006) insistence that a pilgrimage is any journey that is 'redolent with meaning'. For some, like my father, such an ideal may be embodied in the landscapes, wildlife and evolutionary significance of Africa. For surfers, that ideal may be found in perfectly formed waves breaking off tropical islands. Another example is the neo-pagan goddess pilgrims, comprised largely of North American women, who make pilgrimages to Malta and other 'elective spiritual centres' in the Mediterranean associated with the 'feminine divine' (Bittarello 2006; Rountree 2002, 2005). And for others, the Himalayan region, with its 'wild nature', spiritual allure and geographic and symbolic remoteness, represents yet another example of a place for late modern pilgrimage-existential tourism.

The turn to mobilities in pilgrimage and tourism studies

A further revision of earlier, largely place-centred approaches to pilgrimage studies has been a shift towards the various forms of motion that constitute pilgrimage, or to more phenomenological descriptions of the journey itself. In their volume, *Reframing Pilgrimage*, Coleman and Eade (2004: 16-17) observe how movement can be understood variously – though not mutually exclusively – as a 'performative' or 'embodied action', in relation to culturally specific 'semantic fields' or as 'metaphor'. This shift towards a focus on movement in pilgrimage studies coincides more generally with the 'mobilities paradigm' that has burgeoned in the social sciences in the new millennium. Emerging on the heels of globalisation studies which dominated the late 1980s

and 1990s, mobilities researchers typically advocate that the social sciences must rethink the social world by putting movement, flows, networks, assemblages and processes at the centre of social analysis (Appadurai 1996, 2003; Bauman 1998, 2000; Beck and Willms 2004; Beck 2006; Büscher and Urry 2009; Castells 1997; Clifford 1997; Cresswell 2006; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Hannam et al. 2006; Inda and Rosaldo 2008; Kearney 2004; Urry 2000, 2001, 2002a, 2007). Aiming to reorient the largely place-bound, static and ahistorical approaches of twentieth century social science, the mobilities paradigm aims to capture the spatio-temporal fluxes and flows which constitute contemporary life (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Fabian 2002; Urry 2007). In the inaugural issue of the journal *Mobilities*, editors Urry, Sheller and Hannam (2006: 1) explain how the concept of mobilities 'encompasses both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life'. Increasingly popular and global in scope, pilgrimage and tourism both reflect the physical movement of people in places, coinciding with increasing cultural *bricolage* and networks of intersecting institutions (e.g. nation-states, religious, tourism, transportation and media industries) inherent in global mobility.

For such reasons, Ian Reader (2007: 216) cautions against necessarily viewing the rising numbers of pilgrims worldwide as evidence of rising levels of faith. The rising numbers of pilgrims are not clear evidence of a 'religious revival', but reveal a more complex situation. Reader notes that 'pilgrimage growth in the contemporary era is also contingent on

factors that have little to do with religion as an organised entity' (2007: 216). The most striking factor facilitating pilgrimage growth is increased opportunities for travel more generally. Whereas in the past pilgrimage was more difficult – more time was needed due to limitations in transportation options, the risk of illness or death was greater, there was less information available – in more recent times improvements in medical care, economic development, mass transport, information and communications systems and increases in leisure time allow for expanded pilgrimage opportunities. For instance, Reader describes how Japan's economic growth, pension system and increased life expectancy has led to an increase in pilgrim numbers, as well as a change in pilgrim demographics. Since the 1950s, pilgrims walking the eighty-eight temple pilgrimage of Shikoku demonstrate an increase in older and female pilgrims. In fact, in the new millennium, the majority of Shikoku pilgrims are over sixty years old and female. In India**,** an improved transport system and the development of a national education system have led to increased pilgrim numbers. As Reader (2007: 217) observes, however, Indian pilgrimage has become increasing touristic in character, coupled with mass media representations of pilgrimages as mass, national events associated with Hindu culture. Reader also notes how Mecca saw a rise from one hundred thousand pilgrims in the early 1950s to two and a half million pilgrims at present (with a quota put on countries according to their populations to ensure facilities can cope).

Tourism: sacred journey or pseudo-event?

I have argued that the archetypal model of pilgrimage has its roots in mythology and allegorical tales of journeys. In post-renaissance,

secularizing Europe, the Grand Tour came to replace religious pilgrimage for members of the aristocratic elite, who journeyed to the sites of 'high culture' in search of adventure and education, as well as distinction and cultural capital (Adler 1989a, 1989b; Bourdieu 1984a; Elsner and Rubiés 1999; Smith 1992). Structurally, however, the 'pilgrimage model' largely informed the manner in which these 'grand tourists' travelled. In other words, many of the ritualized aspects of pilgrimage, as originally theorized by Turner (1969, 1973), apply to the 'Grand tour' and later to tourism more generally (Graburn 1983).

In the academic literature on tourism, several authors have consistently argued that modern tourism in many respects functionally replaces religious pilgrimage in secular societies, but in fact plays much the same role (Graburn 1983, 2001; MacCannell 1976; Smith 1992). In the novel, *Paradise News*, David Lodge captures this idea in an exchange between the protagonist, Bernard – a theologian visiting Hawaii – and Roger Sheldrake, an anthropologist studying tourism, a character based on real-life anthropologist, Nelson Graburn.

> "I'm interested in religion myself," said Sheldrake obliquely. "The thesis of my book is that sightseeing is a substitute for religious ritual. The sightseeing tour as secular pilgrimage. Accumulation of grace by visiting the shrines of high culture. Souvenirs as relics. Guidebooks as devotional aids. You get the picture (Lodge 1991: 60-64).

Much like the fictitious Sheldrake, the real Nelson Graburn (1983: 11) sees how by taking 'structured breaks from ordinary life', tourism thus 'falls into that set of non-ordinary behaviours which also includes play, ritual, ceremony, communion, altered states of consciousness,

meditation, worship, pilgrimage and so on'. Graburn (2001: 42) advances that tourism is best understood as 'a *kind of ritual*, one in which the special occasions of leisure and travel stand in opposition to everyday life at home and work' (emphasis original). As a 'ritual inversion', much like pilgrimage, tourism allows for separation from normal, instrumental, everyday life, and entry 'into another kind of moral state in which mental, expressive and cultural needs come to the fore' (Graburn 1983: 11). At least structurally or sequentially, tourism follows the same basic patterns as pilgrimage and other rites of pasSage, including rites of preparation, liminality, potential *communitas* and eventually return or reaggregation processes. Like rites of pasSage, Graburn (2001: 46) argues 'the experience of being away on vacation (or going on pilgrimage) has important effects on the life of the traveller *outside* of the actual time spent travelling'. In other words, it is not only the actual journey which is significant, but also how it is understood and made meaningful within the broader life contexts.

Tourism as 're-creation' is underscored by Graburn (1983: 11), who claims that tourist vacations allow for the 'renewal of life, the recharging of run-down elements – so necessary for the maintenance of mental and bodily health which characterize a balanced life style'. Graburn's notion of 're-creation' here is similar to the environmental psychology concept of 'restoration', defined as 'the process of renewing or recovering physical, psychological and social capabilities that have become depleted in meeting ordinary adaptation demands' (Hartig & Staats, 2005 in Kler 2009: 117). In Graburn's eyes, tourists are not superficial hedonists who mindlessly partake in 'pseudo-events', nor

are they necessarily the 'golden hordes, the suntanned destroyers of culture', as Turner and Ash (1975) paint them.

On the contrary, for Graburn and others (see Smith 1992), modern tourists express a deep-seated cultural need to 're-create' and mark the pasSage of time by means of the ritual inversion. Although in modern societies, rituals marking significant pasSages of time and life-stages are less clear than in traditional societies, Graburn maintains that this need nonetheless persists in modern societies. Vacations, for Graburn, thus become 'the modern equivalent for secular societies to the annual and lifelong sequence of festivals and pilgrimages found in more traditional, God-fearing societies' (Graburn 2001: 43). Notwithstanding, Nash (1984: 504-05) critiques Graburn on the grounds that he idealizes the anti-structural, ritual inversion quality of tourism. He accuses Graburn of generalizing that such breaks from daily life at home are always 'necessary for the maintenance of mental and bodily health', while not backing up this claim with empirical evidence. Nash points out that such breaks may not be felt to the same degrees by everyone in a given society, and that the perceived need for and possibility of taking breaks, or ritual inversions via vacationing, will also vary across social classes.

Tourism as quest for authenticity

In his landmark work, *The Tourist* (1976), MacCannell shares Graburn's notion of tourism as ritual inversion evolving out of earlier religious pilgrimage, festivals, and the post-renaissance European Grand tour. For MacCannell (1976: 13), tourism is a 'modern ritual' in which 'alienated moderns' take structured breaks for the purpose of 'getting

away from it all' – 'it all' referring to the mundane, instrumental, workaday world from which tourists seek to temporarily escape from. Rather than passively seeking what Boorstin (1964: 77-117) denigrates as 'pseudo-events' (contrived, artificial, commoditized experiences), MacCannell argues that tourists actively seek 'authenticity'. Related to Eliade's and Turner's notion that pilgrimage centres are always 'out there', peripheral to the profane population centres, MacCannell claims that modern tourists are forced by the alienating forces of modernity to seek authenticity 'out there'. Paradoxically, due to the fact that tourism is a product of the very modern forces tourists are seeking to temporarily escape, rather than discovering the authentic, tourists often encounter what MacCannell calls 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell 1973; 1976: 57-76).

MacCannell describes 'sightseeing' as the modern ritual in which tourist attractions come to be venerated much like religious sites were in pre-modernity. 'Must see' tourist attractions become 'symbols of modern consciousness' through a process MacCannell (1976: 43-44) calls 'sight sacralisation'. Paradoxically, however, under modern capitalistic conditions this process has the effect of commodifying attractions, thus leading to 'staged authenticity' and an 'aura of superficiality'. For this reason, MacCannell explains how the term 'tourist' comes to represent false consciousness and is generally used as 'a derisive label for someone who seems content with his obviously inauthentic experience' (MacCannell 1976: 94). MacCannell describes how the educated middle-classes increasingly scour 'the world in search of new experiences' and seek authenticity 'out there'. While authenticity is central to MacCannell's work on tourism's connection to

modernity and his emphasis on the alienation marking late capitalist societies, the term carries varying interpretations and is not only epistemologically and ontologically problematic, but highly political (Lindholm 2008; Shepherd 2002; Steiner and Reisinger 2006; Vannini and Williams 2009; Wang 1999, 2000). The quest for and the politics of authenticity will be the subject of chapter five.

The alleged need of the educated middle-classes to 'scour the earth in search of new experiences' has a longer historical lineage than often thought. According to Graburn (1983: 18), such a need harkens back to the 'exploratory urges of the post-Renaissance Western world'. During this period, members the aristocratic classes in Europe set off on journeys to better understand the larger world and to bring parts of it home, the *telos* according to Graburn being 'to understand it and make it safe – in other words to "conquer" the Other, whether it be space, the wilderness, foreignness, the past, and so on, to order, categorize, and consume it, and often to show it off in museums (cf. Graburn, 1977, 1982, 1983, p. 18). The conquering mentality of the Grand tour plausibly informs the prototypical touristic desire to consume authentic historic sights, exotic peoples and adventurous experiences, all of which under a Bourdieuian lens become signs of distinction, cultural capital, and symbolic power (Bourdieu 1984). MacCannell's analysis of the touristic impulse to seek authenticity 'out there' reflects the (post)modern imperative to collect and consume culture more generally.

The tourist gaze and the will to consume

The consumptive aspects of tourism – especially the consumption of visual images – has been a dominant theme in tourism studies,

particularly since the influential publication of John Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), now in its third edition (Urry 2011b). Adapting 'the gaze' from Foucault's history of medical institutions, Urry refers to the modern touristic desire to 'seek to experience "in reality" the pleasurable dramas they have already experienced in their imagination' (Urry 2001: 13). While the tourist gaze is constructed through relationships of difference which vary across cultures and times, Urry claims that tourist gazing often results in disappointment. In post-Fordist societies based primarily on consumption of goods and services, the act of gazing upon once only imagined sites becomes anti-climactic and leads to the continual seeking and consuming of new images. Urry (1994: 176) cites advances in colour photography and information technologies as increasing the demand for travel to places free from urban sprawl, pollution, motorways and power stations. While this may be the case, the tourist gaze is not a purely modern phenomenon and may be traced back to what Scruton (2007: 28-43) terms the 'aesthetic gaze'. The 'aesthetic gaze', as developed during the late Renaissance, Enlightenment and Romantic periods placed a primacy on the visual. A key difference between the 'aesthetic' and 'tourist' gazes, however, is that the 'aesthetic gaze' was a product of 'high culture' and led to travel that was religious or spiritual in nature, while Urry's 'tourist gaze' reflects an essentially middle-class, consumerist behaviour. The tourist gazing mode of travel leads to what Urry calls an 'ephemeralisation of experience' in which superficial experiences are essentially collected and consumed and 'like other aspects of life, such as material goods, can easily be disposed of (Urry, 1994: 177).

While the aristocratic Grand Tour of Europe signified wealth, status, erudition and cosmopolitan sensibilities (Adler 1989a), Baudrillard observes that in late modernity, the 'consumption imperative' reaches a stage in which consumption, including tourism, is no longer centred on mere pleasure, luxury, spiritual development or even a sign of distinction. Rather, consumption becomes a serious obligation:

> The typical late modern must see to it that all his potentialities, all his consumer capacities are mobilized. If he forgets to do so, he will be gently and insistently reminded that he has no right not to be happy. It is not, then, true that he is passive. He is engaged in – has to engage in – continual activity... Hence the revival of a universal curiosity...You have to try everything, for consumerist man is haunted by the fear of 'missing' something, some form of entertainment (Baudrillard, 1997 in A. A. Berger 2004: 16).

This relates to Rojek's (2010) observation that in late modernity, leisure and labour have become increasingly blurred. For critical, Marxist-leaning authors such as MacCannell, Urry and Baudrillard, tourists strive in vain for the 'authentic' experiences which they are paradoxically barred from in capitalist modernity. A capitalist mode of production is argued to turn everything, including travel experiences, into commodities to be bought and sold, disposed of and replaced. Raj and Morpeth (2007: 1) point out that an emerging 'experience economy' has implications for how an expanding symbolic economy has the capacity to change the expressions of religious tourism and pilgrimage. Tourism, typically represented by critical social scientists as a form of consumption *par excellence*, may functionally reinforce and exploit the inequalities of global capitalism (Bruner 1991; Cohen 1988; Crick 1989;

Franklin 2003; Greenwood 1989; Lim 2008; Richards 1998; Shepherd 2002; Turner and Ash 1975). As the world's largest industry, tourism in late modernity has become an undeniable social fact. In the academy, Crick (1989: 308-09) observes how the literature on tourism tends to oscillate between two extremes – 'tourism as a godsend and tourism as evil'. Regardless of where one stands, the undeniable fact is that tourism and global mobilities more generally are ever more embedded in the social fabric of life in late modernity. Tourism's central place in contemporary society leads Zygmunt Bauman to employ 'the tourist' as a metaphor for a specifically postmodern identity, characterized by what he calls 'the tourist syndrome'.

Tourists and Pilgrims as social metaphors

Both Bauman and Clifford argue that pilgrimage and tourism serve as useful metaphors for discussing modern life in general (Bauman 1996; Clifford 1988, 1997). Championing his notion of 'liquid modernity', Bauman critiques MacCannell (1976) and Urry (1990), whose theories he claims are outdated and apply more to a previous era of 'solid modernity', when production was still emphasized over consumption. Moreover, for these authors the notion of tourism is based on clear distinctions between home and away, the everyday and the holiday, the real and the fake and work versus leisure; divisions which no longer apply the way they once did (Bauman & Franklin 2003: 206). According to Bauman (1998, 2000), the pasSage from 'solid' to 'liquid' modernity signifies an era of unprecedented social fragmentation, increased mobility and disintegration of traditional social forms. This era, marked by risk, uncertainty and rapid change has tremendous implications for the individual, who may no longer fall back on the norms, structures

and institutions for the construction and maintenance of an integrated identity. In a 'run away' or 'liquid modern world' where 'we are all on the move', Bauman (1998) claims that metaphorically speaking, we are all becoming tourists:

> When speaking of the 'tourists' or 'tourism' as metaphors of contemporary life, I have in mind certain aspects of the tourist condition and/or experience – like being in a place temporarily and knowing it, not belonging to the place, not locked into the local life 'for better or worse'. That condition is shared with the modality of ordinary life, with the way we are all 'inserted' in the company of others everywhere – in places where we live or work; not only during the summer holidays, but seven days a week, all year round, year by year (2003: 207).

Bauman links the 'tourist syndrome' to broader sociocultural trends, characterized by a loosening of ties with place, consumerist or 'grazing mentality', 'frailty of relationships' and an ahistorical orientation in which life is lived 'in the moment'. 'The tourist', for Bauman comes to symbolize the general mentality of liquid modernity, which he contrasts with 'the pilgrim' of earlier times.

> When you juxtapose the 'tourist syndrome' with a 'pilgrim syndrome' – with the modality of the pilgrim's travels, where the significance of every stage is derived fully from the diminishing distance separating the traveller from the previously selected destination – you can see clearly now different contemporary life is (2003: 209).

The key difference between the tourist and the pilgrim, for Bauman, can be found in the clear, directed motives and greater sense of purpose of

the pilgrim's journey: 'Being a pilgrim, one can do more than walk – one can walk *to*. One can look back at the footprints left in the sand and see them as a road. One can *reflect* on the road past and see it as a *progress towards*, an advance, a coming *closer to*…' (Bauman 1996: 21 emphasis original). Employed in a metaphorical sense, pilgrimage for Bauman denotes a 'solid', coherent identity that is allegedly shattered and rendered impossible under modern, 'liquid' conditions. Bauman sees the transition from 'pilgrim' to 'tourist' as having occurred gradually since the Enlightenment. Citing Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, he discusses the rise of the *flâneur* – the socially detached, reflective urban stroller who is *in* the crowd, but is *not* of the crowd (Bauman 1996: 26).

Anywhere, Anywhere! The wandering flâneur

The notion of the *flâneur* as an actor and an activity (*flâneurie*) originated in nineteenth century Paris, and is most famously associated with the prose and poetry of Charles Baudelaire (Benjamin and Tiedemann 1999; Tester 1994). According to Baudelaire, the *flâneur*, who was often a poet or artist is able '[t]o be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen from the world' (in Tester 1994: 3). The *flâneur's* desire to be at the centre of the world in certain respects parallels Eliade's notion of *homo religiosus'* desire to seek an *axis mundi* and 'to be always, effortlessly, at the heart of the world, of reality, of the sacred and to transcend by natural means, the human condition and regain a divine state of affairs' (1963: 385). At first sight, however, one key difference between the modern, urban *flâneur* and the standard western conceptions of

pilgrims is a matter of their respective relationships to place and the directions of their journeys.

For the *flâneur*, there is no place-bounded goal or precise destination. On the contrary, the goal is to become placeless amidst the bustle of the metropolis; to lose oneself *in* the crowd while maintaining a reflexive distance *from* the crowd. This detached, yet cultivated sense of awareness was the condition which facilitated the poetic and artistic creativity of the *flâneur*; creativity which in modernity came to be almost sacralised and worshipped as religion declined. The traditional pilgrim, on the other hand, in most cases[1] moves towards a definite sacred centre or *axis mundi*. On the other hand, numerous pilgrimage researchers have demonstrated that often with pilgrimages, it is actually the journey which is more significant than the final destination (Campo 1998; Coleman and Eade 2004; Frey 1998; Morinis 1992; Reader 2007; Slavin 2003). For Coleman and Eade (2004), the mobile practices involved in making pilgrimages may be considered as a form of 'meta movement', or movement with a high degree of reflexivity and meaning. And yet, as research has amply demonstrated, separating tourism and pilgrimage is problematic and 'meta movement' may apply to secular pilgrimages as well.

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[1] The exception being 'wandering pilgrims', who even then usually in the course of their wanderings make their way to certain shrines or holy places. See for a typology of pilgrimage modes.

[2] This is not to say that representations stay the same. Rather, previous representations are built upon, revised and updated according to changing historical conditions. At the same time, certain dominant

Conclusion: mobility as metaphor and meta-social reflection

Once a socially marginal and threatening figure, Bauman (1996: 29) holds that 'the world is catching up to the vagabond', whose contemporary equivalent, 'the tourist', is now a central figure of Western society. This comparison is based on Bauman's observation that like the vagabond, the contemporary individual (presumably middle-class and 'western' or 'westernized') lives a fluid, placeless lifestyle characterized by ephemeral relationships, open-endedness, flexibility, individualism and 'commitment phobia' (2008: 15). Living in state of perpetual liminality, such a person lives as a permanent tourist. As Bauman sees it, '[w]e don't commit to the place because it's not *our* place and we are simply passing through; we need not commit to relationships with others because very likely we will never see them again' (2008: 16). Issues of place, commitment and identity are indeed important considerations in tourism and pilgrimage research which aims to shed light on broader social process connected to modernisation and globalisation. As such, these are themes in this thesis.

While Bauman's portrayal of 'the tourist' as the singular, archetypical character is a useful metaphor for describing mobile life in late modernity, it may be critiqued on at least four grounds: 1) being applicable exclusively to relatively affluent, Western societies, 2) it assumes (like MacCannell and Urry) that tourists constitute a homogenous category of people 3) is based on little empirical evidence, and rather morally-charged speculation, 4) it completely ignores the local contexts in which actual tourism is performed in.

Having surveyed the territory of pilgrimage and tourism as mobile practices which may be traced back to early myths of heroes and wayfarers, we see certain continuities and discontinuities with the past. Moreover, we have seen how rather than being isolated, exceptional practices, pilgrimage and tourism are embedded in and reflect larger sociocultural and historical processes. Detailed empirical research as well as meta-analysis is required if researchers are to do justice to these complex, intersecting phenomena. Research must also take into account the history – the continuities and discontinuities – of any pilgrimage or tourist destination. This will be the task of the following chapter, where I trace the history of Himalayan travel and dominant representations of the region.

CHAPTER TWO

Walking with the Gods:

Utopic Representations of the Himalayas

Image 4: Nicholas Roerich, 'Lotus', 1933

Retrieved from http://www.roerich.org/collections.html

Modernity seems to signal the final triumph of theoretical consciousness, yet we humans remain inexorably mimetic and mythic creatures.

Bellah (2006: 11)

In order to understand the present it is necessary to go outside of it.

Durkheim (2001: 113)

Travel destinations – be they ancient pilgrimage centres or modern tourist zones or both at once – do not present themselves; rather, they are always represented. In this chapter, I trace the dominant representations and imagery surrounding the middle Himalayan region in an attempt to sketch the genealogy of Himalayan travel from ancient to modern times. Analysing the dominant images and representations the region is generally known for, my aim, is to highlight certain continuities in the dominant discourse surrounding the Himalayas. Establishing connections with the past allows for examining how travel practices in the region evolved and how dominant representations are reflected and reproduced in contemporary journeys to the region and in popular culture/social imaginaries more generally. Importantly, tracing continuities also allows for illuminating discontinuities and change.

Drawing on Durkheim's theory of 'collective representation' – namely that forms of knowledge exist over and above individual members of societies – I argue here that a set of dominant representations of the Himalayas have reproduced a consistent imagery of the Himalayas as a place of power, enchantment, authenticity, exoticism and spirituality. While cultural differences and historical change account for the existence of various and contesting representations and versions of the Himalayas, the dominant representations perpetuate a particular myth of the Himalayas which may differ from those of local Himalayan communities themselves (Lim 2008). While competing discourses and counter representations exist, there are always dominant discourses and representations that become what places are known for, indeed become a dominant reality eclipsing other minor realities (Biehl and Locke 2010; Hage 2012).

Throughout history, the Himalayas have been represented as a place of mysticism, purity and enchantment, where geographic remoteness, magnificent mountain-scapes and a long tradition of religious esotericism fused to create images of a spiritual utopia. The Himalayas, a Sanskrit word meaning literally 'above the snow', have been represented as a place above and beyond the profane, worldly spheres below. The literal and symbolic spatial image of the Himalayas as a sacred landscape, a boundary zone and a place 'out there' carries on in global modernity through media representations and through performances such as tourism and pilgrimage. The story of spiritual travel in the region begins, however, with the tales of early wandering Hindu ascetics who explored and consecrated certain 'power places' in the region. This was followed by the gradual institutionalization of Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage and the founding of shrines and religious centres in the region. The spiritual renown of the Himalayas, as a place where one could 'walk with the gods' gradually extended outward in south and central Asian contexts, and eventually throughout Asia with the spread of Buddhism.

Many centuries later, the earliest Western encounters with the Himalayas were recorded in the accounts of Jesuit missionaries and colonial explorers, followed by adventurers, spiritualists and early mountaineers. By the mid-twentieth century, with the popularity of the novel (1933) and film (1937) *Lost Horizon*, as well as Edmund Hillary and Tenzin Norgay's 1953 ascent of the earth's highest point, Mount Everest, the Himalayas became well known for being the 'mountain of mountains' and a utopic Shangri-La. This also came at a time when interest in Eastern religious philosophies – particularly Buddhism and

spiritual practices such as meditation, yoga and martial arts were coming into fashion in the West. By the late 1960s, the hippy trail from Europe to Kathmandu helped establish the middle Himalayan region as an 'alternative' tourist-pilgrim destination where members of the counter culture 'dropped out' and searched and explored other ways of living. Visitor numbers increased decade by decade, with the region becoming a well-established global travel destination in the new millennium.

Image 5: Lost Horizon cover
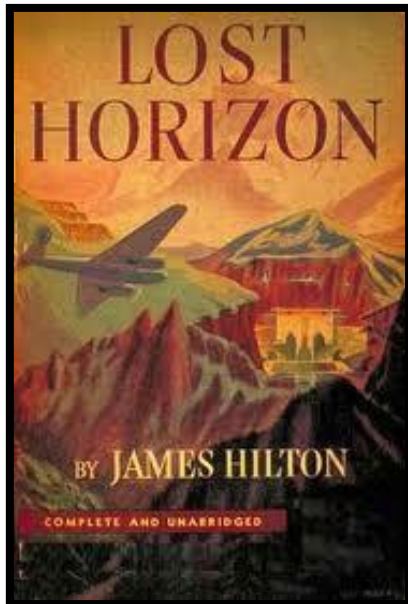
Image 6: Lonely Planet Nepal

http://www.novelcheck.com

http://www.lonelyplanet.com/nepal
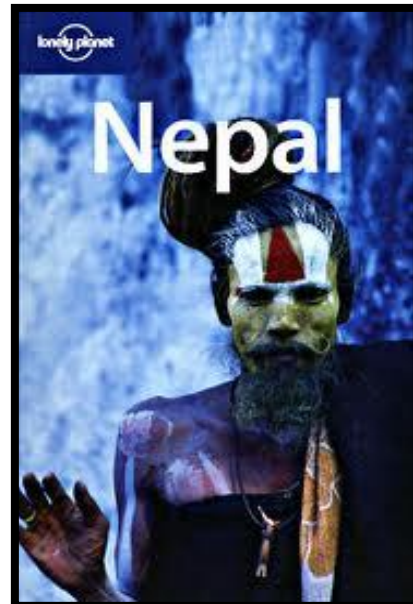
Surveying the dominant representations generated in the history of Himalayan travel and having conducted fieldwork in the region, it becomes clear that there is no singularly understood middle Himalayas, but rather a multiplicity of myths and meanings that are continuously inscribed and re-inscribed upon the region. Just as the Himalayan mountains remain in a continuous state of geological creation, involving destruction and reconstruction, so too are the cultural

meanings attributed to them. On a global stage, the middle Himalayas appears as heterotopic space where fantasy(ies) and reality(ies) continue to play out. Given that the present and future are in principal always contingent on the past (Luhmann 1982), let us move to a historical sketch of Himalayan travel through time, beginning with early religious pilgrimage. This shall be followed by the western encounter, the story of mountaineering and the significance of mountains as symbols of anti-structure and timelessness. I finish by considering how dominant representations of the Himalayas persist within the global conditions of late modernity.

Tracing Himalayan representations

> There is in the north a supreme king of mountains named
> Himalaya possessed of divine self. Bathing in the eastern and
> western oceans, he stretches like a measuring rod across the
> earth. Kalidasa – from the 5th century AD poem,
> 'Kumarasambhava' (in Bernbaum 1998: 218)

The middle-Himalayan region, encompassing northern India, Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan, has one of the longest traditions of pilgrimage in the world and apart from Mecca, continues to see the largest number of pilgrims of any place on earth (S. Singh 2004). Amidst the world's youngest and highest mountain range, there are peaks which have been sacred to millions of people over the past two millennia. In the past thirty to forty years the region has also become a significant destination for both local and international tourism, marketed for its offerings of awe-inspiring natural beauty, adventure, spirituality, cultural exoticism and relative affordability. But centuries before Edmund Hillary and the conquering mountaineers, before the Beatles and the 'hippy trail' in tow and before backpacking global nomads, the first Himalayan travellers

were nomadic tribes and religious pilgrims. From at least the eleventh century BCE, wandering Hindu ascetics discovered 'holy sanctuaries' located amidst the secluded valleys, glacial rivers and hot springs of the world's highest mountain range. Bharadwaj (1973) notes how 'the exquisite locations of the Himalayan-scapes were consecrated as shrines for Hindu pilgrimages where nature overwhelmed the human psyche into prayerful submission and existential humility'. Similarly, Singh (2005: 218) observes: '...the middle Himalayas in all their awesome scenery and awful solitude became a perfect sacrosanct for theosophizing, learning and writing'.

Many mountains became designated as sacred pilgrimage centres, often times for more than one religion. Mount Kailas, in Tibet, for example, is one of the holiest sites in Buddhism, but historically has also been important for adherents from at least three other ancient religions – Bön (the indigenous religion of Tibet), Hinduism and Jainism (Zafren 2007: 279). Hindus, for instance, consider Kailas the home and personification of Lord Shiva – the 'destroyer' or 'transformer'. Milarepa, the eleventh century ADE Tibetan Buddhist mystic allegedly spent many years in meditation in a cave on Mount Kailas, expressing his reverence for the sacred mountain in verses such as the following:

> The prophecy of Buddha says most truly that this snow mountain is the navel of the world, a place where snow leopards dance. The mountain top, the crystal-like pagoda (in Bernbaum 1998: 11)

Figure 7: Nicholas Roerich, 'Ice Sphinx', 1933.

http://www.roerich.org/collections.html
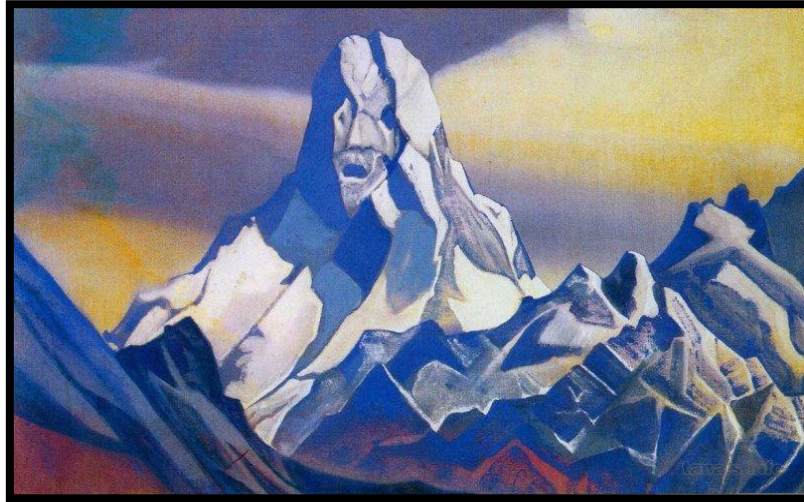
A pilgrimage centre for many centuries, which like Delphi in Greece is also said to be the 'navel of the world', more recently Mount Kailas has attracted a small stream of dedicated international travellers, who appear to come for reasons which blur the pilgrimage and tourism divides. This is similarly the case with Delphi, which continues to draw 'pilgrim tourists' or 'tourist pilgrims' in the new millennium (Bittarello 2006; Nolan and Nolan 1992; Rountree 2002). The *Lonely Planet Tibet* (Mayhew 1999) guidebook outlines a journey to Mount Kailas in a section entitled, 'the trek at a glance':

> The circuit, or *kora*, of Mount Kailash (6714m) is one of the most important pilgrimages in Asia. A religious sanctuary since pre-Buddhist times, a trek here wonderfully integrates the spiritual, cultural and physical dimensions of any trip to Tibet, which explains its growing attraction. Being able to meet pilgrims from across Tibet and other countries is one of the many allures of this walk.

As this demonstrates, Mount Kailas, as well as being the *axis mundi* for Tibetan Buddhists and 'one of the most important pilgrimages in Asia',

also attracts international visitors who seek travel experiences which integrate 'spiritual, cultural and physical dimensions'. This ancient pilgrimage route thus exudes a 'spiritual magnetism' (Preston 1992) which spills over into a broader historical context of global mobilities. Mount Kailas, Mount Everest (*Chomolungma* in Tibetan and *Sagarmata* in Nepali, meaning 'Mother goddess of the world'), Gongotri (the source of the Ganges River) and other sacred Himalayan sites in late modernity appear to be undergoing a process of incorporation into a global network of 'power places' – places perceived as having extraordinary spiritual energy (Arellano 2004). Often integrating indigenous traditions with forms of new-age or neo-pagan spirituality, examples of such 'power places' include Machu Picchu, Delphi and Stonehenge.

An important anthropological question is how *axis mundi* or 'power places' come to acquire and maintain (or lose) their 'spiritual magnetism'. Durkheim's notion of collective representations as socially produced and historically transmitted meanings helps account for the relative stability of symbols in specific social orders. However, this theory does not account for how such places acquired their 'magnetism' in the first place. Recalling from chapter one, we heard Eliade (1963: 373) making the distinction that sacred places are never 'chosen' by human beings, but are merely discovered by them. While this is ultimately a theological question, the questions I pursue here have more to do with how in late modernity, certain people from certain societies are drawn to and appropriate the 'power places' of other societies? Being drawn to certain places presupposes knowing about those places, so a more fundamental question would ask how people

come to know in the first place; simply put, how and where do they receive their information, images and representations?

In the case of this research, I am interested in how certain people from Western societies became interested in travelling to the middle Himalayan region, and why travel there seemed to take on the qualities of pilgrimage. How did Western interests in eastern religions and spiritual philosophies and an almost religious reverence for high mountains and 'wild nature' arise? Almost exactly one hundred years ago, Durkheim foresaw a cosmopolitanisation of religion would unfold in an internationalizing global order. In *Elementary Forms*, he points towards a global transmission of collective representations:

> It is this international life that has already resulted in universalizing religious beliefs. As it extends, the collective horizon enlarges; the society ceases to appear as the only whole to become part of a much vaster one, with undetermined frontiers, which is susceptible of advancing indefinitely ([1965, 493] cited in Tiken 2002: 3).

The idea of 'universalizing religious beliefs' appears to be another expression of Durkheim's neo-Enlightenment thinking which remains epistemologically and empirically problematic. However, the idea of an enlarged collective horizon (though not universal) and the mingling and merging of social forms leading to 'undetermined frontiers' have certainly been occurring in late modernity. The 'indeterminacy' and susceptibility of socio-cultural forms to 'advance indefinitely', rather than leading to a universal, objective knowledge Durkheim predicted, rather reflects Derrida's notion of *différance*: the idea that meaning and symbolic forms have no fundamental endpoint – and thus no beginning

either – and are always subject to change. Taking the Himalayas as a case in point, we can see that the representations surrounding the region, expressed in language, imagery, symbols, mythologies and knowledge are socially constructed and have a particular socio-genesis. [2]

The earliest dominant representations of the Himalayas as a spiritual utopia come from a blending of pilgrim accounts and religious mythology, from which the Himalayas came to be represented as the abode of the gods, the roof of the world and a sacred intermediary space connecting heaven and earth. As Singh (1992: 22) writes: 'The sheer aura of Himalayan physicality sublimates into sacred metaphysical depths, for which it is called the mountain of mountains'. As the secluded valleys, glacial river heads, hot springs and sacred peaks saw increasing numbers of pilgrims, Himalayan pilgrimage became a Hindu institution, marked by the construction of temples and shrines, formal employment of priests and the establishment of rituals, ceremonies and a donation system. The institutionalization of Himalayan pilgrimage occurred in conjunction with the spiritual fervour that caught India from the eleventh to first centuries BCE with the spread of the great Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*. As Singh (2005: 219) observes, with the popularization of the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* (Hindu scriptures on myths), '...pilgrimages were made an inevitable ritual of Hindu living'. Arjuna, one of the four mythic

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[2] This is not to say that representations stay the same. Rather, previous representations are built upon, revised and updated according to changing historical conditions. At the same time, certain dominant themes may remain relatively consistent, as is the case with historical and contemporary representations of the Himalayas.

Pandavas (heroes) of the *Mahabharata*, at one point addresses a Himalayan summit:

> Mountain, thou art always the refuge of the good who practice the law of righteousness, the hermits of holy deeds, who seek out the road that leads to heaven. It is by thy grace, Mountain, that priests, warriors, and commoners attain to heaven and, devoid of pain, walk with the gods (in Cooper 1997: 128).

It would appear that the Himalayas, as a place where one could 'walk with the gods' became, in Durkheim's words, a collective representation of the sacred. In other words, through the transmission and combination of myths and travel accounts of pilgrims and holy men, the Himalayas became collectively represented as a place of spiritual purity, mysticism and enchantment and a geographic embodiment of the sacred. In this sense, the Himalayas correspond to Durkheim's emphasis on the moral and ethical character of collective representations. Another illustration comes from the Hindu *Manasakhanda* scripture, which reads:

> He who thinks of the Himalayas, even if he does not see it, is greater than he who accomplishes all his devotions at Benares. He who thinks of the Himalayas will be freed of all sins. (Cooper 1997: 12)

Durkheim, who claimed that '[t]he idea of society is the soul of religion', sought to demonstrate that what is designated as 'sacred' is in fact a symbol whose function is to foster social solidarity. Durkheim, followed by Victor Turner and Eliade, emphasized how the sacred

could only be accessed in a ritualized manner. In *Elementary Forms*, Durkheim writes:

> [r]eligious beliefs are those representations that express the nature of sacred things and the relations they have with other sacred things or with profane things … rites are rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things (38).

Thus as collective representations of the Himalayas as a sacred landscape spread, travel in the region became more than movement, but the highly ritualized and meaning-centred form of travel known as pilgrimage. Himalayan pilgrimage included prescribed routes, prayers, rituals, and integrated networks of shrines, temples and monasteries. Cultural geographer Bhardwaj (1973: 6-7) elaborates on the socially integrating function of Hindu pilgrimage more generally:

> The innumerable sacred places of the Hindus can be conceived of a system of nodes having varying degrees of religious import. Within this system, some places may be the focal points for pilgrims from the entire vast Indian subcontinent with its variegated cultural mosaic. (…) The holy places thus generate a gigantic network of religious circulation encompassing the entire Hindu population. Pilgrim "flows" are the connecting links between the Hindu population and its numerous sacred centres.

Bhardwaj's overarching analysis is that the Hindu pilgrimage system, which criss-crosses the entire Indian subcontinent, creates and maintains a 'pan-Indian holy space', a 'vast sacred space that ultimately serves a socially-unifying function'. The map on the following page

illustrates only some of the major religious sites shared by the people of India.

Based on early tales from wandering holy men who explored the Himalayan landscapes from approximately the seventh century BCE, representations of the Himalayas as a sacred place extended first to the communities in close proximity, gradually spreading throughout India to become one of the four principle pilgrimage centres designated by the *Puranas*. With the establishment and rise of Buddhism, the Himalayas also saw Buddhist pilgrimage, shrines and monasteries emerge – often times blending with Hindu practices, as well as the indigenous Bön religion.

Image 8: Religious Places in India
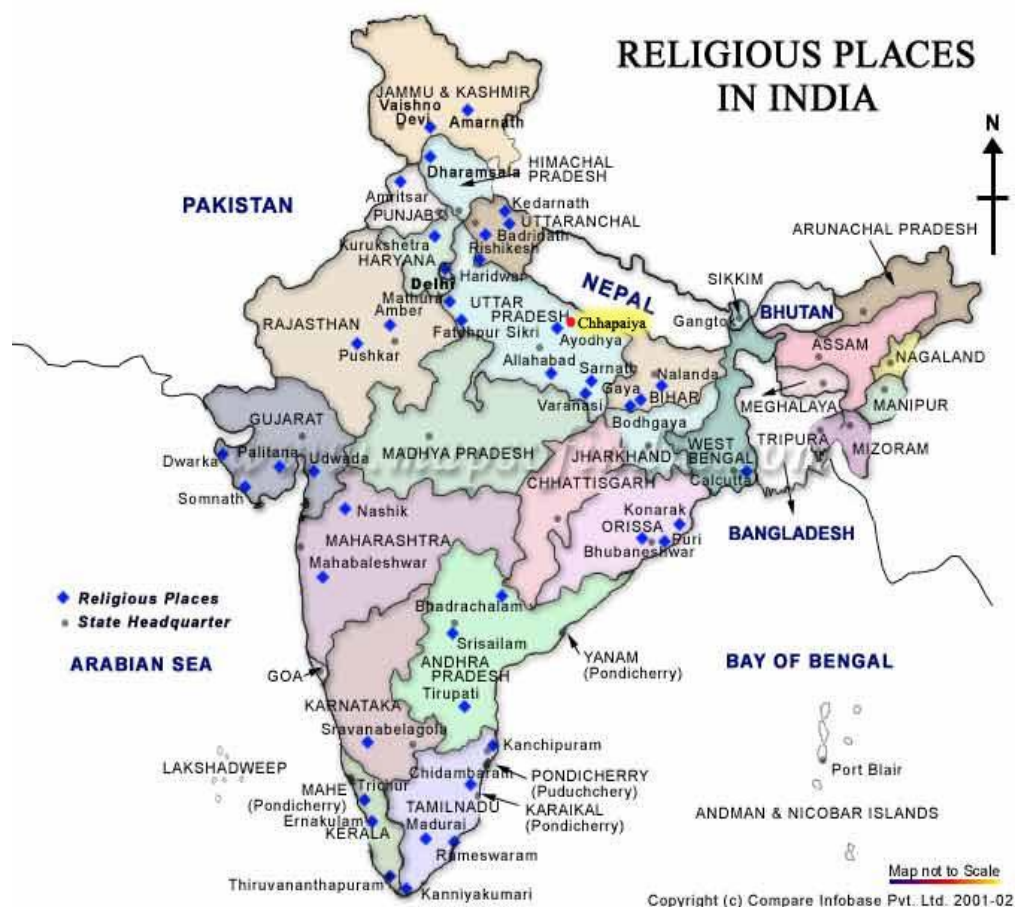
http://en.loadtr.com/Religious_Places_in_India_-399721.htm

Over the centuries, through trade, increasing communication networks and the spread of Buddhism, the Himalayas, with their tales of mystery and intrigue, came to be known throughout Asia. It would be many centuries later, however, that this isolated, mountainous region, as one of the last blank spots on the map, would find its way into the Western imagination.

This is of course a very brief, sweeping glance at earlier, localized representations of the middle Himalayas as a region with a long tradition of religious pilgrimage. I now turn to western images and representations, considering a selection of written accounts from western travellers who visited the region over the past two and half centuries, tracing how dominant representations reproduce a particular version of the Himalayas which shares many of the earlier, local representations in a basic sense, but are adapted to changing historical and cultural conditions. Here I call attention to the consistent set of representations of the middle Himalayas as place of mysticism and enchantment, timelessness and untouched by modernity. I argue that this utopic, paradisiacal discourse is both a reaction to and expression of modernity and Himalayan travel performances may thus be viewed as meta-social commentaries expressing particular ideologies. As will be discussed below, the idealistic and counter-cultural aspects of the western fascination with the Himalayas and the quest for adventure, communion with nature and spiritual enlightenment are indebted to early Romantic ideology – an ideology that continues to permeate contemporary representations of and approaches to travel in the region.

Western images and representations of the Himalayas

Once again, I do not pretend that my selection of texts and discussion here encapsulates the entire history of Himalayan travel. Rather, by gathering an assortment of popular texts: travel books and popular literature found in bookstores and public libraries, information from travel websites and popular films, through media/textual analysis I trace the genealogy and reproduction of dominant Himalayan representations. My hypothesis, which will be unfolded in the following chapters, was that the dominant representations reproduced in popular media became what the Himalayas are collectively *known* for, and this knowledge informs/shapes virtual, imaginary and corporeal journeys there. Such a hypothesis stresses the role of the imagination in travel. This theme will be examined in detail in the next chapter regarding the connections between contemporary Himalayan travellers' *apriori* knowledge and perceptions of the Himalayan region and their expectations and motivations for going. The basic premise of this hypothesis is that the representations people are exposed to before physically travelling to a given place shape their ideas and imaginings of how that place will be. As Berger (2004: 17) puts it:

> Long before we go abroad to visit new lands, we become virtual tourists who imagine what the places we will visit will be like, based on what we've seen in advertisements and on television documentaries.

To become a 'virtual tourist', then, one needs to have been exposed to media productions or representations. Collective representations are

central to Durkheim's neo-Kantian project of understanding how shared symbolic structures are reproduced in the individual minds of social members. As constructors of collectively shared realities, they depend on what he calls 'logical conformism', that is, 'a homogenous conception of time, space, number and cause, one which makes it possible for different intellects to reach agreement' (in Bourdieu 1991: 166). Bourdieu (2000: 68) similarly describes how through language, communities strive to naturalize reality and represent it in a way that is valid for all members; a process he calls 'the imperialism of the universal'. Although Durkheim came to replace his earlier notion of 'collective consciousness' with 'collective representation', the idea that society was united by a sort of 'group mind' occupied his writings until the end of his life. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, for instance, Durkheim (2005: 9) writes:

> The whole social environment appears to us as if inhabited with forces that, in reality, exist only in our consciousness. One knows that the flag, in itself, is nothing but a scrap of cloth for the soldier. Human blood is simply an organic liquid, yet even today we cannot see it flowing without experiencing a violent emotion that its physico-chemical properties cannot explain. From a physical point of view man is nothing more than a system of cells … A cancelled postage stamp can be worth a fortune; it is obvious that this value is in no way tied to its natural properties … Collective representations very often attribute to the things to which they are attached properties which do not exist in any form or degree. Out of the commonest objects they can make a very powerful and very sacred being. Yet, although purely ideal, the powers which have been conferred in this way work as if they were real. They

determine the conduct of men with the same inevitability as physical forces.

Along with projecting meaning onto objects and symbols, there is a significant temporal dimension to representations in the sense that there is a time lapse between perceived images, objects or events and our descriptions of them. Bohm (1996: 55) makes the important distinction that 'representation is not only present in thought or in the imagination, but *it fuses with the actual perception or experience* … so that what is "presented" (as perception) is already in large part a re-presentation' (emphasis original).[3] Representations thus contribute to a continuous shaping of perception, experience and understandings, as Vidal Clarmonte (2005: 260) observes:

> Reality cannot exist outside re-presentations, which, at the same time, influence the way a particular society constructs meaning – and all construction of meaning implies acceptance of the power generating it, that is, acceptance of whoever chose the pieces and classified the materials for us.

Since the linguistic and cultural turns of the mid twentieth century (Rorty 1993), a common perspective in the social sciences is that as products of symbolic systems representations are not only culturally relative, but always express political dimensions and power relationships (Hall 1997). In the history of western representations of the Himalayas, there has been consistent pattern of romanticizing,

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[3] This reflects Lacan's perspective that as culturally and linguistically socialized beings, humans always remain in the realms of the symbolic and imaginary. Access to the Real is always denied by virtue of being thrown into a world of symbols and representations which proceed from infancy to create distance from the Real.

exotifying and orientalising the region. Reflecting Saussure's emphasis on relationships of opposition, the Himalayas have long been represented as an enchanted land, a utopia and as the spiritual antithesis of the modern world (Bishop 2000). The region is incorporated into the 'mystical East' and 'West and the Rest' discourse more generally (Bishop 1989; Clarke 1997; Said 1978).

A survey of popular literature, films, art and other cultural productions reveals a consistent imagery of the middle Himalayas and the Far East more generally as a place of mystery and spirituality. This is evident in novels such as James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (1933, followed by Frank Capra's film version in 1937), E.M. Forester's *A PasSage to India* (1924), Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* (1922) and *Journey to the East* (1932). More recently, Elizabeth Gilbert's international best-selling memoir cum Hollywood blockbuster, *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006/2010), along with a steady stream of New Age and self-help books inspired by eastern spiritual philosophies have shown popularity since the 1970s. Moreover, films such as *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997, based on the 1953 autobiographical account by Heinrich Harrer), *Kundun* (1997), *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), travel guidebooks such as those published by Lonely Planet, Rough Guides and Footprint, as well as travel blogs all reinforce dominant representations of an enchanted East which has much to *offer* the western visitor. For instance, on the Lonely Planet website for Nepal, we find the following description:

> Wedged between the high wall of the Himalaya and the steamy jungles of the Indian plains, Nepal is a land of snow peaks and Sherpas, yaks and yetis, monasteries and mantras. Ever since Nepal first opened its borders to outsiders in the 1950s, this tiny

mountain nation has had an irresistible mystical allure for travellers. Today, legions of trekkers are drawn to the Himalaya's most iconic and accessible hiking, some of the world's best, with rugged trails to Everest, the Annapurnas and beyond. Other travellers prefer to see Nepal at a more gentle pace, admiring the peaks over a gin and tonic from a Himalayan viewpoint, strolling through the temple-lined medieval city squares of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, and joining Buddhist pilgrims on a spiritual stroll around the centuries-old stupas and temples that lie scattered across the Kathmandu Valley. There are few countries in the world that are as well set up for independent travel as Nepal. Wandering the trekking shops, bakeries and pizzerias of Thamel and Pokhara, it's easy to feel that you have somehow landed in a kind of backpacker Disneyland. Out in the countryside lies a quite different Nepal, where traditional mountain life continues stoically and at a slower pace, and a million potential adventures glimmer on the mountain horizons. The biggest problem faced by visitors to Nepal is how to fit everything in.

This 'snapshot' from the world's premier travel guide publisher reproduces an imagery of an exotic and mystical Himalayan nation where travellers have seemingly endless options, including hiking in the world's highest mountains, joining Buddhist pilgrims on spiritual strolls, eating pizza in 'backpacker Disneyland' or slowing down in the countryside. Such a description demonstrates how the essence of speech and imagery works via re-presentations to place what is removed in space or time before our eyes. As Rancière (2007: 114) writes:

Representation is an ordered deployment of meanings, an adjusted relationship between what is understood or

anticipated and what comes as a surprise, according to the paradoxical logic analysed by Aristotle's Poetics. This logic of gradual, thwarted revelation excludes the abrupt emergence of speech that says too much, speaks too soon, makes too much known.

Rancière goes on to elaborate how every act of 'making visible', whether through speech or image, simultaneously keeps other things hidden from sight. In other words, as an 'ordered deployment of meaning', representations also hide or mask other possible meanings. The representation of Nepal posted on the Lonely Planet website thus 'makes visible' a version of Nepal which is meant to appeal to potential travellers[4], while hiding less attractive realities, such as the fact that Nepal is a politically unstable nation and the fourth poorest in Asia. And yet, the dominant representations which define places have histories which had to have been generated and transmitted before we can have a guidebook like the Lonely Planet and a tourist industry more generally. It is thus important to trace where contemporary representations of the Himalayas originate from and how they were transmitted.

Early Western visitors to the Himalayan region

Western visits to the middle-Himalayas began in medieval times with journeys by legendary explorers such as Marco Polo, Friar Odoric and

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[4] But not just anyone, people with interests in this type of travel. Akin to Bourdieu's analysis in *Distinction* regarding who visits art museums in France, being interested in and having economic and cultural resources to travel to the Himalayas reflects a particular social configuration. Specifically, those of the middle class backgrounds. So while representations of the Himalayas are collective in the sense that they are on the internet for anyone to see (granted they have access to a computer and the internet) are on television documentaries, in movies and in books found in public libraries, the distribution of power to signify and make those representations meaningful is not equal.

Sven Hedin, who were followed by Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries. However, as Bishop (1989: 25) observes, the encounter of the British in the region, beginning in the late seventeenth century, marks the beginning of the creation of the Himalayas as a utopic, 'imaginal landscape' for Western societies. Through travel reports and geographic surveys by British colonialists, the Himalayas entered the Western lexicon, accompanied by a discourse of mystery and awe. It is significant to recall that during this period, the Grand Tour had come into fashion for aristocratic, secularizing Europe, marking the beginning of both modern tourism and the genre known as 'travel literature'. Exemplified perhaps by Goethe's (1892) travel account from 1816-1817, *Travels in Italy*, it was important that travel accounts were not only highly descriptive and informative, but literary. Central to the Grand Tour was a discourse of education, in which the original sites of the Renaissance in continental Europe, such as Florence and Venice, became attractions for young English aristocrats (Turner and Ash 1975; Wang 2000: 176).

As travel through continental Europe became more commonplace, colonial powers explored the boundaries of their acquired territories. This appears to be driven by several interrelated factors: 1) greater cultural confidence as Europeans came to perceive themselves as more 'evolved' compared to the societies they encountered abroad, 2) the will to expand colonial empires (particularly on the British part), 3) the Enlightenment/scientific will to map, record, categorize and hence 'dominate' the world, and finally sheer curiosity and the desire for adventure. Here Kipling's 'Explorer' (cited in Reynolds 2011: 1) captures the modern – but perhaps universal – will to travel:

> Something hidden. Go and find it.
> Go and look behind the Ranges –
> Something lost behind the Ranges.
> Lost and waiting for you. Go!

Bishop (1989: 33) notes that implicit in early British accounts of the Himalayas was 'a late residue of medieval European fantasies of Asia and the East' which connected back to 'a totally different conception of European identity'. The other side of the Tartars, Bishop continues, represented not only uncharted territory, but also a 'historical discontinuity' for Europeans. This lack of historical and cultural continuity led to early European travel accounts – often blending geographic description, rudimentary ethnography and literary-style reflection – to exemplify the orientalist tendency of placing non-western cultures outside of time and in binary opposition to a modernizing West (Fabian 2002; Said 1978). Between poles of binary oppositions, as Derrida points out, lay power relations in which 'one of the two terms governs … the other or has the upper hand (1981: 41). In the case of the Himalayas, a post-Enlightenment, colonialist discourse produces an image of the Himalayas which reflects back on the European producers themselves and expresses the stereotyping game Foucault calls 'power/knowledge'. As Said writes:

> …Orientalism is never far from the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against all 'those' non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures (1978: 7).

Representations of the orient transmitted through travel literature worked on western imageries, in some cases instilling an adventurous desire to experience those distant, exotic lands for oneself. In the epilogue to Heinrich Harrer's (2009: [1953]) *Seven Years in Tibet*, the author recounts how the travel literature he had read in his youth had fed his thirst for adventure:

> Even as a boy I devoured books of adventure and discovery. My great models were Alexander von Humboldt, and above all the legendary Swedish explorer of Asia, Sven Hedin. His Tibetan adventures in particular fascinated me, and when our Second World War prison camp in India was moved to the Himalayan foothills, my attempts to escape were naturally directed towards Tibet, that forbidden land on the roof of the world, barred even to its British colonial neighbours in the south (Harrer 2009: 291).

Image 9 & 10: Seven Years in Tibet film posters, 1998

http://www.googleimages.com
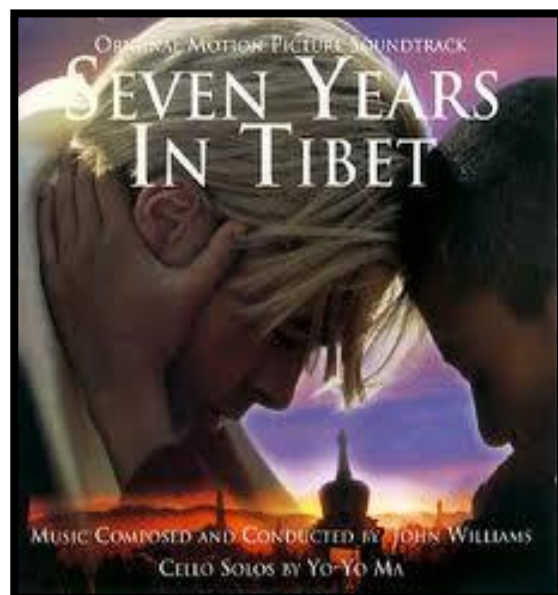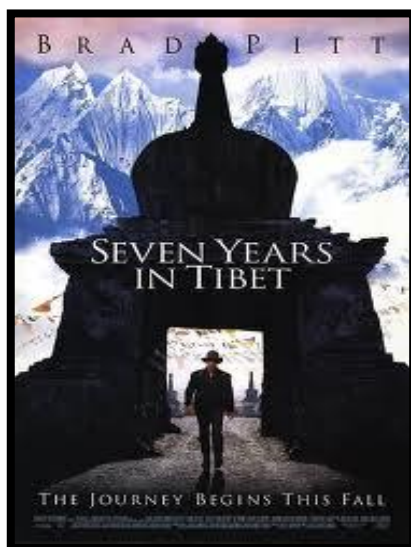
As chapter four will examine further, just as Harrer was inspired by earlier travel accounts, his own book and the film version of it have continued to inspire travellers to visit the Himalayas in contemporary times. Yet no consideration of the history of Himalayan travel would be complete without taking into account the literal and symbolic significance the mountains themselves play.

Mountains as symbols of timelessness and anti-structure

As one of the last blank spaces on the Western map of global exploration and conquest, the geographic isolation of the Himalayas and magnitude of the great mountain range has had much to do with the aura of mystery and timelessness the region has exercised on the Western imagination. In *Virtual Tibet*, Schell (2000: 16) observes that more than any other land, the isolated kingdom of Tibet has been a 'target for a corpus of romantic transferences and has continuously fired the imagination of Western escape artists'. The Himalayas are not only isolated in terms of being a landlocked region surrounded by vast plains and high desert on three sides and rainforest on the other, but by virtue of their being the highest and most climatically severe mountain range on earth. Mountains have often been places of pilgrimage for many cultures around the world. Frequently lying in remote locations and requiring long journeys from the profane life of villages or towns, mountains have been represented in mythology as the sacred domains of gods and spirits. As Eliade (1996) notes, 'the symbolic and religious significance of mountains is endless'. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (2001: 122) observes how peripheral geographic locations –especially mountains – often symbolize anti-structure and timelessness. Tuan

provides some comparative examples, noting that '[i]n Taoist lore, timeless paradises are located myriad miles from any known human settlement', while '[t]he European mind also envisions atemporal Isles of the Blest, Edens, and Utopias in remote and inaccessible places'.

In his analysis of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, Paul Ricouer (1985: 112-5) observes how there is a consistent contrast between 'those up here' and 'those down below'. The spatial opposition reinforces a temporal opposition between those up on the mountain who is acclimatized and whose sense of time has been an abolished, and those down on the flatlands whose occupations force them to follow clock time. This binary opposition creates an image of two separate worlds whose uniting theme is time. The novel, according to Ricouer, is fundamentally an exploration of the conflicting relations between internal time, chronological time and monumental time. Representations of the Himalayas, as the 'mountain of mountains', have similarly played on spatial and temporal relations between 'up there' and 'down here'.

Yet, as Bishop further notes, the region is also represented as 'a spectacle, a totally homogenous and coherent world of exotic customs, of disturbing yet alluring sensuality, combined with horrific bestiality and perverse morality' (1989: 7). As travel accounts made their way back to the West, a discourse of mystery and enchantment fed western imaginaries. This fascination occurred in the context of post-Enlightenment, modernizing Europe, at a time when 'nature' and those peoples who were believed to still be living in a state of nature (i.e. 'noble savages')

Image 11: Nicholas Roerich, 'Tibet', 1933.

http://www.roerich.org/collections.html
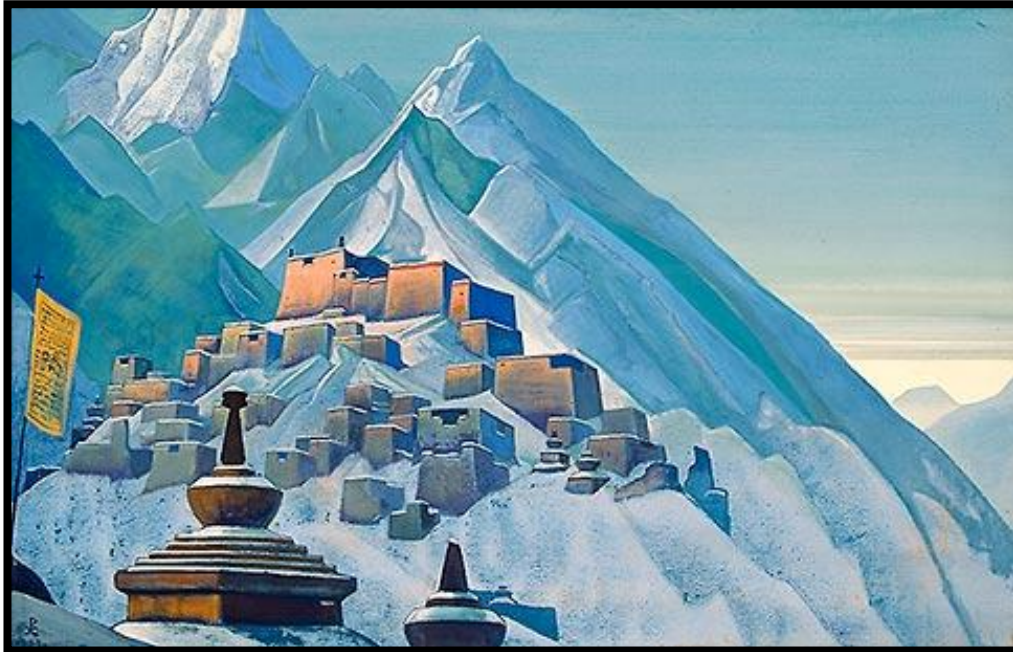
came to acquire an almost divine status for the Romantics. Feelings towards mountains in Europe also changed during this period. Previously understood as places to be avoided, first the spirit of scientific discovery, followed by a romantic ideology produced new representations of high altitude mountain landscapes as beautiful and sublime (Bishop 1989).

As Mathieu (2009: 348) points out, 'during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a vocabulary took root that came from the border of aesthetic and religious experience (…) [p]eople spoke of a feeling of "delightful horror," the idea of "the sublime" was central, mountains were designated as the "cathedrals of the world". With the works of romantic authors such as Rousseau, Goethe, Schiller, Wordsworth and Ruskin, mountains were represented as sacred landscapes endowed with spiritually and morally uplifting qualities. For example, in 1857

Ruskin (2010: 38) described mountains with a timely mixture of scientific analogy and romantic reverence:

> Mountains are to the rest of the body of the earth, what violent muscular action is to the body of man. The muscles and tendons of its anatomy are, in the mountain, brought out with force and convulsive energy, full of expression, passion, and strength.

Aldous Huxley, whose father was an early mountaineering enthusiast, once remarked, '[m]y father considered a walk among the mountains as the equivalent of churchgoing' (in Armstrong 2006: 86). As a subgenre of travel writing, mountain literature increasingly represented the lofty peaks as symbols of purity, transcendence and the numinous. Temporarily removing climbers from the profane concerns of modern life 'down here' – climbing mountains and dwelling 'up there' became a ritualized act exhibiting characteristics of religious pilgrimage. In secularizing Europe, however, this practice came not to be referred to as pilgrimage, but mountaineering.

The birth of modern mountaineering

The history of mountaineering is important for our discussion of Himalayan representations for two reasons. First, the sport of mountaineering was established during a period of rapid and dramatic changes that Europe experienced in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At this time, Europe was in the wake of the French revolution, the momentum of the industrial revolution and accompanying urbanization, colonial and imperialistic expansion, post-

Enlightenment secularization and the Romantic Movement. It is within this complex context that the desire to simultaneously 'conquer' mountains and 'escape' modern life emerged. Mathieu (2009: 349) observes how while the Enlightenment period is usually portrayed as a secular, if not anti-religious movement, somewhat paradoxically it led to the sacralisation of mountains and other 'natural' phenomena by early Romantics. He makes this case by demonstrating how from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, mountains in Europe were viewed as considerably less sacred than in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. This sacralisation – occurring during a period of intense modernisation, industrialisation and nation-state building – contradicts the assumption that only 'simple' societies are 'religious', while modern 'complex' societies necessarily undergo secularization. In the western, Judeo-Christian context, there also appears as a displacement of sacredness from the supernatural to the natural. As Beedie and Hudson (2003: 635) observe, 'mountain mythology is embedded with romantic notions of exploration, journey, and searching (…) ideas which become attractive in the modern social world where fragmentation and complexity are the norm'. Citing Melucci (1996), they continue that 'exploration implies finding, thereby suggesting potential stability in a world that is increasingly destabilized'. What's more, by symbolizing timelessness, mountains may also lure people who are seeking stability in the sense of an unchanging reality, for nothing is more stable than that which does not change. This in turn reflects Eliade's notion that *axis mundi's* – which for many religious traditions are mountains – symbolize a timeless eternal present (*illo tempore*), the time of the gods and creation, as discussed in chapter one.

The second reason mountaineering is integral to our discussion of Himalayan representations is that explorers and mountaineers were often the first Westerners to come into contact with many areas and peoples of the region. Mountaineers' accounts of the region and the publicity their expeditions received in Europe did much to propagate the discourse of mystery and enchantment surrounding the 'roof of the world'. Moreover, mountaineering can be viewed as the earliest form of tourism in the Himalayas (Johnston and Edwards 1994: 462) and laid the foundations for the approaches to travel the region is known and marketed for today, including eco, adventure, cultural, spiritual tourism.

As the sport grew in Europe and every peak in the Alps had been 'conquered' during the golden age of alpinism in the 1850s, mountaineers began setting their sights on mountains in reach of colonial outposts, most notably the Himalayas (Unsworth 1994: 66). It should be pointed out that the British, who by virtue of occupying India had the easiest access to the Himalayas, were also the country most enthusiastic about mountaineering at the time.

While eighteenth century mountaineering was part of the Enlightenment project, aimed at rational, scientific understandings and the need to map and measure the earth's surface, Unsworth (53) notes the scientific element declined fairly rapidly in the nineteenth century. Rather, a sense of individual and nationalistic competition and the desire to be the first to summit the highest Alpine peaks became central to the emerging 'sport'. Unsworth observes how the British had taken charge of mountaineering by the mid-19th century:

> The mood of the nation was expansionist. Imperialism and exploration went hand in hand and national self-confidence was such that nothing seemed impossible. All these factors contributed to the rapid growth of British involvement in the Alps (54).

By 1877, all of the European Alp first ascents had been 'claimed' (eighty percent of which were by British climbers); it wasn't until 1892 that the first Himalayan expedition took place (Johnson & Edwards 1994, 462). Compared to the Alps, the Himalayas posed a whole new set of challenges for climbers, with 14 peaks reaching higher than 8,000 meters – more than double Europe's highest, Mount Blanc, which stands a *mere* 4,807 meters. Moreover, while railroads in Europe allowed for increasing speed and accessibility to mountains, leading to what Simmel (1997: 219) called the 'wholesale opening of the Alps', most of the Himalayan peaks took between three and four weeks to reach their bases on foot from villages.

Adventure and escape: twentieth century Himalayan travel

As one of the most dangerous sports ever invented by human beings, responsible for hundreds of deaths, the non-climber may ask the question: why do people risk their lives to stand on the top of mountains? In his book, *Through Tibet to Everest*, Captain J.B.L. Noel, a British geographer and photographer who in 1913, disguised as 'a Mohammedan from India', got within forty miles of the forbidden mountain before 'a force of soldiers turned me back' (Noel 1989: 30), reflects on this question:

There are people who look upon mountaineering adventures and activities as a preposterous waste of human energy, involving unnecessary risks to life and limb. They are entitled to their opinion and may be left to lead their comfortable lives and to die in their beds. The fact remains that there are other men who feel an urge to the high places, men whose spiritual natures are drawn to them, irresistibly, and who gain the spiritual sustenance their souls crave. The present Pope, Pius XI, who is himself an ardent and distinguished mountaineer and who followed the Everest Expedition with the liveliest interest, sending us repeated cablegrams of encouragement, congratulation and sympathy, wrote this on the occasion of the anniversary of the birth of St. Bernard: "In his laborious effort to attain mountain tops, where the air is lighter and purer, the climber gains new strength of limb. In the endeavour to overcome the obstacles of the way, the soul trains itself to conquer difficulties; and the spectacle of the vast horizon, which from the highest crest offers itself on all sides to the eyes, raises his spirit to the Divine Author and Sovereign of Nature."

Noel's testament to mountaineering shows a moral and spiritual projection onto the act of climbing mountains, a metaphorical, transcendental narrative which extends beyond the sport into divine realms and communion with God or Nature. Noel was on the infamous 1924 expedition to be the first to summit Mount Everest, in which the famous climbers Mallory and Irvine perished high on the northeast ridge, causing them to become mythic figures in mountaineering history. Captain Noel was the only surviving member of the expedition. Here he reflects on the death of Mallory:

> Did Mallory and his companion perhaps feel that exalting urge
> to be above everything in the world and to get a glimpse, so to
> speak, of God's view of things? Did Mallory's spirit drive his
> body to death? (Noel 1989: 277)

In her comprehensive study, *Life and Death on Mount Everest*, Sherry
Ortner (2001) sets out to make sense of what she calls the 'serious game'
of mountaineering. With its own rules, definitions and relations of
power and solidarity, Ortner strives to 'make sense of mountaineering
by figuring out how it fits into other, or larger, games' (Ortner 2001: 36).
On one hand, she says, mountaineering is a 'game of masculinity';
while on the other it is a 'game of adventure' which facilitates a
'dropping out of the continuity of life'. Conceding that the notion of
'adventure' is probably universal to all human beings and cultures, she
points out:

> The kind of adventure involved in mountaineering – a basically
> twentieth-century phenomenon – is very specifically
> constructed in relation to issues of "modernity"; one drops out
> of the continuity of (modern) life because one finds it lacking –
> lacking in "adventure," among other things. A discourse in
> which the adventure-ness of mountaineering is linked with a
> critique of modernity is perhaps the dominant (though not the
> only) discourse of the sport... (ibid).

After nearly four decades of encounters with mountaineers in the
Himalayas, particularly the Everest region, she explains the point for
many, if not most, climbers, is 'to find something that one cannot find
in modern life that indeed has been lost in modern life' (ibid). The
earliest climbers, according to Ortner, 'seemed to view climbing as

embodying a spirituality that was lacking in modern life'. Particularly, it was the crassness, noisiness and busyness of modern life that these early mountaineers sought to escape, as such modern manifestations inhibited reflection and the communion between self and nature. As Ortner (2001: 37) puts it,

> If modernity is vulgar and materialistic, crass and noisy, it is also soft, routinized, and boring. In this dull, modern world, the self loses its definition, its edge, its purpose, its honesty. Mountaineering on the other hand is difficult, dangerous, challenging; it makes the self-sharper, tougher, more honest, more real.

She goes on to quote an American climber in the seventies: 'Overcoming boredom is one of the main challenges to many people who find themselves in a world where it is nearly impossible to find real adventure' (2001: 38). Ortner offers the basic equation that '[f]or these men, modernity is the problem, and mountaineering is the solution' (ibid).

While Ortner observes that the 'counter-modern discourse of mountaineering' runs through the entire twentieth century, it undergoes significant variations in different eras. In the early period, which she identities as occurring between the twenties and forties, mountaineering was heavily influenced by late nineteenth and early twentieth century romanticism. The ethos of romanticism, she says, is ultimately 'organised around the desire to transcend the limits of the self (…) so that one could rise above, transcend, previously assumed barriers and limitations' (39). It is easy to see, then, how climbing

mountains, let alone Himalayan Mountains, provided supreme opportunities for transcendence. Another aspect of the romantic ethos was the 'glorification of nature', which gained popularity in the West during the industrial revolution and was popularized by writers such as Rousseau, Goethe, Wordsworth and Coleridge in Europe, and Thoreau, Whitman and Emerson in the United States. All these authors, we might add, were avid travellers and advocated travel in nature as a form of spiritual purification and respite from the entanglements of modern social life.

Ortner explains how many early mountaineers incorporated elements of asceticism, mysticism, and/or moralism into their Himalayan adventures. Even mountaineers who did not speak of their journeys as 'mystical' often displayed anti-modern and purist streaks by denouncing the use of oxygen and other modern technology in climbing. Such technologies ran counter to the idea of mountaineering being about pushing the boundaries and refining the self. She quotes the famous Himalayan climber, Bill Tillman, who in 1948 voiced his protest against the 'cold-blooded' ways of scientific interest in climbing Mount Everest:

> No, I merely ask that mountaineering and science should be kept distinct, in particular that the problem of climbing Mount Everest, like any other mountain, should be left to mountaineers to solve, and those actively engaged with solving it should not be expected to enter what Goethe calls the charnel house of science (in Ortner 2001: 41).

In 1953, Edmund Hillary and Tenzin Norgay were the first to summit Mount Everest. Hillary, who remarked how his intention had been 'to

knock the bastard off', represents what Ortner calls the 'hyper-masculine sahib [westerner]' that characterized Himalayan mountaineering of the fifties and sixties. As every Himalayan peak came to be 'conquered' by the early 1970s and the region saw more and more climbing teams every year, we can see that mountaineering paved the way for tourism. Johnston and Edwards (1994, 462-3) observe how increasingly visitor numbers occurred in conjunction with improvements in technology, including climbing equipment, more accurate maps, access to weather reports and improved communications between climbers and base camps. Moreover, the establishment of airstrips in remote regions, as well as the general lowered cost of air travel has led to 'dramatic increases in the number of people travelling up and down the mountains', and to the region in general. As Zafren (2007: 279) notes, the opening of Nepal and Tibet to foreign tourism gave rise to a 'modern generation of secular pilgrims', which he playfully calls the 'trekker sect' and the 'climber sect'. The 'flower-children' of sixties and seventies were another type of pilgrim drawn to the Himalayas.

The hippie trail and the emergence of the Himalayas as a mass tourist destination

Ortner observes that by the late 1960s, Nepal was probably the biggest magnet in the world for the countercultural lifestyle. At this time, '[h]ippies from virtually every nation flocked there for the cheap living, "Eastern religion," and legal marijuana... ' (2001: 186). Only opening its doors to outsiders in the 1950s, Nepal (2000: 663) notes that by 1961, a little over 4,000 tourists had travelled to Nepal. Even then, these early

visitors' trips were mostly limited to Kathmandu, owing to the lack of transportation and communication facilities outside the valley). Fifteen years later, more than 100,000 tourists had visited the country and the tourism revenue had quickly become a central facet of Nepal's economy. Ortner, who first conducted fieldwork in the Solu-Khumbu region around Mount Everest in the early sixties and had only encountered a handful of foreigners, revisits her original field notes from the mid-seventies: 'We trekked from Thami to Lukla in two days. There were a *million* tourists. Both the trail and Lukla itself were *awful*, essentially *polluted* with tourists' (Ortner, 2001: 199 emphasis original).

Many of the tourists in the late sixties and seventies came from Europe, where they travelled overland on what became known as the 'hippie trail'. As the 'end of the road', Nepal became a pilgrimage centre for those seeking alternative lifestyles. In 2005, British author Rory Maclean remade the classic hippie trail, which he depicts in his travel narrative, *On the hippie trail from Istanbul to Kathmandu* (Maclean 2006). Investigating the changes the 'end of the road' (Kathmandu) had undergone since the sixties, he speaks with Desmond, a long-term resident of Nepal who explains his feelings upon arrival from Ireland in the late sixties:

> …I fell in love with those peaks,' Desmond says, nodding in the direction of the Himalayas. 'I wanted to know the name of every one, and the names of the gods who live there. Way over there somewhere…' he gestures towards Tibet '…is Mount Kailas, the spiritual centre of the universe. Man, it's from there that the gods descend from Heaven. A stairway *from* heaven at my doorstep (Maclean, 2006: 272).

In the new millennium, like Ortner, Desmond laments about the overrun of tourists in Nepal:

> Kathmandu's full of people reading the Lonely Planet guide to Vietnam. They sit in cafés sending each other text mesSages. I mean, at their age we wanted to get into each other and society, not to live in a meltdown world. We didn't have guidebooks; we didn't even know the *name* of the next country. 'What's this place called? Bhutan? Where the hell is Bhutan?' he shouts, his voice filled with angry energy (271).

In his collection of travel essays, *Video Night in Kathmandu: Tales from the not so Far East*, Pico Iyer (2001) similarly depicts the changes Nepal has undergone amidst the boom of global tourism. Disillusioned with the spectre of neo-liberalism in his native USA, Iyer writes of his hopes for Nepal.

> I had great expectations for Kathmandu – subject of Cat Stevens songs, long-time mecca of the hippies, sometime colony of the professional idealists of the Peace Corps (…) Hessean journeyers to the East, propelled by a social conscience, a lifetime of Dead-mania, a kind of improvised innocence – this was exactly what I dreamed of finding in Kathmandu (78-79).

Iyer's nostalgic imaginings and pilgrimage-like approach to travelling to Nepal leads to disappointment, however, as evidenced in his ironic chapter title: 'The quest becomes a trek'. By the late eighties, when the essay was first published, Iyer found Nepal a place which had embraced cultural commodification in the name of tourism revenue.

For twenty years now, it [Nepal] had cashed in on being the closest place on earth to the remotest place on earth, a country just around the corner from Shangri-La. And if Tibet's charm lay in its remoteness, Nepal's lay in its availability; a veteran of the mystic market, it knew exactly how to sell itself as a wholesale, second-hand Tibet. Thus the magic title of the Forbidden Land found its way into every single brand name: local stores were stocked not just with handcrafts, but with Tibetan handcrafts, Tibetan paintings, Tibetan bells, Tibetan scarves, Tibetan pizzas.

Nepal had the additional advantage of being on the fringes of India, and where India was still the biggest spiritual department store in the East, Nepal offered an economy-sized convenience store with many of the same goods at even better prices. And the country's hybrid mix of Buddhism and Hinduism, with bits of animism thrown in, allowed it to offer not just lamas, and not just yogis, but lamas and yogis thrown together in every kind of combination. Billboards all across town offered Thanka Painting courses, Himalayan Buddhist Meditation classes, sessions at the Himalayan Yogi Institute and yoga/masSage double-headers to keep every resident of Santa Cruz out of mischief for a decade (83).

Employing the irony characteristic of 'postmodern' travel writers, Iyer and Maclean express both nostalgia and critique surrounding the commodification of a 'mystical east' which has fallen prey to mass tourism. Within this critique is not only an ambiguous anti-modernity streak, but a subtle acknowledgement that tourism both produces and

paradoxically destroys its object of desire[5]. While not put in these terms, this points to what Ortner (2001: 17) refers to as the 'mutual production of the West and the Rest', or the idea that in their interactions and intertwinements, both groups – but particularly the one in the supposedly 'dominated' position (e.g. the Sherpas) – undergo changes. This 'mutual production' is also a central concern of Vincanne Adams' (1996) ethnography *Tigers of the Snow*, where she claims that Sherpas interpret themselves according to western textual representations of them and in doing so take on a 'virtual' identity (18-19). Drawing upon Ricouer's notion of *mimesis*, which as Ricouer notes is not a copy, but an inter-active, dialogic process of identity construction or creation, Adams (1996: 18) argues:

> Sherpas engage with Western representations of them, which begin as texts and end as images, in a manner which opens up and discloses ways of being Sherpa – ways created in the Western imagination but based, after all, on real experiences of Sherpa life.

Discussing encounters between locals and foreigners in Nepal's Langtang National Park, Lim (2008) focuses on the 'mutual gazing' of (relatively) wealthy tourists-trekkers from the West and local villagers. Relating such encounters to the shaping and re-working of the imagination of each other's lives, Lim (2008: 389) argues that 'the interaction dynamics between tourists and host communities can be

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[5] An idea central to MacCannell's (1976) seminal work on tourism as quest for 'authenticity', which will be examined further in chapter five.

characterized as a constant shifting of subjectivity along a spectrum marked by the two poles of reverie and emplacement'. The author utilizes the notions of 'reverie' and 'emplacement' from Simmel's theory of sociation, with reverie referring to the 'displacement of the subject', or a state in which the spectator is situated in an Olympian position that affords a sense of detachment in relation to the scenery under gaze. According to Lim (2008: 389):

> In a state of reverie, the spectator becomes a voyeur who feels a partial escape from temporal flux, while at the same time attributes qualities of completion, stability and innocence to the landscape, hence lifting out of the vicissitudes of history.

Emplacement, on the other hand, refers to a re-situating of the subject 'in a historically and existentially specific condition ... [when] the subject is metaphorically brought down to earth from the Olympian heights of reverie'. Reveries such as those experienced by tourist-trekkers in the Himalayas appear to be founded upon the dominant representations which the region is generally *known* and marketed for, while emplacements represent ruptures, breaks or what might be called the shock of the real.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to demonstrate that throughout history, the dominant representations of the middle Himalayan region have reproduced a particular imagery of mystery and enchantment. These representations first came from wandering holy men who ventured forth and consecrated sites in the Himalayan landscapes. Mythic tales of 'walking with the gods' on the 'roof of the world' spread as

Himalayan pilgrimages gradually became an institution of Hinduism and Buddhism. Viewed through a Durkheimian lens, over time the Himalayas became a 'collective representation', an embodiment of societal and spiritual ideals of purity and transcendence. Durkheim noted that as social constructions, representations transform within the socio-historical conditions that frame and reproduce them. As I have tried to demonstrate, certain continuities appear to exist between early local representations of the Himalayas and those later constructed by the west. The Himalayas for both Hindu and Buddhist cultures and the West has been represented throughout history as a place of pilgrimage. However, Western representations of the region emerge under very different historical and cultural circumstances, and reflect certain particularly modern themes connected to the industrial revolution, post-Enlightenment secularization and the Romantic Movement with its re-sacralisation of nature, including mountains.

Modern Himalayan journeys appear to express desires for not only adventure and escape, but also a longing for stability and timelessness in a world of flux and change. As a place located geographically and symbolically above and beyond the profane world below, the Himalayas, as in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* are often represented according to a semiotics of opposition as a place out of time. This, I argue, relates to Eliade's notion of an *axis mundi* as a place existing *illo tempore* – in an eternal, mythic present and thus may reflect his theory that human beings have an archetypal 'nostalgia for paradise'. While an *axis mundi* is typically approached ritualistically, as in making a

pilgrimage to a sacred mountain such as Mount Kailas, in late modernity the situation is highly ambiguous.

As Bishop (2000: 15) observes, in contemporary times 'Shangri-La seems to be caught between being a utopia and a brand name, between being a tourist destination and the goal of spiritual pilgrimage, between a museum or a theme park and a political and spiritual summons'. In 2011, the Nepal government launched the Nepal Tourism Year campaign in the hopes of attracting over one million foreign visitors to the country, with the mission statement: 'to establish Nepal as a choice of premier holiday destination with a definite brand image' (Ministry of Tourism 2011). So what is this 'definite brand image', we may ask. From my readings in the history of Himalayan representations, it appears to be that of the adventure, exoticism and spiritual enchantment – the sum of which appears to serve as a utopian antidote to certain lackings of modern life. As part of the 'mystical East', the Himalayas appear as a 'therapeutic landscape' (Hoyez 2007), a place which promises adventure, escape, and spiritual wellbeing. Such promises are produced and reproduced via representations in various media. Chapter four will examine the connections between expectations, promises and representations and contemporary traveller's goals, motivations and hopes for travelling to the Himalayan region.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodological Wayfinding & Research Methods

In this chapter I discuss the methodological choices which guided my research. I reflect on the ontological and epistemological premises I followed and how these informed the data collected and analysed. While journeys, pilgrimages and mobility more generally were central topics, they also provide useful metaphors for describing the research process. As much of our everyday and theoretical understandings of social life are based upon and reflected through metaphors, they play in important role in this research (Lakoff and Johnson 1990; Ricœur 2006; Urry 2000: 21). Like a pilgrimage or journey, a large research project entails a series of stages; individual parts which build upon one another, altering the predicates of what came before, the unity of which forms an always emerging whole. Research also resembles a pilgrimage or quest in the sense that it is driven by a search for higher ideals – in this case knowledge, understanding and an expanded horizon.

Like the wayfarer, the researcher sets off with certain ideas, imaginings and goals, but without knowing exactly what will be discovered on the way and where they might end up. Since ancient times, the quest for knowledge begins in wonder and recognition of not knowing. In the case of this research, I wondered why certain people make journeys to a

certain place known as the Himalayas. I wondered what drove them there, what the experience of being there entailed and what it meant for them, and what Himalayan journeys might tell us about contemporary life in a broader sense. I also wondered how I too had come to have desires for travelling not only to the Himalayas, but also to many other places around the world. In short, this research was born from a basic anthropological question: what do people, including anthropologists, search for and find in other places and what does the will or desire to travel say about the human condition?

Whether by way of travel or research, or both, the search for understanding begins when there is awareness of an absence of knowledge and a desire to know. As Gadamer (2004) says in *Truth and Method*:

> Understanding begins … when something addresses us … This requires … the fundamental suspension of our own prejudices. But all suspension of judgments and hence, a fortiori, of prejudices, has the logical structure of a question. The essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open (298).

> In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know… The path of all knowledge leads through the question (357).

Research and journeys into the unknown thus begin by asking questions and choosing to go in search of understandings. As with travelling, it entails setting off and entering a period of errancy, nomadism, movement and transience during which time the

researcher-wayfarer faces a series of challenges, problems, trials and tribulations, which must be overcome for further progress to be made. Research thus appears to be about both *transition* and *potentiality* – the actualization of the 'what may be' and the 'not yet', much like the Turners' (1978: 32) reflections on the significance of liminality in pilgrimage. The goal and result of pilgrimage and research is ideally a transformation of self-understanding, knowledge, an enlarged horizon and a new way of relating to the world. Yet because individuals are always situated in particular social, cultural and historical horizons, knowledge is necessarily partial and limited. Along with the notion of journeying or wayfaring, the phenomenological metaphor of horizon is another tool frequently employed in this thesis to refer both to the researcher's reflexive epistemological positioning, and to the analysis of travelling presented here.

Horizon as travel and epistemological metaphor

Horizon signifies both the limited range of thought and experience and the possibility of expanding this field to encompass a broader view. As an epistemological concept emphasising the subjectivity of experience, horizon is used 'to characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy and the way one's range of vision is gradually expanded' (Gadamer 2004: 302; Lima 2003). Casting radical doubt on objectivism and attending first to the 'natural attitude' and our practical engagements with 'the things themselves', phenomenologists argue that knowledge of the world comes to us first through pre-reflexive experience and practical engagement in the world (Heidegger 1996; Husserl 2012; Merleau-Ponty 2002). Following a phenomenological, pragmatist and critical realist epistemology, in this research I do not

deny that a 'real world' exists, but assume that human access to and knowledge of reality is always limited and biased.

These include the fact that knowledge is shaped by relative sociocultural and historical conditions which are embedded in experience and re-present the world in specific ways. Moreover, sense experience and perception is mediated by culturally and species relative modes of bodily schema and embodied cognition (Dreyfus 2002; Merleau-Ponty 2002). While these various bodily medias allow for sensing, interpreting and coping in the world, they do not reveal a complete picture of the world. Due to the possibility of altered and expanded experience, contingency and being other than who or what we are, horizons as subjective versions of the world are subject to change. To illustrate, let us consider the experience of walking towards a distant horizon. Once that point on the horizon appears to have been reached, a new horizon and an endless succession of horizons are revealed. It is not only impossible to survey the surrounding and non-appropriable horizon or take it in completely, we can also never walk around or go beyond the horizon; as we move forward, we never come closer to it, and it always slips away. Even more, as we are watching the horizon it changes, moving with the situated one who observes it. Thus we cannot reach the horizon, because it is moving at the same time as we are moving. In this way, horizons are invariable and immutable. In phenomenology, the notion of horizon is also used to describe what forms a background; that is, the subject directs his or her attention to an object in the foreground, and everything else becomes a blur. The horizonal, differing nature of experience leads Husserl (2012: 92) to reflect: 'All actual experience refers beyond itself to possible experience,

which themselves again point to new possible experiences, and so on infinitum'.

Highlighting the existence of multiple realities, the notion of horizon denotes a fallibilist or critical realist epistemology in the sense that perspectives differ for different individuals, cultures, historical epochs and also different scientific disciplines (Bhaskar 1975; Kuhn 2012; Schutz 1995). While there is no 'god's eye view' from which to objectively judge the world, this does not preclude strengthening our epistemological moorings through reflexive awareness of the social conditions of knowledge (Bourdieu et al. 1991; Dewey 2005). Epistemological reflexivity, encourages researchers to 'recognize and to work to neutralize the specific determinism to which their innermost thoughts are subjected...' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992a: 46). Practicing critical reflexivity throughout this research I strived to recognize how my own biases, prejudices and values were present in my interpretive endeavours. At the same time, I observed how my horizon of understanding changed and expanded, continuously revealing an endless succession of horizons and opening new possibilities.

While archetypal journeys such as the *Odyssey* conclude with the protagonist's eventual return to the place departed from, he does so in such a transformed state his once familiar home is barely recognizable. This idea of transformed homecoming has been poetically expressed in modern times by T.S. Elliot at the end of his *Four Quartets*:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring

> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

Hence while journeys, explorations and research implies an eventual return or conclusion, the sense of an ending does not mean the journey truly ends. Whether returning from a pilgrimage or a spell of fieldwork, narrative constructions continue to construct the stories we tell others and ourselves as new knowledge, experience and interpretations continue on conscious and subconscious levels. As I explore further in chapter four, the unstable, recursive, and temporal nature of knowledge and meaning problematizes notions of clear beginnings, endings and final conclusions, as well as notions of singular, objective truths. Rather than seeing this research as the final word on Himalayan travel, more humbly I view it as a project which emerged and found expression under particular socio-historical conditions. Metaphorically, this research may be called a journey in the sense it was driven by intention and what Elizabeth Povinelli (2006: 97-8) describes as a 'self-conscious commitment to self-elaboration'. However, as Povinelli further points out, 'a journey is not intentional in another sense; the agent is not the monadological author of his life'. This double sidedness of experience, the entanglement of structure and agency, pattern and chance, order and chaos, seen in all the great journey myths, is perhaps what journeys and research teach us most.

Moving with a reflexive episteme, I sought to explore the desires, imaginings, experiences and self-understandings of travellers in the middle Himalayan region. Walking on roads and trails, riding planes, trains and buses, conversing with fellow travellers on their journeys through Nepal and northern India, my own journey as a researcher and

fellow traveller was inextricably intertwined in what I consider to be a co-constructed, dialogic project. The voices in the polyphonic and polysemous story presented here were not only those people I encountered while travelling; rather, friends and colleagues, supervisors and the many authors I read and carried out silent conversations with throughout the research. Having proposed and explained the metaphors of the journey and horizon, I will now discuss the methodological framework which guided the preliminary research phase, or setting forth in the same light.

Because methodological choices co-construct their objects of study, guide data collection and analysis and also inform epistemological and ontological positions, it is important to discuss the basic premises of those methodological choices. After outlining key principles of qualitative methodology, I discuss the complexity and mobilities paradigms before addressing the specific research methods I employed. This will proceed from pre-fieldwork interviews, media sampling, narrative and textual analysis, followed by a discussion of the mobile ethnographic and autoethnographic approach I followed.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methods offer ways for researching and giving verbal descriptions of a given phenomenon under study. Studying subjective phenomena such as traveller's motives, perceptions, self-interpretations and the meanings they attributed to their experiences are best suited to a qualitative methodology. As opposed to quantitative approaches, which tend to abstract phenomena out of life-worldly contexts and interpret data numerically, qualitative approaches recognize the central

and inescapable role of language and interpretation in human enquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Gadamer 2004; Rabinow and Sullivan 1987). Since I sought to understand Himalayan travel experiences from the points of view of the travellers themselves, a qualitative methodology which acknowledged the primacy of language was deemed the most appropriate.

Interpretative research techniques attempt to both describe and de-code social phenomena occurring in life-worldly contexts. Such techniques tend to recognize language as the basis for reconstructions and interpretations of 'reality', and are more orientated towards revealing and interpreting meanings than quantifying them. A methodology which acknowledges the primacy and socially produced nature of language allows for probing the various subjective, changing and particular perceptions of reality that subjects communicate, while avoiding as much as possible making positive truth claims about any singularly understood, absolute reality (Baert 2005; Bazin 2003; Berger and Luckmann 1966; Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Rabinow and Sullivan 1987; Rorty 1993; Temple and Young 2004).

I designed a multi-method, triangulated study which combined ethnographic fieldwork and media sampling as the primary techniques for data collection and thematic, narrative, and textual analysis as the primary techniques for data analysis and interpretation. Following a relational ontology and a reflexive epistemology, the research design sought to discover relationships, patterns and themes between contemporary Himalayan travel and broader sociocultural, historical, material and political processes. These relations were explored primarily through interviews with travellers and participant

observation at and between multiple sites in Nepal and northern India during the first half of 2011. Although I began this research with certain assumptions about Himalayan travel and travellers, I did not begin with a singular theory or situated in a particular research paradigm. As an exploratory project, the basic criteria I established for this research were that it be data-driven, interpretativist, critical and reflexive.

As the task at hand involved synthesizing fieldwork observations with interviews and situating these in a broader socio-historical milieu, a qualitative methodology informed primarily by phenomenology, hermeneutics and Bourdieu's 'structural constructivism' was found to be an effective combination for integrating micro, meso and macro levels of analysis. Phenomenology and phenomenological hermeneutics was well suited for thick description and microanalysis of travellers' experiences, impressions, perceptions and self-interpretations. However, it was important to situate these in a broader global context, acknowledging the socio-historical conditions which made such travel possible. Thus, a relational, historical perspective on global mobilities, pilgrimage and tourism networks and infrastructure, transport industries and information communication technologies were considerations that constituted the meso level. The macro or meta level aimed at viewing contemporary Himalayan travel in the *longue durée* – focusing on certain continuities and discontinuities with the past, exploring mythic archetypes and addressing basic existential and anthropological questions surrounding the human as a traveller, a seeker, a *viator* (Marcel 1951).

In adopting a multi-method, trans-disciplinary, as well as para-paradigmatic approach, I accepted that this implied not necessarily

producing a neatly framed, monotone portrait of Himalayan travel, but 'a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage – a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 6). Recognizing the limitations of any singular theoretical paradigm or disciplinary approach, as much as possible I strove to cultivate and maintain a holistic methodology in accordance with the principles of the systems and complexity paradigms, outlined as follows.

Complexity, process and a logic of relations

The complexity paradigm represents a dynamic, non-linear mode of researching which aims at integrating knowledge from across the life sciences, social sciences and humanities (Morin 2008; Urry 2003, 2005). Complexity thinking requires researchers to remain present to the fact that being in the world has never been a singular or purely human affair. As 'dividual individuals' (Strathern 2002), humans as relational beings coexist within and are co-constituted by shared social, biological and physiochemical environments. Enfolded into a dynamic whole, these relational networks and assemblages form systems of immense complexity (Capra 2005b; Latour 2005; Luhmann 2003; Nowotny 2005). As Polkinghorne (1988: 1) observes, '[h]uman existence consists of stratified systems of differently organised realms of reality – the material realm, the organic realm, and the mental'. Rather than assuming reality is knowable in its entirety, complexity and systems perspectives characterize the world as a dynamic, relational environment comprised of intersecting processes, contingencies and emergent structures.

Existing within and constituted by complex relational systems, human beings have what Polkinghorne describes as a 'synthetic kind of existence in which the realms of matter, life, and meaning are fused' (1988: 2). While human beings rely on language, numbers and other representational mediums to organise dynamic, continuous experience into meaningful, coherent episodes and discrete units, it is important for researchers to recognize not only the supreme reliance upon and limitations of language, but also its socially constructed basis and ontological arbitrariness. As a socially produced system of classification which as Derrida (1991: 64) – following Saussure – notes, has not fallen from the sky, language and knowledge more generally does not reflect an objective reality as it is (Rorty 2009). As systems theorist Niklas Luhmann (1994: 25) observes, communication does not communicate the world, but serves to divide it. This all implies that although language allows for making reality comprehensible for human beings, by no means does language mean the whole of reality is communicable.

In this thesis, I have followed a path which recognizes both the centrality of language to human experience, yet casts radical doubt on language by recognizing its inherent limitations. Turning to the body, affect and situating the human 'dividual' in a complex logic of relations, I engaged with certain post-humanist literature and imminent critique (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Haraway 2008; Heidegger 1978; Lash 2010; Latour 1993; Serres 2007, 2009; Sloterdijk 2009a, 2011). Post-humanism does not suggest that the human has somehow disappeared, but merely represents an attempt to describe the human in different terms from those of traditional humanism, which since Descartes and the Enlightenment have emphasized humans as autonomous agents

guided by reason. Taking into account the dynamic relations which constitute a complex and always more than human reality, post-human perspectives aim to resituate or reassemble the human without 'destroying their humanity' (Latour 1999: 271).

Keeping in the mind that representations of reality are necessarily limited, reductive and political, I take complexity science more as an ideal, a guiding and reflexive principle to strive for rather than a methodological procedure to follow. It is a holistic way of thinking which advances a methodology of both multiplicity and radical interdependency, proceeding by differentiating within a unity rather than integrating dualities (Lee 2012; Morin 1999). Serving to bridge conceptual and disciplinary gaps, as well intra-disciplinary ones, such as that between biological and sociocultural anthropology, the complexity turn also allows for integrating non-western modes of thought. For instance, complexity, systems and post-human theories find resonance with eastern philosophies such as Taoism and Buddhism – both of which have also implicitly informed my thinking – in respect to their mutual emphasis on ontological relationism, process and non-duality (Capra 2005a; Varela et al. 1991). An affinity between complexity and eastern metaphysics is a dynamic, non-linear understanding of reality which emphasizes temporality, chaos, contingency and a logic of relations (Serres 2003), as opposed to static, binary categories defined by unchangeable essences.

The Buddhist notion of *sunyata* or 'emptiness' was incorporated into the reflexive episteme and perspective of complexity I followed. The Dalai Lama (2005: 46-47) explains *sunyata* as follows:

At its heart is the deep recognition that there is a fundamental disparity between the way we perceive the world, including our own experience in it, and the way things actually are. In our day-to-day experience, we tend to relate to the world and to ourselves as if these entities possessed self-enclosed, definable, discrete and enduring reality. For instance, if we examine our own conception of selfhood, we will find that we tend to believe in the presence of an essential core to our being, which characterizes our individuality and identity as a discrete ego, independent of the physical and mental elements that constitute our existence. The philosophy of emptiness reveals that this is not only a fundamental error but also the basis for attachment, clinging and the development of our numerous prejudices. According to the theory of emptiness, any belief in an objective reality grounded in the assumption of intrinsic, independent existence is simply untenable. All things and events, whether 'material', mental or even abstract concepts like time, are devoid of objective, independent existence.

Although I had previous knowledge of the concept of *sunyata*, my reflections on emptiness, complexity and human 'dividuality' crystallized during/emanated from the fieldwork experience. As with complexity science, process philosophy, Buddhist and Epicurean metaphysics, a focus on motion similarly underlies the mobilities paradigm, which also served as a major methodological mooring of this research.

A world in motion: the mobilities paradigm

Related to the complexity paradigm, the 'mobilities turn' represents a broad project aimed at establishing a 'movement-driven' social science (Appadurai 1996; Bauman 1998, 2000; Clifford 1997; Cresswell 2006;

Cresswell and Merriman 2011; Elliott and Urry 2010; Greenblatt 2010; Lash 2010; Merriman 2012; Urry 2000, 2007). According to two central proponents of mobilities research, the term 'mobilities' refers to 'movement, potential movement and blocked movement, as well as voluntary/temporary immobilities, practices of dwelling and 'nomadic' place-making are all conceptualized as constitutive of economic, social and political relations' (Büscher and Urry 2009: 100). The mobilities paradigm serves to critique and reorient traditional social science approaches, which have tended towards viewing static, place-bound and face-to-face interactions as constitutive of social realities.

As Büscher et al. (2011: 5) observes, '[m]uch social science presumes a 'metaphysics of presence', proposing that what is in the immediate presence of others represents the 'real' basis of social existence. Striving to overcome positivist epistemologies that rely on the visible and immediately observable, mobilities research emphasizes flows and fluidity, networks and assemblages which connect and constitute humans and non-humans, technologies, capital, institutions, biological and material processes. Like complexity theory, mobile methodology follows relational, process and vitalist ontologies, recognizing with thinkers from Lucretius to Spinoza, Marx, Deleuze and others that there are not only relations of life, but *forces of life* which humans beings are co-constituted and moved by (Büscher and Urry 2009: 100). Lash (2010) observes how vitalism, in contradistinction to mechanism is back on the agenda for social scientists during what has been called the 'ontological turn' occurring in the new millennium (Escobar 2007; Rollason 2008). Lash (2010: 22) identifies three central dimensions of vitalism as follows:

- Movement, or flux, which entails a metaphysics of emergence, becoming and deterritorialization.

- Non-linearity and self-organization, corresponding to contemporary processes of informationalisation, networks and globalisation.

- Monism – ontologically speaking, there is no fundamental dualism between beings or entities; there is only difference.

Vitalist and relational ontologies view reality as a complex, multi-layered, interconnected and emergent process. In accordance with the basic principles of ancient and modern physics, as well as certain non-western ontologies such as those of Buddhism and Taoism, mobility as an meta-concept applies from molecular to global and even interplanetary levels (Merriman 2012: 6). Following this perspective, I did not consider contemporary Himalayan travel as an isolated, micro case study, but as a relational process which intersected with broader social and political orders and also encompassed material, ecological and non-human dimensions (Cudworth and Hobden 2011; Urry 2003, 2007). Being sensitive to the micro-, meso- and macro-structures and the interplay between these multiple levels is indeed necessary for research which recognizes mobility as a complex, diverse, multidimensional phenomenon (D'Andrea et al. 2011: 158). Integrating 'the fleeting, multi-sensory, distributed, mobile and multiple, yet local, practical and order making of social and material realities, researchers come to understand movement not as only governed by rules but as methodically generative' (Büscher et al. 2011: 7). Büscher et al. (2011: 5) identify five interdependent 'mobilities' that produce and reproduce social life across time and space, including:

- *Corporeal travel* of people for work, leisure, migration, etc.

- *Physical movement* of objects.

- *Imaginative travel* effected through various mediums of communication.

- *Virtual travel* that enables presence and action at a distance.

- *Communicative travel* via various present and tele-present modes of 'contact'.

These five overlapping forms of travel were all considered in the course of this research and taken as a complex, ambiguous, overlapping 'whole'. Mobile methodologies also require attending to rhythms and intensities of movement, was well as moments of pause and a politics of (im)mobility (Cresswell 2010; Holmes et al. 2011). The embodied and cultural dimensions of crossing boundaries were themes of particular importance in this research. Now that I have outlined the basic methodological contours which informed this research, I will move into a discussion of the data collection processes and the research methods I employed.

Pre-fieldwork data collection: initial interviews, textual and thematic analysis

Although this research was to be centred primarily on a mobile, multi-sited ethnography, before departing for Nepal and India I carried out six in-depth, semi-structured interviews with people who had formerly travelled to the Himalayan region one or more times. I met these participants through personal and professional networks I was affiliated with. The only selection criteria for participants at this point were that they had travelled to the middle Himalayan region for non-instrumental, recreational purposes. These initial interviews served as a piloting of the interview questions I was to bring into the field, and

served to help me to refine the questions and raise others I had not considered.

The interviews took place both in Wellington and Auckland, primarily in cafes or on the campuses of Victoria and Massey universities. The method of recording was taking notes on the spot and writing down as much as I could recall immediately after the interviews had concluded, noting and analysing topics, patterns and themes which emerged. As a process of data collection, these initial interviews and later those in the field were not seen as an entirely separate process from the data analysis. In other words, interpretative analysis did not begin post facto, but was generated during data collection and recursively built upon over the course of the entire research period.

In all six cases, I had follow-up interviews either in person or via email. These back and forth, dialogic exchanges proved to be very rich sources of data in that they allowed for probing further, seeking clarifications and elaborations. Moreover, in most cases, these respondents took the time and liberty to expand on themes and experiences of personal significance, simultaneously raising and answering questions that had not been prompted by the researcher. These written email exchanges came to resemble journal or diary method in that the participants had relative degrees of freedom and space to express matters of personal significance. Three of the respondents also volunteered to share their travel journals and photo collections with me, which also became sources of data I analysed. As important as co-present interviews are, I found that the written medium of email exchanges in many cases elicited clearer, more reflective responses to my questions, while also

creating space for other topics to be raised. The research was thus partly driven by the participants themselves.

Sharing stories: narrative knowing as temporal sense making

Along with a set of relatively consistent themes and patterns, what I discovered from these initial interviews and in subsequent ones in the field was that most people were quite happy to have the opportunity to share stories of their travel experiences. This was a fortuitous situation in the sense that the interviewees got to tell their stories to an interested listener who in return received the gift of storied data. These dialogic encounters revealed the human tendency to tell stories, which has been shown to be a fundamental technique for organising and maintaining continuity in experience and personal identity (J. S. Bruner 2002; Polkinghorne 1988; Ricœur 1984, 1985). In the case of post-traveller interviews, I found that their retellings often facilitated an imaginary journey into the past, which came to life in the present. Moreover, travellers in the field often connected their present journeys to stories from the past, and also projected potential stories into the future. This pattern reflects not only the human propensity to construct reality through narrative, but the more basic existential condition of time consciousness, as examined extensively in phenomenology and process philosophy (Bergson 2007; Deleuze 2002b; Heidegger 1996; Husserl 1999). Husserl formulated temporality as follows: situated in a continuous present, human beings simultaneously project into the future ('protension') while bringing what has past ('retention') into a future oriented present.

Due to the instability of meaning and memory, interviews both in the field and post-facto were accepted with both gratefulness and criticality. For post-facto travellers, the time lapse and distance from the immediacy of the experience allowed for the possibility that different narrative understandings had emerged over time as new knowledge and experiences caused horizons to shift. This is not to say that interviews of the moment yield data that is any more or less objectively 'true' than those after the fact; with Nietzsche (1982: 458) we can say that there are no facts, only interpretations.

Often times those travellers I interviewed in the field, while able to articulate specific impressions, feelings and experiences, had a difficult time answering questions surrounding the larger meaning of their journey. Plausibly, this was because the experience was still unfolding and the story was in the making. On the other hand, post-facto travellers were generally more adept at expressing the overall meaning of the experience and narrating it like a story with a standard plot structure of beginning, middle and end.

Media Sampling

During the same period I conducted the initial interviews in New Zealand, I collected a sample of various media texts related to Himalayan travel. For this, I visited public libraries and bookstores, collecting guidebooks, travel literature, magazines and other materials which a person interested in the region would be likely to encounter. I also conducted internet key words searches, visited websites and blogs related to Himalayan travel, and watched popular films and documentaries. These media texts were subjected to thematic analysis,

in which I identified reoccurring patterns, motifs and representations of the Himalayan region. As a secondary data set, thematic analysis of media texts was triangulated with the interviews and participant observation in order to increase validity and reliability.

Mobile reflexive ethnography

Eventually, after a year of research in New Zealand and having gained ethics approval, it came time to depart for the field. As Rabinow (1977: 3) reflects, a major attraction of anthropology has been its insistence on getting out of the library, venturing out into the world and 'being there'. In its emphasis on meaning-centred travel, anthropology shares certain similarities to reflexive forms of movement such as pilgrimage (Clifford 1997; E. Cohen 1979; Morinis 1992b). Recent practices of 'multi-sited' (Coleman and Von Hellermann 2011; Falzon 2009; Marcus 1995) and 'mobile ethnography' (Atkinson et al. 2008: 165; Büscher et al. 2011: 9) in particular can be viewed with pilgrimage as forms of what Coleman and Eade (2004: 18) call 'meta-movement'; that is, mobility with a degree of reflexivity as to its meaning, form and function. Meta-movement proved to be an apt description for my mobile fieldwork practice and a broader travel experience which brought me on a circuitous journey from New Zealand to Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, India and Thailand before touching back down in New Zealand. The various forms and conditions of mobility which constituted my own journey and global travel more generally became a central topic of reflection. Attending to various modes of transportation and the institutional and technological networks which supported them – that is, the meso and macro dimensions – I also attended closely to the more micro role of the mobile body. This was to be not only a mobile reflexive ethnography,

but an embodied and multi-sensorial ethnography (Monaghan 2006; Pink 2009; Porcello et al. 2010; Stoller 1989, 1997; A. Turner 2000; Vannini et al. 2012).

The travelling body as medium and tool for research

The sensing body was significant to this research on multiple levels. First, there was the basic existential condition of my and other bodies moving, acting and being acted upon in a shared life-worlds. Since being-in-the-world also means 'being-with' (Heidegger 1996: 114-22), travelling and researching are not only corporeal and intersubjective encounters, but intercorporeal ones which take place in and across shared places, spaces and times and implicate human and non-human dimensions. Ethnographic fieldwork, while usually relying primarily or solely on language as its final representative medium, is first experienced through various bodily senses, including touch, taste, sight and sound (Stoller 1989). As forms of somatic knowledge, sense impressions, intuitions, affect and emotion play an important role in both travelling and researching, despite being traditionally downplayed in academic research (Csordas 1993; Devereux 1967; Wetherell 2012).

The encounters I had with travellers in the field were by no means limited to language alone, but consisted of experiences of mutual perceptual awareness of 'body hexis'. Bourdieu (2002: 87) describes body hexis as 'a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic (…) linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body, tools, and charged with a host of social meaning and values'. The

'collection of ways in which our bodies are conditioned to habitually stand, speak, walk, and move is therefore a central means by which our identities become somatically informed and grounded' (Throop and Murphy 2002: 187). Largely beyond conscious awareness, people constantly sense, intuit or 'read' the body hexis of others, assessing and placing them in relative social categories. In the field, I observed both how others perceived me and I them, and how this impacted communication scenarios. Many of the interviews or conversations I had with travellers were one-off encounters that were initiated by me in social contexts such as cafes, guesthouses, at temples, or while riding buses and trains. Because I was essentially a stranger who approached others with an agenda to gain data – I was aware of how my approach, including body hexis and my verbal language influenced the encounters.

Travelling as practice

Placing emphasis on the bodily, sensorial and affective dimensions of travelling, I also approached travel and research alike as forms of practice. Generally speaking, theories of practice seek to explain 'the relationship(s) that obtain between human action(s), on the one hand, and some global entity we may call "the system" on the other' (Ortner 1984: 148). Marx (1977) may be the forbearer of the 'practice turn' with his famous pronouncement in the *Theses on Feuerbach*:

> All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

For Marx and future practice theorists, social relations are produced and enacted through practices; by doing, acting in the world. Methodologically, practice theories proceed from the position that *praxis* precedes *theoria*; implying that theoretical knowledge is a socially produced reflection which emerges first from practical engagements with the world (Arendt 1977; Bourdieu 1990b, 2000; de Certeau 1984; Dreyfus 1991; Heidegger 1996). In other words, knowledge is not product of decontextualized mental representations which construct webs of significance and discursive worlds over and above physical, material strata. Practice theories, by turn, emphasize a post-Cartesian, non-representative theory of knowledge, which is imminent and grounded in practice (Anderson and Harrison 2010; Bourdieu 2002; Merleau-Ponty 2002; Schatzki et al. 2001).

While practices tend to follow patterns, rules, habits and bodily schemes which rely upon 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi 2009), these are historically and culturally specific and take place mostly below the level of conscious awareness. From Marx to Heidegger, Dewey to Bourdieu, practice is taken as an evolutionary mode of coping and adapting to worldly circumstances. As Shusterman (1999: 20) explains:

> We develop these practices in order to help us cope with our (social as well as natural) environment (by both adjustment to it and transformation of it) and in order to advance our purposes which themselves are shaped by that environment, itself a changing and changeable product of history.

My own gravitation towards and use of practice theories in this thesis emerged primarily through the fieldwork experience. In the field, my

attention was drawn to the practical nature of travelling; of coping and failing to cope in foreign environments, of adapting to changing conditions and the role of habit and bodily schemes in shaping practical sense. Coming to understand Himalayan travel as embodied practice *and* a form of potentially transformational praxis, my thinking was drawn to the practical character of life more generally. This meant attending not only to the everyday practices of the main subject of this research – the travellers – but to the practiced life-worlds of locals as well, and the social realities being produced through relations and interactions between the two.

Finally, this was a practical, embodied ethnography in the sense that consequently, I arrived in the field in ill health and continued to be intermittently sick over the course of the entire fieldwork period. This had a major impact on how I conducted the fieldwork and in part explains how the body, practice and complexity came to figure so prominently in the project as a whole. Sickness thus relates not only to the conditions under which I generally conducted the fieldwork, but how it informed my methodology more generally, as well as how my own story came to figure in the thesis.

Mobile research and the unanticipated consequences of worldly encounters

I took a circuitous route to arrive at the first site of ethnographic research, Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. After having made arrangements to travel from New Zealand to Nepal, I learned that a good friend would be getting married in Tokyo just before my intended date of departure. Considering I was on my way to Asia, despite its being the

largest continent on earth, I reasoned that I could stop by Tokyo and attend the wedding. This would also give me a chance to catch up with a few friends from the time I studied and lived in Japan, explore a job prospect at a university another friend was employed at, and revisit Kyoto, my favourite city in the world. From there I would carry on to Nepal and India. Along with reasoning that this side-trip connected indirectly with my research on mobilities, I also justified the trip to Japan with climactic considerations. There was no hurry to get to Nepal in February, as winter would still be lingering and arriving in early spring seemed sensible.

I reorganised my ticket and went to Japan, but not before a certain, highly personal event took place on the eve of my departure from New Zealand and delayed my trip by nearly two weeks. I will not go into details here and the only reason I mention it is because along with the following series of events recounted below, the confused thoughts and emotions born from this event in New Zealand came with me into the field and impacted the fieldwork experience. Despite the delay, I managed to attend my friend's wedding, arriving the day before. After a brief sojourn to Kyoto, I was returning to Tokyo on the *shinkansen* 'bullet train' when the massive magnitude nine earthquakes struck northern Japan on the afternoon of March 11, 2011. Our train arrived several hours behind schedule to a frantic, chaotic Tokyo, where tens of thousands were walking the streets due to the power and transportation cuts. Within the shell-shocked multitudes was my newlywed friend, Yukio, who walked four hours across the city to his apartment, where we met later that night.

Several strange days later, I found myself at Tokyo's Haneda airport, saying emotional farewells to my newlywed friends and preparing to depart the apocalyptic milieu of post-quake Japan. Riding a tram between terminals, I had offered a luggage-laden young woman my seat. This resulted in a casual conversation, which continued from the tram to the departure lounge. Her name was Adele. I learned that she was a native of Kuala Lumpur, and had been living in Tokyo for the past several years, where she was studying to be a *manga* (comic) illustrator. She was on her way back to Kuala Lumpur, or 'KL', as locals call it, by the order of parents. The earthquake had sent a shockwave of panic surrounding the possibility of a nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, just north of Tokyo.

Waiting to board our Air Asia flight, I asked my new acquaintance what would be good to do with a one-day layover in KL. Giving it just a moment's thought, she said, 'How about I show you? I have nothing planned.' Surprised at such a spontaneous and generous proposition, I briefly thought it over and said, 'Really? That'd be great. Are you sure you don't mind?' The fact was I had very little idea of what I was going to do in KL, as this layover was the effect of a series of flight readjustments I had made online while en route. Considering the circumstances, I felt fortunate to have a travel companion, and a local one at that. Moreover, being flexible, spontaneous, open to meeting new people and gaining glimpses into their lives seemed to be the beauty and value of travelling. Despite such intentions, with travelling into the unknown there is always the possibility that things will go wrong.

Arriving at five in the morning in Malaysia, I was glad to have a companion at the airport, which strangely enough looked nothing like the pictures I seen on the internet. After being scanned for nuclear radiation since we were coming from Japan, we collected our luggage and met Adele's parents, Gordon and Lily, kerbside. Adele quickly explained who her unexpected travel companion was and as if this was all very normal, we all loaded into the family mini-van. Lily offered us some Chinese-style dumplings and we set off to their home, after they stopped to show me the new government district of KL, which looked like a cross between a newly erected luxury resort and Mecca.

Image 12: Author in Kuala Lumpur's government district

Photo by Adele Chung

We arrived at the Chung's home, which was in a lush, tropical and seemingly middle-class suburb of KL. No sooner was I sat on the sofa and offered a cup of tea before there was an eruption of crackling

electricity and the sound of an adolescent male screaming from the kitchen. Everyone rushed over to find that Roy, Adele's sixteen year old brother, had just mangled his hand in an electric blender! Apparently he had stuck a knife or spoon in while the machine was in operation, which had proceeded to suck his hand down into the blades. Great panic and shouting in Mandarin, English and Malay ensued as we all looked in horror at Roy's disfigured hand and the crimson blood splattered about the kitchen counter.

Wrapping his hand in a bath towel, the whole family and I piled back into the mini-van and sped off towards the nearest emergency room. While we waited for Roy to have his hand stitched up, Gordon took Adele and me to a nearby Malay-Indian restaurant. Sipping sweet milk tea, we all pondered how someone could butcher his or her hand in a blender first thing in the morning. The food arrived and for the first time in my life, I ate curry for breakfast. It actually tasted rather good, though perhaps it was more the sheer novelty of the situation which impressed me most. *Here I am, in a little neighbourhood curry joint in Kuala Lumpur, eating breakfast with the Chung family. How did I get here? How did this happen?* I wondered.

I found myself not only feeling concern for Roy, but also somehow bonded to the Chung family by this bizarre, traumatic event. As we ate and talked, I felt this bond extending from the Chung side as well. In the few days after the earthquake in Japan, I had noticed a similar sense of bondedness and solidarity amongst people on both local and national levels. Scenes of catastrophic destruction and violence, the raw power and indifference of nature evoked both compassion and care for

the suffering and mindfulness of life's supreme vulnerability, the two of which seemed to strengthen social bonds.

Image 13: Curry breakfast with the Chung family,
somewhere in Kuala Lumpur.

Photo by author

After breakfast, we went back to the hospital, where we found Roy stitched and bandaged after the fateful blender attack. Back at the Chung's home, Adele's cousin Patricia came over and after a lunch consisting of numerous unfamiliar Malay-Chinese dishes, the pair offered to show me around downtown KL. After driving and walking around the bustling, cosmopolitan capital for the afternoon, we returned and ate yet another home-style meal prepared with obvious skill by Lily. With my evening flight to Bangkok – where I would have to spend one night before carrying on to Kathmandu in the morning – approaching, the Chung family insisted on delivering me to the airport. Feeling slightly guilty by inconveniencing them, I offered to take the train, but they insisted. Touched by their hospitality, the entire family and I piled once again into the mini-van and battled thick traffic for an hour and half to the airport. This road congestion meant time was tight and I was getting anxious about making the check in time. Alas, we

finally arrived at the airport where this eventful day had begun, and
Adele and Patricia accompanied me inside. Searching for the Thai Air
counter, it became apparent that no such counter existed. Unbeknownst
to me, it turned out there are two international airports in KL – the
main one and one servicing Air Asia and lower budget airlines. While
my morning flight from Tokyo had been on Air Asia, the evening's
flight on was on Thai Air and departed from the other airport, which
was about twenty or so kilometres away. Running back to the van, with
my flight leaving in thirty minutes, we sped off to the other airport.

We arrived just minutes before the flight was set to take off. Dashing
into the terminal, I was informed at the Thai Air counter that I was too
late. I pleaded and argued to no avail. Not only did I miss my flight, but
also I would receive no refund because I had already checked in online
and was thus considered a 'no show'. 'But I'm here!' I yelled. 'You see,
I'm not a no show. I show, I show!' No such luck – I was forced to buy a
brand new ticket for the next available flight, which was the following
morning. The Chung family felt really bad and offered me to come back
to their house, but it was far away and I was starting to feel that this
chance cosmopolitan meeting perhaps was not meant to be after all. I
thanked them for their hospitality, told them not worry about me and
we all said farewell. By this time, I was starting to feel odd, as if a fever
was coming on. My stomach cramped up and started making strange
sounds. I made the first of many desperate dashes to the bathroom.

I found a café that remained open all night and wasn't too far from the
bathroom. Ordering a mineral water, I settled in for a night at KL
International in the grips of a nascent fever. Breaking out in a cold
sweat, I put on a sweater, curled up into the foetal position in the café

booth. There were some suspicious characters milling about, so I locked my backpack to the leg of the table and tried to sleep with one eye open. I had to get up numerous times to use the bathroom, which of course involved unlocking and bringing my luggage with me. Needless to say, I did not get much sleep that night in the Kuala Lumpur International airport.

I made it to Bangkok the next morning feeling even worse – chilled to the core with a high fever and apparently food poisoning. Not that the well-intentioned Chungs poisoned the food they served me; I had merely ingested some foreign bacteria, parasites, viruses, or toxins which my body was unfamiliar with and eager to expel. My flight was full of Chinese nationals, mostly older folks who appeared to have been on a tour together. Many had iPhones or similar devices, which they were watching videos or listening to music on – not through headphones, but through the inbuilt, high pitched speakers. Add this to innumerable conversations overlapping across the isles and the atmosphere appeared as one of utter chaos – at least to me it did. Feeling too sick to be annoyed, I mostly stared in a feverish stupor at the scene around me, a scene which my co-travelling microbes and I were somehow a part of.

Donning a cowboy hat and boots, the older Chinese man sitting next to me consumed three flight-size bottles of red wine on ice as he watched some sort of Chinese comedy program on an iPhone knockoff. Every ten seconds or so, he would crack up wildly, and then turn around to speak with the row behind us, delivering me a blow to the body or head en route. The first few times I flashed him a weary scowl, but seeing he took no notice whatsoever, I simply accepted the blows as if

they were occurring not to 'me' and 'my body', but simply to *a body*. I recalled the question posed by William James ([1890] 2007: 291) in *The Principles of Psychology*: 'Our bodies themselves, are they simply ours, or are they us?' This was the beginning of many subsequent experiences which caused me to ponder basic questions such as this and prompted me to seriously reconsider what I knew, or thought I knew, about who or what a human being is. In the face of the bubbling intensity contained in the body of the plane, feeling utterly powerless, I had little choice other than to accept these circumstances, realizing once again that although this was a journey of intention, I was not the monadological author of my own life.

Even more interesting than the flight was when the plane landed. No sooner had the wheels touched the ground than seemingly every passenger was up out of their seats, jostling for luggage in the overhead compartments, shouting across the isles and making a break for the front of the plane. The female flight attendants, who first appeared young and docile, stepped in to take control of the erupting anarchy and started yelling furiously at the rioting passengers to sit down. Unfazed by the desperate attempts of the poor flight attendants, they pushed and shoved their way to the front of the plane. All the while I sat dumfounded by the spectacle, before finally dragging myself up the isles and into the Bangkok international terminal.

Recovering somewhat, I spent the two-hour layover observing my fellow passengers – a mixture of Nepalese, Indians, westerners and Japanese. I scribbled a few notes and took some photos of the futuristic terminal.

Image 14: Bangkok International terminal: time-space portal to Kathmandu

Photo by author

I considered approaching several of the solo travellers, but felt too weary to speak to anyone. Instead, I focused on observing people's clothing and body hexis, along with the titles of books they were reading. Several of the western travellers were reading books on Buddhism with 'dharma', 'sacred' or 'enlightenment' in the titles, thus fitting with profiles of the travellers I interviewed in New Zealand and the thematic analysis I had carried out.

The Japanese and Western travellers generally wore natural fibre and high tech outdoor clothing, and most appeared healthy and fit, with tanned skin that suggested a fair amount of time spent outside. Most wore hiking boots, which also fit the profile I expected. Everyone appeared calm and collected –the antithesis of the previous group – and either were chatting quietly in small groups or reading quietly. Aboard the flight to Kathmandu, at last, I was placed in the middle seat between a youngish Nepali husband and wife. I spent most of the three-hour flight in a feverish daze with my head bouncing between my

seat and the one in front of me. I turned away all offers of food and drink with feeble groans, while my Nepali neighbours – whom I learned were from Lumbini, the birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama and a major pilgrimage site for Buddhists – ordered three rounds of Johnny Walker and Coke. *Nepalese drink Johnny Walker?* I thought. My condition further declined somewhere over Burma.

Once landed in Kathmandu, I dragged myself through customs and contemplated going straight to the hospital. The only reason I did not was the thought frightened me. Plus, I was promised to be collected and taken to the Hotel Vajra, where I had made an online reservation. Forgetting that in the midst of all the travel rearrangements, I had forgotten to let them know my new date of arrival, I searched in bewilderment for the hotel representative amongst a swarm of taxi drivers and begging children. This story of my precarious entry into Nepal continues in chapter six, where I further discuss the affective and bodily dimensions of travel as a boundary disruption and meeting of worlds. At this point, however, the reader may be wondering about the methodological relevance of the story of my journey into the field.

Serendipity in mobile ethnographic research

My intention and commitment to be open to others, to new experience and my desire for adventure – the same intentions and desires I often observed in fellow travellers in Nepal and India, not to mention other anthropologists – had unanticipated consequences. Robert Merton (1936: 895) notes how consequences result from the interplay of actions and objective situations, what he calls 'the conditions of action'. In my case, a complex chain of events assembled in particular configurations

across various places, spaces and time. This particular assemblage consequentially led to my going to Kuala Lumpur, becoming sick, missing my flight and beginning the fieldwork under less than ideal circumstances.

Along with the unanticipated consequences of action, Merton also observed how scientific discovery often emerges by chance, accidents and serendipity. While serendipity is the discovery of something that was unsought, it requires astute observation and openness to the unexpected. Horace Walpole coined the word serendipity in 1754 after he discovered it in an Italian folk story entitled *The Three Princes of Serendip*. The story was about the adventures and discoveries of three travelling princes in ancient Ceylon, or present day Sri Lanka.

> As their Highnesses travelled, they were always making discoveries by accident and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of: for instance, one of them discovered that a mule blind of the right eye had travelled the same road lately, because the grass was eaten only on the left side, where it was worse than on the right – now do you understand *Serendipity*? (Merton and Barber 2004: 2)

Through a combination of accident *and* sagacity, discoveries can be made even when one is not searching for them. As with the princes of Serendip, they can also be made while travelling for those who have sufficient knowledge and attention to notice them. Geertz's (1972) famous story of how running with Balinese villagers during a police raid on an illegal cockfight gained him group acceptance is a good example of a serendipitous discovery. As it happened, the experience of arriving sick in Nepal and continuing to be sick until the end of the

fieldwork facilitated unforeseen discoveries, connections and themes to emerge. I considered my own research as an exploratory, experimental and descriptive project in which I remained open to the unexpected twists and turns of experience.

I spent the first four days in Kathmandu sweating feverishly in bed. The pattern of being sick for three or four days in bed, then semi-recovering, continued over the course of the next three months and eventually the trip came to a conclusion with a stay in the Darjeeling Public Hospital for severe dehydration and amoebic dysentery. The experience of being sick in the field had a tremendous impact on the entire experience. In the end, I did not make the great Himalayan mountain treks with fellow travellers I had imagined. Because I was often sick and also because I found it was easier to find participants in these places, I stuck closer to well-worn travel routes and enclaves: the Kathmandu valley and Pokhara in Nepal, Dharamsala, Darjeeling and Yuksom village in Sikkim in northern India.

Image 15: Entamoebic parasites, the micro travellers within.

http://www.biology-resources.com
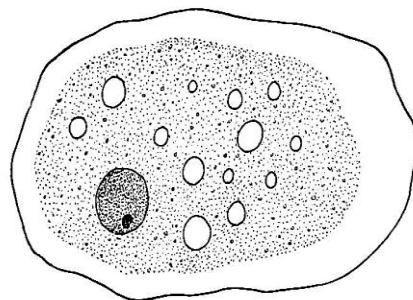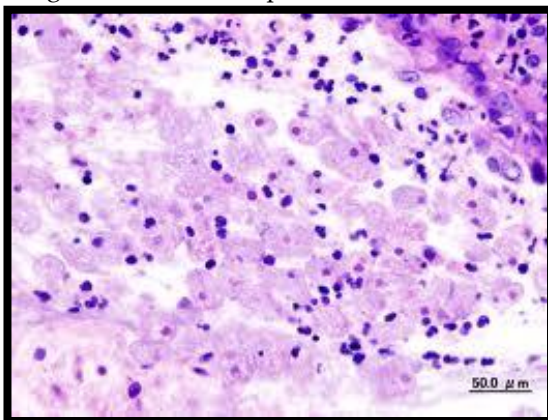
This is all not to say that the trip was a complete disaster, only that it actualized differently than it potentially could have under different circumstances. Nonetheless, I adapted to the conditions I found myself

in and the fieldwork was fruitful in numerous unanticipated ways. I met many interesting people and discovered things that would not have been possible not only had I not been there, but been there in the particular circumstances I found myself in. Not only did these circumstances draw my attention to the body, mobility, *sunyata* and complexity but also to reflections on the social conditions of anthropological knowledge and research. My experience of participant observation became a simultaneous exercise in what Bourdieu (2003) calls 'participant objectivation'.

Participant objectification involves rigorous reflection on how scientific work expresses the social conditions of possibility under which it is produced at particular historical moments and by particular 'objectifying subjects'. Critical reflexivity entails researchers analysing their own 'social origins and trajectory, gender and above all educational trajectory', as well as their points of view and the interests they may have in objectivation (Bourdieu 2003: 284-85). Such an exercise in socio-self-analysis typically demonstrates:

> …that our seemingly most personal, most intimate, and therefore most cherished choices, namely, our choice of discipline and topics ... our theoretical and methodological orientations, find their principle in socially constituted dispositions in which banally social, sadly impersonal properties still express themselves in more-or-less transfigured form' (Bourdieu 2003: 283-84).

Only by exercising 'epistemological vigilance' (Bourdieu et al. 1991: 222) and reflexivity can researchers overcome the pitfalls of producing either de-contextualized research or else overly subjective, narcissistic

textual interpretations – both of which I have tried to avoid. Bourdieu
(2003: 282) outlines such a program as follows:

> In short, one does not have to choose between participant
> observation, a necessarily fictitious immersion in a foreign
> milieu, and the objectivism of the 'gaze from afar' of an
> observer who remains as remote to himself as from his object.
> Participant objectivation undertakes to explore not the 'lived
> experience' of the knowing subject but the social conditions of
> possibility – and therefore the effects and limits – of that
> experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself.
> It aims at objectivizing the subjective relation to the object
> which, far from leading to a relativistic and more-or-less anti-
> scientific subjectivism, is one of the conditions of genuine
> scientific objectivity.

Keeping one eye on the objectified and the other on the objectifying
subject, this dual process unfolded throughout this research.
Interrogating my choice, interest and commitments to the research, I
found that I shared many demographic similarities with my
participants. Our close social proximity not only minimized social
asymmetries which may negatively impact interview scenarios, but also
further justified autoethnographic reflections.

(Auto)ethnography and boundary crossing

Autoethnography is a reflexive approach to researching and writing
that seeks to describe and analyse connections between personal and
cultural experiences (Ellis 2004). Recognizing ethnographic research as
a co-participatory, generative, embodied practice, epistemologically
and ontologically the researcher's own experiences become folded into
the relational nexus of a given context. The ethnographic self as

'resource' (Collins and Gallinat 2010), wayfarer, or 'navigator', as Westbrook (2008: 106) says, 'must put herself into circulation, into the crosscurrents … and find her way the best she can'. Autoethnographic research as a boundary crossing practice, acknowledges and accommodates the subjective, intersubjective and emotional dimensions of research, rather than hiding these or pretending they do not exist (Coffey 1999). Importantly, both auto- and standard ethnographic research should be recognized not only for their boundary crossing, but boundary disrupting qualities.

Although I left New Zealand prepared to embrace the unknown, the experience of arriving ill and remaining intermittently so made for a strange rhythm. Being sick in these new and strange places not only caused me a great deal of bodily discomfort, but also resulted in times of emotional distress and anxiety. I was at least comforted to know that this has been a relatively common state of affairs in the history of ethnographic research, as evidenced in Malinowski's (1997; Reed-Danahay 1997) *Diary*, Read's (1980) *High Valley* and beyond. In an essay reappraising George Devereux's 1976 work, *From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioural Sciences*, Jackson (2008: 170) meditates upon the productive potential of the boundary disruption and separation anxiety ethnographers often experience:

> …separation anxiety, whether experienced by an anthropologist embarking on fieldwork or by any human being suffering a devastating disruption of his or her lifeworld may be understood as a particular instance of boundary disruption – a sudden loss of the normal balance between inside and outside.

Being sick and alone in highly unfamiliar environments was indeed disruptive – physically and emotionally, and thus to the research. Nevertheless, I participated and observed on the good days, and had little choice but to let the sickness run its course on the bad days. As I realized the situation was somewhat out of my hands, I reconciled myself to it and took it as an opportunity for observations, explorations and experimentations of a different type than I had expected. Frustratingly, my physical condition and weight loss meant I had less energy than I would have liked. I did not do any of the multi-day treks I had intended to, and even smaller day hikes and excursions were typically exhausting. Being sick and feeling vulnerable also affected my overall mood, and seemed to put me into an instinctive mode of self-protection, introspection and retreat. I developed a profound mistrust of food and survived on a steady diet of bananas, papayas and salted crackers.

There is an upside to breakdowns, separation anxiety and boundary disruptions, however. Threats to our ontological security can lead to heightened reflexivity, new levels of awareness and metanoia – changes in consciousness. As Jackson (2013: 22) writes, metanoia, as 'an on-going series of transformations each one of which alters the predicates of being', is in fact the goal of fieldwork. It is also the goal of pilgrimage. As my body continued to break down and reorganise itself, I become increasingly attuned to the complex, more than human conditions of existence. Experiencing my body as a 'half alien body' (Waldenfels 2007: 86), composed of human and non-human matter, charged by forces of life and alien intentions, cohabited by bacterial,

parasitic and amoebic 'others', I came to see myself and others in a profoundly relational, complex and systemic way.

Thus, for all the suffering and anxiety it caused me, the experience of being a sick stranger in a strange land allowed for unforeseen experiences, ideas and themes to emerge. In this sense, my ethnographic research illustrated one of the oldest existing theories of learning: *matheín – patheín*, or learning through suffering. The power of failures, disruptions and misadventures for learning is known since ancient times and an often-prominent theme in journey myths and narratives. Like Odysseus, the hero of Homer's epic poem the Odyssey, the protagonist learns through experiencing obstacles and suffering through unexpected consequences. In the ancient Greek play, 'The Supplicants', for instance, Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.) writes how suffering is salutary:

> Zeus, who leads onward mortals to be wise. Appoints that suffering masterfully teach.

The ancient idea that 'suffering masterfully' teaches sounds initially negative, Mitgutsch (2009: 9) points out how 'the ancient understanding of pathos is ambiguous' in the sense that 'it implies not only misery and suffering, but also enthusiasm and passion'. This idea seems to encapsulate my ethnographic sojourn in Nepal and India, which unexpectedly led to a series of serendipitous discoveries and a metanoic shift towards a more complex, non-dual horizon of understanding, which despite my suffering I became intrigued by.

Methodological challenges of researching mobile subjects

Practically speaking, mobile, multi-sited ethnography poses numerous challenges. Doing scheduled interviews in New Zealand was one thing, but meeting travellers and conducting interviews with them in the field was another. Despite the fact that ethnographic research has always posed problems of 'access' emanating principally from the ethnographer's 'outsider' status (Ortner 2010), mobile ethnography carries this and a unique set of problems of its own: the participants move, as does the researcher, but not always at the same time or in the same direction. The challenge of mobile ethnography, then, is how and where to find one's feet in a field that moves, how to gather in-depth accounts from fleeting encounters with mobile participants.

No sooner did I meet travellers – in cafes, guesthouses, at temples, on buses and trains, in airports, at yoga classes, in the street or along mountain paths –and they would vanish. These fleeting encounters made for many short, fragmented conversations. As many travellers had limited time frames and itineraries which ranged from tightly structured to improvised day-by-day, I did not have the opportunity to conduct a great number of in-depth interviews. Given these people were essentially on holiday, it seemed out of place and intrusive to request formal interviews and after only a couple of days in the field I realized I had to abandon the pretext of 'interviews' altogether.

Instead, I approached travellers on their own terms, as one of their own, a fellow traveller. I replaced interviews with conversations. Fortunately, most participants found my role as a youngish anthropologist

researching travel rather 'cool' and were generally open to speaking with me as long as conversations were kept casual and informal. Most participants, as self-described 'travellers', where genuinely interested in my research and often wanted to know my 'academic' stance on our shared activity. This was an awkward position to be in, for I reflected on how by sharing certain critical interpretations of tourism and global mobility, I would potentially influence the participant's experience, or possibly offend them. Hence I generally tried to steer conversations away from these directions and focus them instead on the participants' stories. I hesitated in this regard too; however, as I reflected on how these people justifiably wanted to know about the research they were participating in. I did discuss the research with certain key participants I spent significant amounts of time with, which despite potentially altering the context, allowed for the co-creation of critical dialogues to emerge. The relationships with these key participants were established and developed through a strategy I call 'moving with'.

Mobile ethnography as 'moving with'

The idea of 'moving with' is similar to the ambulatory ethnographic strategy Lee and Ingold (2006: 69) call 'walking with', which recognizes that '[t]o participate is not to walk *into* but to walk *with* – where 'with' implies not a face-to-face confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing the same vistas…' In this way, doing mobile ethnography involves becoming a fellow traveller who not only walks with, but also reflexively moves with travellers. Riding planes, trains, buses, shared jeeps, taxis and bicycles, along with walking were thus part of the research process, not simply 'downtime' between sites A and B. Some of most productive dialogues I had with participants took place on long

bus and train rides. I also found walking, hiking and exploring places on foot with fellow travellers were scenarios which facilitated fruitful communication – a mutual sharing of thoughts, feelings and reflections on our co-experiencing. As mobility also entails moments of pause, when not moving about, I practiced what travellers commonly refer to as 'hanging out'.

Moving and 'hanging out'

Once in the field, it struck me that ethnographic research practice is essentially a disciplined, reflexive form of what is colloquially called 'hanging out'. The key difference between lay and anthropological hanging out, however, is that the latter does so with a trained awareness and an agenda to collect data and objectify. Hence, ethnographic hanging out is not passive, but an active practice in which all events, encounters and contexts are of potential significance. Like my participants, when not moving about, I hung out. I frequented popular traveller cafes and restaurants, hung around the lobbies or common areas of guesthouses and around temples, attended yoga classes, music concerts and movie nights. When I did not know what to do, I simply wandered around, taking Flaubert's advice that 'everything is interesting provided you look at it long enough' (Bourdieu 1996: 17). I took notes vigilantly in a small notebook and also made voice recordings on an iPhone, which I also took photos and videos on. Most evenings I typed up my daily notes and reflections on my laptop computer, which again, was a form of analysis.

I spoke with whoever would speak with me – travellers and locals – though I focused on and encountered the most travellers from highly

developed countries. Although I guided conversations in the direction of my research questions, much of the time, I allowed them to run their twisting, turning courses, coming to find that often times the answers I was seeking emerged without much overt provocation on my part. Moreover, keeping conversations relatively open, as with the initial interviews in New Zealand, allowed new topics and themes to emerge which extended beyond only the topic of travel. This was because, as Morinis observes, ultimately anthropologists and pilgrims are both people of culture: 'an anthropological study of pilgrimage is a conversation about life, suffering, and the pursuit of ideals and salvation' (Morinis 1992: x). Given my exploratory research program, the age range of my sample was broad: I spoke with people in their late teens to their mid-sixties, from first time visitors to veterans who had been coming to the region for thirty plus years.

Final remarks

This research was cross sectional and of the moment, not longitudinal. The fieldwork scope was limited and practically constrained by three central factors: money, time and bodily health. Despite these limitations, each day of my three months in the field was full of interesting and illuminating experiences, even when I was ill. Through the cultivation of a phenomenological practice, a mobile, relational imaginary and a perspective of complexity, the experience of participant observation and objectivation was and continues to be a path both of awakening and estrangement. The following chapters invite the reader to follow this path in search of clearings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Horizons of Possibilities: Virtual, Imaginary and Corporeal Mobilities in Himalayan Journeys[6]

For many years, I have been moved by the blue at the far edge of what can be seen, that color of horizons, of remote mountain ranges, of anything far away. The color of that distance is the color of an emotion, the color of solitude and of desire, the color of there seen from here, the color of where you are not. And the color of where you can never go. (Solnit 2006: 29)

Meaning is the continual actualization of potentialities … the unity of actualization and virtualization, of re-actualization and re-virtualization, as a self-propelling process. (Luhmann 2003: 65)

Travel always takes place within horizons of possibilities. This chapter addresses the question of why certain people travel to a certain part of the world – the Himalayan region – while also addressing the more fundamental question of why people travel at all. Focusing on the interplay between memory, media representations and travel practices, I highlight the role the imagination plays not only in motivating

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corporeal travel, but also in pre-structuring imaginaries that impinge upon actual journeys. I discuss the motives, goals and desires of travellers in the Himalayan region, showing how such journeys commonly revolved around three themes, identified as: coming to the source or origin of spiritual traditions, volunteering and having immersive cultural experiences and seeking bodily challenges amidst the highest mountains on earth. After examining these typically interlaced themes and arguing for greater attention to the relationship between the imagination and corporeal travel, I conclude with what the overall aims, goals and meanings of contemporary Himalayan travel centre on.

To begin, I would like to present a transcript outlining one traveller's goals for visiting the middle Himalayas. John had recently returned to New Zealand after spending two months in Nepal and was recounting his 'grand adventure' in an email to family and friends, and this grateful researcher.

> It was an amazing and grand adventure! Spending sixty days trekking in Nepal twas a brilliant way to celebrate turning sixty this year. I went over with a few goals, and will tell you what they were so this [his subsequent travel narrative] has some organization to it:

> · To experience as much of the Nepalese way of life (especially in the remote areas) as possible.

> · To have an adventure where I never knew from day to day where I would be staying or what I would be eating.

> · To experience the spirituality of the region - both the Buddhist and the Hindu based spirituality.

> · To try to find a way to do some meaningful volunteer work.

· To exist in the lap of the mother of all mountain ranges - as mountains are a huge part of my love of life.

· To immerse myself in a life of walking, where no alternative form of transportation exists and the locals all rely on walking too.

· To celebrate the retirement of my adventure mate Shahe with him and my running mate Peter's first travels out of the US.

· To see how comfortable I was above the height of Mt Whitney, 14,500 feet (approx. 4,300 meters), the highest I had ever been.

· To see for myself the schools, hospitals, bridges, and water systems that New Zealand's own Edmund Hillary helped the Nepalese to build.

· It was my first trip on my NZ passport [John is originally American], so the last goal I listed was important to me.

I open with John's list of goals because not only does it provide a clear picture of one travellers reasons for making a Himalayan journey, but represents the general pattern of overlapping goals, desires and meanings I observed in most travellers I interviewed in Nepal, India and in New Zealand. Like most Himalayan travellers, John's trip was multi-dimensional, aimed at achieving a number of specific goals within a single journey that was seen overall as a 'grand adventure'. In this sense, it tends to fit with pilgrimage and tourism research that recognizes the overlapping features inherent in modern quests (Badone and Roseman 2004; Bittarello 2006; Cohen 1992a; Collins-Kreiner 2010a; Digance 2003; Graburn 2001; MacCannell 1976; Morinis 1992a; Murray and Graham 1997; Mustonen 2006; Narayanan and Macbeth 2009; Nolan and Nolan 1992; Olsen and Timothy 2006; Pfaffenberger 1983; Reader and Walter 1993; Rinschede 1992; Rountree 2005). Like other

travellers I interviewed, John's journey encompassed shifting between multiple temporary roles: sometimes a pilgrim, other times an ethnic tourist or amateur ethnographer, an eco-adventurer, while still others a 'voluntourist'. Moreover, we can see that John's trip related more broadly to his lifestyle (love of mountains and walking, spiritual interests/orientation and life stage (retirement, turning sixty, becoming a New Zealand citizen). Like John, many travellers I interviewed were in transitional phases or turning points; either between jobs, relationships, careers or studies, Himalayan adventures often functioned as structural breaks and an opportunity for gaining perspective, seeking answers or reconciliation to both practical and existential questions, achieving personal growth and extending horizons. As journeys 'redolent with meaning' (Digance 2006: 143), such quests were integrated more generally into what Giddens (1991) calls the late modern 'reflexive project of the self'. As parts of reflexive, narrative identity constructions, travelling, especially in meaning-centred forms such as pilgrimage, cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader life-worlds of actors, whose travel experiences always remain situated within the overall continuity of life. In other words, while travel represents a series of experiences within experience, the boundaries separating the two remain hazy and depending on one's ontological position, artificial. This raises a temporal question of when journeys actually begin and end.

Along with travel experiences, apriori motivations, expectations and perceptions were identified by Reader (2007) as important considerations for research aimed at capturing the complex, multidimensional nature of pilgrimages. While travel often revealed

pilgrimage characteristics, for the reasons outlined above and as I stated in chapter one, I avoid rigid, 'ideal type' classifications (Olsen 2010), taking the phenomenon to be a case of 'complex leisure' (Kjølsrød 2009), I wish to turn to the significant role the imagination plays in motivating and informing travel.

Imaginary mobility and the will to travel

> The aims and ideals that move us are generated through imagination. But they are not made out of imaginary stuff. They are made out of the hard stuff of the world of physical and social experience (Dewey 1934: 49).

The modes of travel individuals adopt are best understood genealogically, as historically contingent practices in which previous representations and practices influence and build upon those that follow, albeit in adapted forms (Adler 1989a). While travellers exercise agentic qualities, from a systems theory perspective they may also be thought of as 'mediums of communication' (Luhmann 2003); active receivers and processors of various already existent and disseminating images, representations and discourses.

Communicative processes are recursive in that they recycle, blend and integrate received media with new and continuously unfolding experience. In the case of travel and as analysed in chapter two, media is transmitted from various cultural productions – literatures, films, guidebooks, documentaries and other texts in an on-going communicative process that works to shape receiver's perceptions, expectations and projections of places before they are actually encountered. In other words, through media re-presentations, travellers

come to know places such as India or Nepal before departing for them. Cognitive blending processes create versions and projections not only of how places will appear, but also certain 'narrative imaginings' (Turner 1998: 20-21) of how a narrated self will be(come) transformed by visiting those places.

Such cognitive processes may take place in the imagination, but as Dewey says, are not made from 'imaginary stuff'; rather, they are made from blends of images and representations that already exist in the world and are integrated with social experience. Fellow pragmatist philosopher Nelson Goodman calls this process 'worldmaking', and emphasizes that the 'worlds' actors construct are always made from and build upon pre-existing worlds: 'Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is remaking' (Goodman 1978: 6). Phenomenologists similarly take the historical facticity of a world which always presupposes our being in it as the starting point for analysing how subsequent worlds are not so much 'made' as 'disclosed' or 'revealed'[7]. Psychoanalytic approaches emphasize how by virtue of being born into pre-existing symbolic systems that operate on all levels of thought and experience, human beings always remain in the realm of the imaginary. Perhaps with such perspectives in mind, Rojek observes how travel involves mobility through internal landscapes that are sculpted by personal experience

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[7] While worldmaking is a useful theory for research on the meanings and implications of travel, the constructivist emphasis on 'making' is in danger of attributing too much agentic power to the 'worldmaker'. A phenomenological perspective would argue that because human beings are co-constituted by already existent worlds, travellers are acted upon and hence 'made' by those worlds they inhabit and move through.

and cultural influences, as well as movement through physical space (Rojek 1997).

Cervantes' Don Quixote represents a paradigmatic example of a worldmaking traveller whose imagination, fantasies and desires precedes and merges with his actual travels. Blurring the boundaries between fantasy and reality, Don Quixote constructs his adventures and sense of identity from medieval tales of errant knights, which he read passionately from the comfort and safety of his bed before finally, late in life setting off on his own (imaginary) hero quest. I was reminded of Don Quixote by a traveller I met in Kathmandu named Roman, who explained his travel motives as following:

> Ever since I was a very small child I wanted to travel, take journeys like the ones in the adventure novels that my parents would read to us as young children. It was this yearning for adventure and Robert's [an organiser and leader of annual trips to the Himalayas] kind nudging that landed me in India the first time.

A passionate traveller and documentary filmmaker who currently lives in San Francisco, Roman was on one of many trips to the middle Himalayas. When asked about his expectations and perceptions before his first visit, he responded:

> Having been through the blender of expectations versus reality more than a few times in India, I have become more adept at feeding my anticipation rather than expectation for these trips to the Himalayas. I must say though that the first time I came to Kathmandu I was secretly expecting a little more of an Indiana Jones place, only because the movie stuck in my head as a child.

Roman was not the first or last traveller I met who cited Indiana Jones as playing a part in shaping their initial expectations of the Himalayan region and contributed to their general thirst for adventure and exploration. Like Don Quixote, Himalayan travellers in this sense resembled Lévi-Strauss' (1972: 72-73) *bricoleurs* – practical subjects who tinker and experiment with already existent objects to create mythopoeic images of the world.

The majority of Himalayan travellers I spoke with claimed that films and various literatures played the largest role in informing their images, perceptions and expectations of the Himalayas. Sometimes these impressions could be traced as far back as childhood, as in Roman's case and another traveller named Jason, whom I met on a long, rather gruelling bus ride between Kathmandu and Pokhara. I asked Jason if he could say what planted the earliest seed of his interest in coming to Nepal and India. After some thought, he recalled his childhood encounter with the picture book and cartoon, 'Rikki-Tikki-Tavi' (a short story in Kipling's The Jungle Book). He explained how he was struck by exotic animals such as the mongoose and cobra, as well as the unique colours and images of landscapes that were different from what he observed in his native California. From then on, Jason explained how he would frequent the library and check out every book on India he could get his hands on, dreaming of making his own journey there one day. Jason's curiosity towards India and Asia more generally would lead him to eventually pursue higher degrees in Asian Studies from the University of Hawaii's renowned East-West Center. At thirty-eight, he was fluent in three Asian languages and had been working as an environmental planner in China, Indonesia and

Cambodia for the past ten years. Having just finished a two year contract in Phenom Penh, his journey through India and Nepal was part of a larger 'round-the-world' trip, during which time his broad goals were described simply as 'to explore', and 'to take some time, find some new inspiration and figure out where to go from here'. 'Funny,' he told me on our long bus ride, 'if I really think about where all this [travelling] all started, how I ended up going here, there and everywhere, I guess it all began with Rikki-Tikki-Tavi. That's pretty interesting to think about…' Jason's reflection here raises underlying temporal question of when journeys actually begin and highlights the role the imagination plays in taking people 'on the road'.

Another participant I interviewed in New Zealand, a poet named Avery, had previously spent six months in India, in which most of her time was spent studying yoga at an ashram in Rishikesh – the 'yoga capital of the world' and mecca for global spiritual seekers, located in northern India. When I asked about her expectations and perceptions prior to departing, she explained:

> I knew a little about India, and most of my information had come from yoga books, pictures I had seen in the media, movies like Seven Years in Tibet and Little Buddha, and Bollywood. Before I went I think I saw India as a very large, complex, and spiritual place. Generally though, I had little knowledge of India, although I did have quite a lot of knowledge about the yogic tradition in India, and yoga as a practice.

Numerous participants made similar claims about where they believed their images, perceptions and expectations of the Himalayas had come from; mainly books, films and other media. Like Avery, many travellers

163

professed to have limited knowledge of the region. Four travellers claimed that seeing Wes Anderson's 2007 film, *The Darjeeling Limited*, played a central role in inspiring them to come to India. Marisa, a twenty-two year old traveller from New York told me:

> I saw this movie at the end of high school and ever since I wanted to go to India. I wanted to ride trains, end up in strange, random places and weird situations, wear the funky outfits and you know, have a spiritual adventure, just like in the film. The music, the colours, it all really captivated me at I guess an impressionable age. I wanted to go right after graduating, but I went to college. But now that I'm finished, and there's no jobs and everything's gone to hell anyway, I came.

Image 16: The Darjeeling Limited. A film about the misadventures of Western spiritual seekers in India

http://zoobiailyas.blogspot.co.nz/2010/12/darjeeling-limited-2007.html
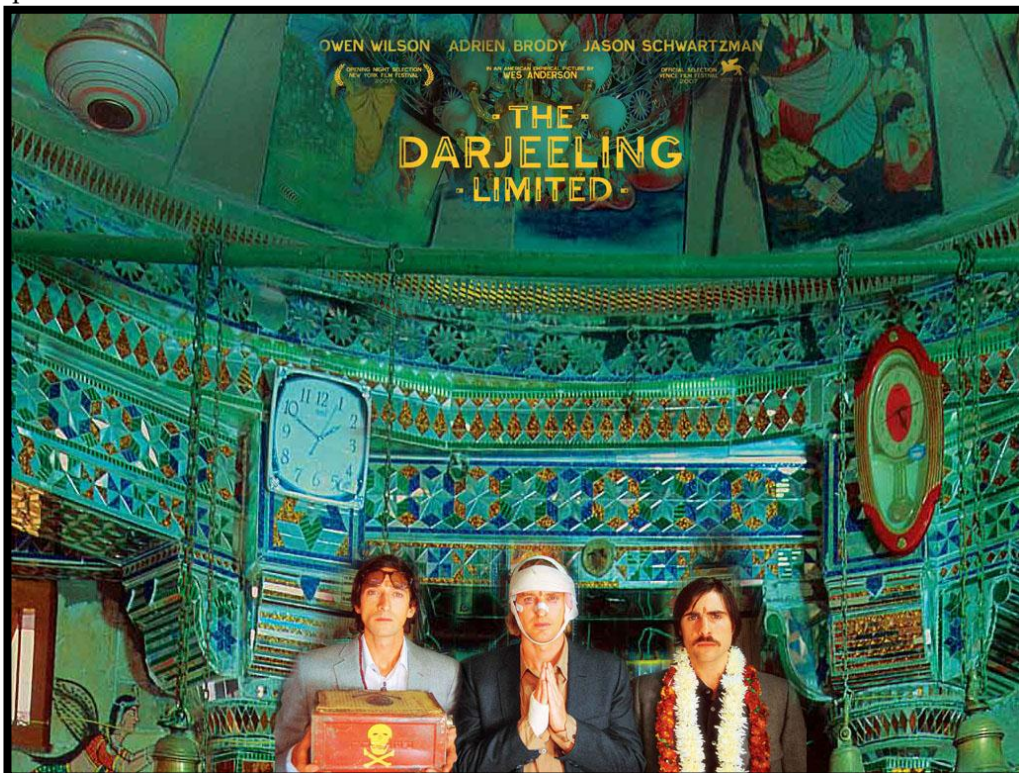
Over steaming cups of tea grown on the terraced hillsides surrounding Darjeeling, Marisa and I mused on how despite the title, we discovered that in the film the characters never actually go to the Himalayan hill station. The fact that her imagination and expectations did not match the film in this way did not particularly bother Marisa, however: 'Yeah when I got here, I was like, so this is Darjeeling? Hey, they never came here. I think they actually were somewhere in Rajasthan.' Nevertheless, she described India as 'infinitely interesting … full of beauty, ugliness, life and death. You can learn a lot in a single day here'. From Darjeeling she continued north to Sikkim, crossed into Nepal by bus and eventually visited Tibet. Months later, back in New York and working temp jobs, I heard from Marisa:

> Everything is easy after India. When I arrived [in India] I cried for like three days and was too afraid to even leave my hotel room. Being back in New York, a city which used to feel pretty intimidating now is a piece of cake. India teaches you about the things that really matter – basic things like love, simply living and surviving. Here people are caught up in so much stuff that really doesn't matter at all. It's sad but also makes me laugh. Being back, I feel lighter and in a way more free, cause I've seen how different life can be, how hard, but also just how simple.

Marisa expressed being transformed by her Himalayan travel experience, as did many other travellers I met who appeared to be searching for just that. Discussing the connections between films and tourism in the Austrian outback, Frost (2010: 723) demonstrates how films that take urban dwellers into frontier zones follow 'strong storyline patterns which essentially take the form of a series of "promises"'.

The key promise is that a tourist to this exotic locale will be changed. In many cases, the change presented is a positive one. The tourist is changed from being bored, alienated, frustrated or stagnant to being re-energized, a better person, more tolerant of others, perhaps even spiritually uplifted. The causes of the change are a combination of wilderness, isolation and interaction with people who live a simpler life. Essentially the frontier is a transformer, an antidote to the travails of urban life. The process is mysterious, perhaps even magical—and that is part of the appeal. There is also possibly danger, which may be negative, but the risk may also be energizing and attractive. The Outback is not a comfortable mass tourism destination; it is a place on the edge.

I found that similar narrative patterns and relationships based on frontier zone 'promises' existed between travellers and the books and films they claimed inspired them to seek their own adventure in the Himalayas. Numerous participants, like Avery, reported having been inspired in part to visit the Himalayas by the film Seven Years in Tibet. The 1997 film, much like James Hilton's famous utopian novel, *Lost Horizon* (1933), portrays Tibet as a mysterious, spiritual land, lost in time and hidden from a destructive modern world; a frontier zone *par excellance*. Like *The Darjeeling Limited*, it is interesting to note that *Seven Years in Tibet* was not filmed in the actual location viewers imagine. In *Virtual Tibet*, journalist Orville Schell (2000) points out that for political reasons the filming took place not in Tibetan Himalayas, but on the other side of the world in the Andes of Argentina. In this sense, the Himalayas become a utopia in the literal sense of the term – a 'placeless place'. The film offers an exotic, utopian re-presentation of the Himalayas while narrating the transformative adventure of Austrian

adventurer Heinrich Harrer in a mystical land represented as the antithesis to a violent and disenchanted modern world. In my interviews and like Frost's observations on the connections between films and frontier travel, I found travellers approached the middle Himalayas as a place that 'promised' positive transformations, a narrative imagining very much in accord with the films they watched and the books the read.

Along with popular films such as *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997), *Little Buddha* (1993), *Kundun* (1997), *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007) and *Eat Prey Love* (2010), various literatures also played a major role in shaping travellers perceptions of the Himalayas and motivating their journeys. The most popular genre travellers cited in relation to their motivations for coming to the Himalayas was spiritual literature. Books by the Dalai Lama such as *The Art of Happiness* (1998), Yogananda's (2005) *Autobiography of a Yogi* and other Eastern 'spiritual classics' were frequently cited by travellers as having been read before their journeys, as well as during. In popular hill stations such as Dharamsala and Darjeeling in north India, and in Kathmandu and Pokhara in Nepal, used bookstores stocking such titles abound. Along with more active pursuits such as practicing yoga or mountain trekking, I found many travellers spent large amounts of time in cafes and restaurants absorbed in books. I often observed travellers engrossed in books with the words such as 'mindfulness', 'wisdom', 'loving kindness' on the covers, giving the impression that these journeys were as much about inner transformation, spiritual contemplation and reflexive self-improvement

as outward adventure.[8] As many Himalayan travellers were interested in eastern spirituality, particularly yoga and Buddhist meditation, it appeared that books such as these fuelled desires for what travellers often described as 'coming to the source'.

Coming to the source and seeking transformation

Avery, the poet from New Zealand responded to the question of why she had decided to travel to India in the following way:

> I wanted to go to India because I had been studying yoga for two years, and I wanted to learn about yoga in the birthplace of the practice. I think I also wanted to get away from the life I had in New Zealand at the time. I'd had a bad breakup a few years beforehand, and I was working for an organization where there was a lot of conflict and egocentric behaviour, both of which made me very unhappy. Going to India was a way of exploring a part of myself that I was discovering through yoga – a more thoughtful and mindful part of myself. I wanted to go and do a yoga teacher training, as I had a vague vision of being a yoga teacher, so that was my motivation. I also just enjoy visiting new places as travel expands my awareness and understanding of the world we live in, and of myself.

In Avery's account we can see multiple motives and overlapping 'push' and 'pull' factors (Dann 1981) explaining why she had decided to go to

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[8] It wasn't only eastern spiritual literature that was being read, however. In the bookstores, there seemed to exceptional amounts of novels by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Umberto Eco and Paul Coelho, as well as literary travel writings by authors such as Bruce Chatwin and Paul Theroux, among others. I spent a week in Nepal with an American student of Buddhism named Dave, who typically read a book a day. I myself read more novels during my three month trip than I had read in the past several years. The shifting experience of exploring the world imaginatively through literature while corporeally exploring foreign worlds may affect one's experience in certain ways and in some cases augment the transformative potential of travelling. The interplay between reading and travelling represents, in my mind, a fruitful topic for further research on the correlation between imaginary and corporeal travel.

India. Expressing dissatisfaction and a desire to break out of her present life-situation in New Zealand, she felt drawn to India because it appealed to her interest and desire to explore herself through the practice of yoga in its birthplace, and to expand her 'awareness and understanding of the world'. Moreover, in making a break with her previous situation – marked by a conflictive, egocentric work environment and a bad breakup – going to India to study yoga marked the actualization of a potential turning point in Avery's life story. Driven by 'a vague vision of being a yoga teacher' because the practice was perceived to positively cultivate a more 'thoughtful and mindful' part of herself, her journey to India centred on an imaginary of hope, future transformation and the realization of possibilities. In this regard imagination must be distinguished from fantasy on the grounds that 'imaginative thoughts are constrained by the need to be appropriate to reality '(Davies 2009: 349).

Avery's story was not particularly unique. I encountered many aspiring yoga teachers in Nepal and India whose motives and goals revolved around a redirected life-trajectory, personal transformation and wellbeing. In his research on spiritual tourism in India, Norman (2011) found similar motives brought Western 'spiritual tourists' to Rishikesh in the Himalayan foothills, the most common being for purposes of self-improvement and healing, thanksgiving, coming to the source or origin of spiritual traditions and intensive study and practice. Similar to my findings, Norman observed how these motives revolved around what he calls 'the explicit project of the self' (also based on Giddens' thesis that in late modernity selfhood becomes a reflexive project).

Janine, a thirty three year old Melbourne native whom I met at a café in Pokhara explained what brought her on her six-month trip through India and Nepal. Along with trekking in the Himalayas and taking a break from 'my busy life and boring job', she said:

> I've been practicing yoga for about ten years now, and in the past few years I've gotten into meditation – mainly Vipassana. I've read a lot of books like the ones by the Dalai Lama, Autobiography of a Yogi, stuff like that. I guess after all this reading and practicing at home, I wanted to come here to see for myself, to see where all these brilliant teachings come from. And I think it's easier to immerse yourself and live the teachings here, cause you have the time and the culture is more spiritually oriented. I mean, this is where it all comes from, this is their culture, its part of daily life, not something you just go dip into. There is so much history and wisdom here. I mean, I went to the exact place where Gautama Buddha sat under the Bodhi tree and attained enlightenment. There were few people around cause it was after the pilgrim season. I sat under the very tree, I meditated right there. I cannot even describe how powerful that experience was. It was incredible! I keep thinking about that day in Bodh Gaya. I think it was a pivotal experience in my life. So, I think it was important for me to come, if anything for that one experience of sitting under the Bodhi tree. I guess it's about coming to the source and experiencing that pure connection.

In Janine's case, along with Avery and other travellers, visiting the source and connecting with the history and practice of the spiritual traditions they identified with takes on great significance and exemplifies Turner's (1973) notion of pilgrimage as 'a journey to the center out there'. In the case of spiritual journeys by westerners through

India and Nepal, however, we observe that the 'centre' is not located within or commonly shared by members of one's home society. Rather, these centres are 'out there', located in distant geographic and transnational contexts, becoming what Cohen (1979) calls elective spiritual centres.

Another case of an individual whose 'elective' spiritual centre was located beyond the bounds of his own society was Kazu. A native of Tokyo, Kazu has made three trips to the Himalayas, spending the majority of his time in Dharamsala, the home of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile. He described the motivation for his first trip to India in 1999 as the desire to do a 'hard-core backpacking trip', to visit Buddhist sites and attend teachings by the Dalai Lama. Like Jason, Avery, Janine and other travellers I met, Kazu expressed how his first trip to India took place during a crossroads in his life: 'Everything was getting fucked up. I had to escape. I had some friends who quit their jobs and went to India for like a year. I envied them.'

In India and Nepal, Kazu made Buddhist pilgrimages to spiritual centres such as Bodh Gaya and Lumbini, though he admitted that he felt he could never really integrate with the 'spiritual community', both foreign and domestic. He described himself as being 'too rational' and that the people who prostrated themselves at temples acted 'very irrationally'. Nonetheless, he expressed a certain utopian yearning that appeared to guide other travellers as well. When I asked why he kept returning to the Himalayan region, he replied tellingly: 'I want to believe that some place sacred exists, that there is an ideal village out there'. Asking if he had managed to find that 'ideal village', he answered:

> Not exactly. But people in the Himalayas live very pure life, much more pure than Japan – there is too modern, too fast, very busy, very distracting. There's not enough connection – to the nature, not enough spiritual connection. People in the Himalaya live with the nature, not against it. They have time for spiritual matters. It's more simple, more free.

Kazu, like other travellers, followed the pattern of comparing and critiquing his native society while praising the forms of life he encountered in the Himalayas, giving the impression once again that such journeys were driven by both 'push' and 'pull' factors and also related to life stages and lifestyle choices. When I asked Kazu why he chose to pursue Buddhism in India, as opposed to in his native Japan, his answer was related again to the concern with origins and purity:

> Japanese Buddhism is not pure, not original Buddhism; it's missing something fundamental, and too political. India, Tibet, Nepal, this is where Buddhism comes from. The history is very important. You can feel the essence.

Like Janine and Avery, we can see that coming to the source of the spiritual tradition he identified with and perceived as 'pure' was an important theme in Kazu's journeys. Since his first trip in 1999, Kazu has been back twice and said in specific reference to Dharamsala, 'I plan to visit again, and again! Dharamsala is a unique place, different from the rest of India...softer'. As he explained and as I observed, there is a community of travellers in Dharamsala centred on the figure of the Dalai Lama, a group Kazu jokingly called 'Dalai Lama groupies'.

Cosmopolitan pilgrims and communitas in Dharamsala

I encountered Kazu's 'Dalai Lama groupies' on only my second day in Dharamsala, when word quickly spread among travellers in the small hill station that 'his holiness' would be appearing at the main temple that afternoon. Ironically enough, I received this news from an old friend from the time I lived in Japan, named Reiki, whom I had not seen or had any contact with for six years, but happened to cross paths with on a steep, narrow street as I searched for someplace to eat breakfast. Travelling with his girlfriend, Haruka, both were passionate about the Dalai Lama's teachings and had specifically come to Dharamsala to experience them first hand. From reading the Tibetan leader's books, they had become deeply interested in Tibetan culture and religion and the political struggle against the Chinese occupation and were even members of a Tibetan association in Japan.

With Reiki and Haruka, I found myself waiting for several hours at Dharamsala's main temple with a high spirited, cosmopolitan mix of Tibetan monks and lay refugees, Indians from across the subcontinent, global pilgrims, tourists and everyone between. All around the temple complex, people were chatting and smiling, sharing snacks while waiting patiently for the Dalai Lama to appear. Giving an elderly Tibetan woman my seat, she smiled, taught me a few Tibetan words and offered me a couple *momos* (steamed dumplings). Soon I noticed how along with Reiki and Haruka, a Swiss peace activist, an American artist and a Spanish traveller and I had formed organically into a group. I recall perceiving a marked sense of egolessness in this group and instead a warm, comfortable openness, as if everyone had always been

friends and were free to let their guard down. Looking around, I noticed how similar such cosmopolitan groups had sprung up all around the airy courtyard of the hillside temple, giving me the impression that I was witnessing what Turner (1969: 128) calls spontaneous *communitas*, a sudden break down in normal communicative barriers and social structures and a sense of communal togetherness. I reflected on how the nodal point of this sense of spontaneous cosmopolitan *communitas* was none other than the Dalai Lama himself, who indeed appeared to be a living, global pilgrimage centre. In the days to come, when I asked many people why they had come to Dharamsala, the main response was to see the Dalai Lama, to listen to his teachings, to learn about Tibetan religion and culture and meet Tibetan people.

Given that being in the corporeal presence of the Dalai Lama was a central goal of many journeys to Dharamsala, I reflected on what ideals this global spiritual leader and self-described 'humble monk' symbolized for those who came from all over the world to this once backwaters hill station. In the course of interviews with travellers during my month in Dharamsala, I found that the ideals that pulled them there were the very ones the Dalai Lama has been teaching over the course of his lifetime as the spiritual and political leader of Tibet and an iconic ambassador of world peace. Tibetan Buddhism, derived from the older Vajrayana and the foundational Mahayana traditions, centres foremost around the cultivation of 'loving kindness' (*mettā bhāvanā*) and compassion (*chenrezig*).While based essentially on the same principles developed centuries and even millennia ago, these

teachings continue to speak to contemporary Tibetan and global audiences alike.

Along with Buddhist ideals, many travellers I met responded deeply to what the struggles of the exiled Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people symbolized; namely violations of human rights, the call for religious freedom and cultural autonomy, respect for nature and human dignity. From my interviews and observations in Dharamsala, including participating in a volunteer project in which travellers teach English to Tibetan refugees, I had the impression that for the majority of travellers in Dharamsala, Tibet symbolized all that was 'good' and 'right' in the world on one hand, and all that was wrong on the other. Tibetans were perceived as a peace loving, spiritually minded people who for centuries had lived in harmony with nature and each other high in the remote Himalayas. This utopic image corresponds to various popular representations of Tibet and Himalayan cultures, from early travel writings by European explorers and early mountaineers, to books such as *Lost Horizon* and films like *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Kundun*, and in the Dalai Lama's own books and other writings pertaining to Tibet (Bishop 1989, 2000). On the other hand, the situation of Tibet since the Chinese assault and occupation beginning in the late 1950s also served for travellers to symbolize all that is wrong with the world – violence and ethnocide, injustice and oppression, the mindless exploitation of the natural environment and the decimation of an innocent, peace-loving people. Tibet is a place, but perhaps even more so it is a threatened utopic image charged with political, ethical and spiritual meanings; an image in which the Dalai Lama serves as the deterritorialized nodal point. Touched by the mesSage of the Tibetan

people, a mesSage that calls for greater compassion, loving-kindness, peace and justice in the world, travellers as global pilgrims come to Dharamsala with the aim of strengthening and embodying these ideals and expressing solidarity and support with the Tibetan people.

Voluntourism as doing good and gaining access

The utopic desire to realize a better world was an important theme in Dharamsala, as evidenced by the numerous community volunteer projects and NGOs. It seemed every other traveller I met in Dharamsala was spending part of their time there and elsewhere in the region getting involved and trying to do some good. For instance, in Dharamsala I met Emily, a Toronto native in her mid-twenties. We struck up a conversation with she paced slowly around the main temple cradling a Tibetan baby in her arms. She explained how she was participating in a volunteer project organised by a Korean established NGO called *Rogpa* (Tibetan for 'trusted friends and helpers'), which offered free childcare to Tibetan refugee families. When I asked her general impression of Dharamsala, her immediate reply was that it was 'magical'. When I asked what she meant by this, she said:

> You know, the Himalayas! It's a dream to be here and it's just so beautiful. And Dharamsala, it's just got this…energy! There are so many great community projects; seems like so many people trying to do good things. It fills me with hope.

Emily explained how her motives for making her trip were to practice yoga and meditation, go trekking, experience the Dalai Lama's public teachings and learn more about the Tibetan cause, and to do volunteer work. Volunteering was important for Emily, who explained that it was

part of her yoga practice: 'Serving others is one of eight aspects of yoga,' she told me, 'stretching is only one'. As she swayed the Tibetan baby side to side, I learned that at home in Toronto she was studying to be a mid-wife. 'So, you were just born to serve,' I said. 'Yeah, I guess so. I think people are at their best when they are giving,' she replied. For Emily, volunteering and serving others in Dharamsala – a place charged with political overtones – was part of a set of ideals which appeared centred on striving towards self-improvement and contributing to the making of a better world. In this same group of volunteers, I met Gerard, a Frenchman who was also meandering around the temple courtyard with a Tibetan baby cradled in his arms. While volunteering was not the sole purpose of Gerard's trip, which would combine trekking, a ten-day Vipassana meditation course in the mountains outside Dharamsala and travels to other parts of India, Gerard explained:

> Since I had the time, why not offer some help? Even though I had nothing to do with what happened to them [the Tibetan people], I feel they've had such a hard life, being refugees, losing their home and living in exile. They are amazing people. So, this is the least I can do. And it's hardly work, I mean, look at this cute bébé! Who is the lucky one here?

For the volunteers I met in Dharamsala, such as Emily, Gerard and those whom I taught English with, their goals and ideals revolved around helping the Tibetan refugees, a people who many travellers imagined to simultaneously symbolize all that is good and evil in the world and who are signified by the enigmatic figure of the Dalai Lama. Coming to Dharamsala was a chance to learn about and experience

Tibetan culture and spirituality, which has been under threat for the past sixty years since the Chinese occupation. In this sense, volunteering was not only about giving, but receiving as well and hence we are reminded that the gift exchange is not a neutral practice. By offering their time and service, travellers came into intimate contact with Tibetans, a people who tended to be simultaneously idealized and pitied. Experiences of proximal intimacy and perceptions of meaningful encounters with Tibetans were significant motivating factors for many Himalayan travellers, who contra 'tourist gaze' were not only interested in taking pictures (Urry 2011b). By getting involved in local life through volunteer projects, travellers sought experiences that facilitated what ethnographers call 'gaining access', a way of breaking through outsider-insider barriers and entering the life-worlds of Others (see Mustonen 2006). While there were certainly altruistic motives in doing volunteer work, I came to see how the practice, perhaps also like ethnography, was often part of the more general aim of increasing one's own understanding of the world, and hence oneself.

Searching for self in other forms of life

Along with pursuing spirituality in a place of origins and 'voluntouring', part of what drove many Himalayan travellers was the basic desire to experience and understand other forms of life. Recall John, who listed his first reason for going to Nepal as '[t]o experience as much of the Nepalese way of life (especially in the remote areas) as possible'. Similarly, Roman explained his motivation in terms of the desire for experiential learning and the satisfaction of curiosity:

I feel like we learn something when we land in a place like Nepal or Bhutan. I am not sure exactly what it is, but the hunger for this type of learning drives me to travel to these places and when I finally figure out exactly what it is I may no longer have that same hunger.

We should recall how Roman traced his 'hunger' for adventures in 'places like Nepal or Bhutan' to the stories his parents read to him as a child. Driven by a hunger for adventures in places perceived as frontier zones, Roman, Jason and other Himalayan travellers carried out worldmaking exercises that blended childhood fantasies with corporeally encountered realities. Indeed, many travellers claimed that coming to the Himalayas had been a 'dream' of theirs. Carina, an actress from San Francisco explained her inspiration for making a two-month trip through Nepal, India and Bhutan as 'a dream come true' and continued to explain:

I've always loved mountains. I am not sure I can explain exactly why I am drawn to the Himalayas. Perhaps it's their exotic location, mystique and folklore. Perhaps because I lived in this part of the world in another life and am drawn back. Perhaps because these mountains are the tallest on the planet. I love immersing myself in places where there are very few Americans and drawn to the "National Geographic" experience of it all. I love travelling off the beaten path and the diversity of seeing how other humans on the planet live. Now I am itching to travel again!

Image 17: Himalayan vista from National Geographic

http://travel.nationalgeographic.com

Carina's speculative reasons parallel those of many other travellers I encountered and appear deeply entrenched in the realm of the imaginary. First, there was the image and allure of a place perceived not only as 'exotic' and different, but mystical and utopic. Such imaginings were very much in tune with popular media representations of the Himalayas, such as those found in National Geographic and again, in films such as *Seven Years in Tibet*. Next, there was a passionate desire to experience the imagined grandeur, magnificence and purity of the highest mountains on earth; or as John put it, '[t]o exist in the lap of the mother of all mountain ranges'. This was part of the desire for challenge and adventure, for 'travelling off the beaten track' and crossing frontier zones with the promise of positive transformation. Fundamentally, what bound these pursuits together was the desire to experience otherness, which was only

previously imagined. For travellers such as Roman, Carina, John and others, crossing thresholds separating the familiar from the alien promised learning and growth by enlarging their awareness of worldly possibilities. Travelling, in this regard resembles a kind of explorative and experimental art form capable of generating a transformative worldmaking, as described by Adler (1989b).

This leads back to my original question regarding why people travel at all. Why is reading National Geographic, practicing yoga or going hiking *at home* not enough? Urry identifies three basic forms of mobility – imaginative, virtual and corporeal – all of which intersect and impinge upon one other on various levels. He asks the important question, '[g]iven the significance of imaginative and virtual travel within contemporary societies, why is there an increasing amount of physical, corporeal travel?' (Urry 2002a: 256). The answer I arrived at in the course of my fieldwork is that imaginary and virtual travel is not enough for certain individuals. Urry similarly observes how places '*must* be touched, seen, smelled, heard, physically walked in – in short, *sensed*, in the literal meaning of the word' (262). Just as contemporary actors, despite being able to communicate across time and space via ICTs still require face-to-face encounters with significant others, or moments of what Urry calls 'intermittent co-presence', the need for face-to-place encounters also persists. The corporeal experience of 'being there', of seeing the Himalayan region with their own eyes and walking through them on their own feet were extremely important to the travellers I encountered. That said, staying connected with many other places was also important for travellers, as I will discuss further in chapter seven.

Gaining new understandings by moving further from conventional certainties and exposing themselves to experiences of 'othering' was a central aim for many Himalayan travellers. Actively seeking 'boundary' or 'limit situations', travellers expressed desires for what was commonly described as 'getting out of my comfort zone'. Such desires centred on the imagination and awareness that the world was full of diverse possibilities, and that by crossing boundaries and transcending limited experience, one could enlarge one's horizon. A twenty-four year-old Swiss traveller named Katia, for instance, explained what a third trip to India would mean to her:

> For my third trip in India, I expect to know myself even better than today. I also expect to know about life, people, society, values ... I look forward to seeing nice colours, true smiles, uncomfortable life (commodities) … I like to get over my limit, and India is the country for that.

By going to India, a place Lonely Planet promises will 'jostle your entire being', Katia seeks to 'get over' her perceived limitations by throwing herself into situations of radical difference. As quests for understanding, Katia and other travellers in this sense relate to the German notion of *bildung*, usually translated as 'self-formation'. Gadamer characterizes *bildung* as a quest for the universal, for recognizing oneself in other being. He quotes Hegel, who wrote, '[t]o seek one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of the spirit, whose being can only return to itself from what is other' (in Gadamer 2004: 12-13). Hegel found the world and languages of antiquity especially conducive to this type of learning, which involves a 'separation of ourselves from ourselves'. As a kind of

self-induced alienation[9], this type of learning is aimed at cultivating an enlarged perception of oneself as a historically constituted subject. For Gadamer, it is the encounter and dialogue we carry out with the Other, be it text or foreign life-world, that expands our horizons. He writes, 'Only through others do we gain true knowledge of ourselves' (1988: 86). By crossing boundaries, facing perceived limits and seeking to understand the Other, travellers such as Katia were on quests driven by the philosophic imperative of knowing thyself. Yet she and others were seeking othering experiences not in the disengaged mode of the *vita contempliva*, but through active, meaningful engagement with the Other. As Lévinas (1998: 159) writes, '[m]y relationship with the Other as neighbour gives meaning to my relations with all the others'.

As a German traveller whom I met wandering around a mossy Buddhist temple in Sikkim told me:

> Travelling in India is all about challenging assumptions. You come here to realize that your common sense is not so common. It puts things into perspective, all things we take for granted at home.

Alfred, a twenty-three year-old Belgium traveller I met at another temple perched high above Yuksom village in Sikkim, had a similar desire for challenging his assumptions, crossing perceived limits and generating self-knowledge by knowing the Other. He spoke passionately about his quest for understanding while travelling on foot

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[9] Alienation not in the Marxian sense of alienated labor, but in the more basic Hegelian sense of *entzündung*, literally, 'estrangement'.

through north-eastern India and Nepal, explaining his goal as, 'I wanted to find out how I really am'. Continuing, he said:

> It's so powerful here! In Europe, there's no way you can get what you get here. The nature, the spirituality… Over there, you're always busy, hanging out with friends, partying, working, going to school, there's always so much stuff happening. There's no way I could've learned the things I've learned about myself in Europe that I've learned here. Walking through the Himalayas these past three months, I really transcended what I thought were my limitations.

Along with the type of learning (and un-learning) which comes from placing oneself in foreign environments, self-testing and exploring the limits of the body in the extreme natural environment of the Himalayas was an important aim for Alfred and many travellers I encountered.

The quest becomes a trek

Reflecting the 'mobilities turn', more recent pilgrimage research tends to privilege the process of journeying over the reaching of final destinations (Coleman and Eade 2004; Collins-Kreiner 2010a; Frey 1998; Slavin 2003). In my research, I too found that Himalayan journeys were largely movement-centred and processual, but that reaching specific destinations and achieving concrete goals also held significance. This was especially so regarding the making of certain famous route-based mountain treks. Waiting to clear customs at Kathmandu airport, I met a middle-aged couple from California who were bubbling with excitement in anticipation of making the famous Mount Everest base-camp trek in the Khumbu region of north-eastern Nepal. I asked the

couple if they did much hiking in the Sierra Nevada mountain range of California and they replied 'not at all'. I found it interesting that despite living within a couple hours of what many consider a very spectacular mountain range, they chose to fly half way around the world to make this particular trek. They explained how they had attempted the base-camp trek eleven years prior, but that the wife had succumbed to altitude sickness and they were forced to turn back. Outfitted in high tech trekking apparel, they explained: 'We've always wanted to come back and make it to base camp. If anything to tell ourselves that we can still do it'. We can see here that having a physical challenge, an achievable goal and a specific destination were significant for these travellers and that the meaning was not only in the journey itself.

A similar case was that of a traveller from New Zealand, who despite having a very common English name, perhaps not insignificantly, suggested that I call him Don Pablo. Explaining his basic motivation for making a six week trip to Nepal as the desire 'to have an adventure', he went on to claim that his three-week trek to Mount Everest base-camp was 'the best thing I've done in my life'. Don Pablo made the journey with two close friends in a period just before entering a doctoral program in psychology. He saw doing a PhD as a great challenge, but figured that if he could successfully complete the long trek to the highest mountain on earth, he could manage doing a doctorate. Emphasizing how much he enjoyed the solitude and simplicity of mountain life and seeing how the Sherpa live 'in harmony in such a dramatic environment', Don Pablo also highlighted the importance of having 'a definitive goal that drives you forward':

…you also feel you're on a mission to accomplish something worthwhile and life changing. It's not just simplifying life and slowing down. You could do that by being unemployed and being on the benefit. But then you would have no goal, no sense of achieving anything, and these are things I think humans need to feel as if they are flourishing and to make them happy. And I know I for one would feel guilty that I was wasting my time and my life. So it's simplifying, slowing down, with an important goal and a sense you're doing something worthwhile.

Having a 'definitive goal' and 'a mission to accomplish' were important components of what made mountain treks 'worthwhile' and 'life-changing' for Don Pablo and others, and often took on allegorical significance after their completion. Not only did successfully reaching Everest base-camp instil a confidence in Don Pablo for successfully completing a doctorate in psychology, he explained how several years later he continues to revisit the experience:

Whenever I feel life is getting overbearing with its stressors – all the things I have to do, I feel a sudden urge to escape and go hiking in the mountains again. Further, when I look at my pictures of my trek in the Himalayas it make me feel relaxed and happy.

Similar to Frazer's 'law of contagion' – the idea that things in contact continue to act upon one another – Don Pablo's re-imagined Himalayan journey continues to maintain a positive presence in his life. In her research on the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage, Frey found that for many pilgrims, the experience lives on and often takes on new meanings well after the journeys are made. Contrary to the idea that the

longer the journey the more meaningful it is, Frey (1998: 214) found that 'what appears to be more important is what the pilgrims bring to the Camino (state of mind, motivation) and how the Camino is remembered and acted on in the post-experience'. Similarly, Robert, a San Franciscan who has been leading groups to the Himalayan region annually for the past twenty-five years told me how 'it takes about three to four months after returning home that the experience begins to sink in and make sense'.

Along with trips to pilgrimage centres, such as Varanasi, Bodh Gaya and Gongi Tori in India, Roberts's itineraries often included the Mount Everest base-camp trek and occasionally other treks in the Annapurna range, in Sikkim or Ladekh in northern India. Explaining where trekking fits into his guided trips, he explained:

> My trips combine visiting religious sites and staying in ashrams, doing yoga and meditation, and also plenty of opportunities for getting to know the locals. We do these treks to bring the element of nature into the mix. But not just any nature! Trekking in the Himalayas pushes people to their absolute limits – both physically and psychologically. In fact, these bifurcations break down up there, which in a way is the whole point. It leads to spiritual growth and compliments the other aspects of the experience. No one comes back quite who they were before from these trips.

Not only Robert's travellers, but most people I met at some point of their journeys planned on engaging in what Davidson and Stebbins (2011: 2) call 'nature challenge activities', leisure pursuits whose 'core activities centre on meeting a natural test posed by one or more of the six elements'. In her research on secular pilgrims and spiritual tourists

in the Indian Himalayas, Singh (2004: 222) describes such seekers as 'environmental pilgrims'. Motivated by 'geopiety' – a spiritual reverence for the earth – contemporary 'environmental pilgrims' are said to journey to places such as the middle Himalayas by 'the search for and appreciation of intrinsic environmental and cultural values in pristine environments'.

The majority of travellers I encountered, as in Singh's research, were middle-class, university educated and from metropolitan areas in the Western world. From a historical-sociological and social constructionist perspective, the contemporary value and seeming sacralisation of 'nature' and enthusiasm for 'nature challenge activities' may be related more to transformations in modernity and corresponding romantic sensibilities rather than nature having intrinsic value in itself (see Latour 1993; Macnaghten 2006). This point was raised in chapter two regarding the modern emergence of mountaineering and will be further reflected upon in the following chapter on authenticity. Turning his attention to the moral and ethical aspects of tourism, MacCannell (2011: 216) observes how 'nature provides humanity with a moral mirror is crucial to ecotourism, sustainable tourism' and that 'so-called new tourists are fascinated by the society/nature division, across which they project strong moral values'. Many Himalayan travellers I encountered described their urban lives at home as fast-paced and stressful and expressed deep desires to spend time outdoors in natural environments and to engage their bodies in physical challenges. Anna, a 28-year old British woman I met at a guesthouse in Kathmandu, for instance, had quit her job as a financial planner in London and explained her reasons for coming to the Himalayas in these terms:

> I came to trek mainly, and to do yoga. I guess I came to move my body. I had to get out of London. I felt stifled and perpetually stressed, so I decided to break out of that cycle and here I am. Being up in the mountains has been amazing. It is such a different way of life. You can't call it easy, but it's certainly healthy!

The significance of trekking, spending time outdoors and practicing yoga was qualified by Anna in her description of her urban lifestyle at home in London. Since graduating from university, she had worked in a bank, a job that kept her indoors and 'perpetually stressed'. In order to counter the effects of this lifestyle, Anna had committed herself to practicing yoga and on weekends tried to spend as much time as possible outdoors, making excursions to the countryside to go hiking with friends. I met many similar cases – people who lived in cities and worked in offices, where they spent exorbitant amounts of time seated in front of computers while longing for fresh air and bodily movement. A number of participants expressed great disdain for the institutions in which they worked, which were frequently described as boring, bureaucratic, egocentric and alienating. Many of these individuals saw their trips to the Himalayas, like Anna, as a 'breaking out' of, or at least a temporary escape from what was often described as overly sedentary, stressful and unfulfilling lives at home.

Mike, another Londoner also in his late twenties, whom I met in Pokhara shortly after he had completed the seventeen day Annapurna circuit trek, explained how he had been working for a government ministry until 2010. In the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis, Mike said things became 'very ugly, very political' in his place of work and

there was 'a lot of backstabbing going on by people scared of losing their jobs'. Many of his friends had lost their jobs or else taken substantial pay cuts, 'so it was a good time to get out'. With a small severance package and his life savings, he decided to leave London on an open-ended trip, beginning in Nepal, 'a place I had always dreamed of coming'. When we met, Mike was one month into his trip, with three of these weeks spent on the Annapurna circuit trail. Like Don Pablo on trekking to Everest base-camp, Mike described the experience as the best thing he had ever done in his life. He spoke passionately about the mountain vistas, the physical challenge of trekking in high altitude and the bonds he formed with fellow trekkers, some of whom he had been reconnecting with back down in Pokhara. He explained how it was easy to make friends and talk to people, as 'everyone was going through a similar experience and shared the common goal – to make it over *the pass*'. At 5,300 meters, making it over 'the pass' is both the goal and greatest challenge of the trek. Trekkers follow a ritual of leaving the nearest huts at 3am to watch the sunrise from the top of the pass, making it a pivotal point of the trek-pilgrimage. Explaining how many people do not make it over due to the high altitude and sudden weather changes, Mike described it as 'by far the most difficult physical feat I've ever done in my life, and I'm a competitive cyclist'. A Swedish couple he befriended on the trail had apparently tried three times and never made it over 'the pass' and he also reported crossing paths with a Dutch woman who was being brought down by mule with a broken leg.

Mike's mountain adventure demonstrated many of the qualities of a rite of pasSage and pilgrimage, including liminality, *communitas* with

fellow trekkers and completing a circular journey that involved reaching and carrying out a ritual at a specific axis point. Back down in Pokhara, Mike expressed feeling a sense of change and transformation: 'I feel the healthiest I've ever felt, fit as a whistle, really calmed down and just at peace with things. I just feel…good'. As we chatted through a lazy morning at a café in Pokhara, Mike with an Umberto Eco novel in hand, I reflected on how the desire for challenging bodily experiences in the mountains appeared directly related to people's life situations at home. In Mike's, Anna's and other cases, the pressures, boredom and the neglect of the body that accompany urban lifestyles facilitated intense urges to reinvigorate their bodily being and reconnect to nature. Such desires and the thirst for adventure were much the same as those of early mountaineers, as discussed in chapter two.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the imaginings, goals and reasons why certain contemporary people set off on journeys to the middle Himalayan region, while exploring the broader question of why people travel at all. Pre-travel imaginaries informed by various media representations shaped travellers' perceptions and expectations of the Himalayas and fuelled desires for transformative adventures. The three central motives I identified in Himalayan travel were coming to the source or origin of spiritual traditions, immersive cultural experiences and nature-based challenges primarily in the form of multi-day mountain treks. There was almost always overlap between these themes and very often Himalayan journeys were incorporated into trips to other parts of Asia and in many cases around the world.

Many travellers were in transitional phases in their life narratives; they were either between jobs or career paths, romantic relationships or life stages. People's motives were never reducible to a single reason and typically hinged upon a complex mixture of goals and purposes, 'push' and 'pull' factors. Himalayan journeys were used variously to create distance from the everyday, to mark transitions into new life stages, to break out of unhealthy and dissatisfying patterns, to seek understanding of self and world and find reoriented life paths. Overcoming perceived limitations, enlarging understandings by experiences of radical Otherness and exploring bodily potentials, travellers sought to extend their horizons. The *telos*, or ultimate aim of Himalayan travel, I concluded, thus was self-transformation, fulfilment and the cultivation of *eudemonia* – wellbeing or human flourishing.

While Himalayan adventures lead in certain respects to what Simmel (1997: 222) calls a 'dropping out of the continuity of life', I have tried to emphasize that travelling still takes place within the overall continuity of life. As a series of experiences within the continuous experience of a life, clear delineations of when journeys actually begin and end are problematic. When one physically departs on a journey, there is indeed the sense of a beginning, just as when one returns, there is the sense of an ending. Yet places are visited, prepared for and *known* in the imagination before they are departed for, and they are also re-visited and re-presented in the imagination after they are returned from. Sometimes travel imaginaries can be traced back to childhood, as in the cases of Jason and Roman, or even to imagined past lives, as in Carina's case. The stories, images and media representations we as 'mediums of communication' are exposed to in social experience work to construct

worlds that build upon worlds in an on-going creative process. In this sense, like the supposed boundaries separating here and there, self and Other, how do we know where our imagination ends and reality begins? One day in Kathmandu, Robert, the wise man who had been leading groups to the middle Himalayas for the past two decades told me: 'Reality? Better to get rid of that idea all together. It's all imaginary.

CHAPTER FIVE

To the Village Where No Roads Go:
Authenticity & Alienation in Himalayan Travel

I want to believe an ideal village exists.

> Kazu, Himalayan traveller

I wished I had lived in the days of *real* journeys, when it was still possible to see the full splendour and spectacle that had not yet been blighted, polluted and spoilt …When was the best time to see India?

> Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (1974: 43)

How has it happened that so many people have come to take up this strange attitude of hostility to civilization?

> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1961: 38)

This chapter centres on authenticity, a distinctively modern theme that emerged continuously in interviews and fieldwork observations and also reflects the broader socio-historical milieu Himalayan travel is situated in. Here I explore the relational dynamics of contemporary quests for authenticity in the Himalayas by examining certain

projections and contrasting attitudes travellers expressed towards their home societies. Typically critical of 'modernity', 'western culture' and 'life at home', travellers often expressed positive yet uncritical appraisal for people and places perceived as exotic, pre-modern and natural. Set against a modern world perceived as inauthentic, alienating and spiritually disenchanted, the Himalayan region was often idealized for an aura of natural and cultural purity, authenticity and spirituality. It is in such contrasting projections, nostalgia and utopian yearnings that contemporary journeys such as those to the Himalayas and perhaps other global 'power places' may be read as both a meta-critique *and* enactment of late modernity.

As discussed in the previous chapter, motivations for visiting the Himalayas were typically multifaceted, driven by push and pull factors connected to narrative representations and imaginings, transitions between life stages, desires for challenge and transformations of self. In accordance with the dominant media representations that pre-structured travel imaginaries and informed Himalayan travel, there was a general perception amongst travellers that the world consisted of two distinct and contrasting spheres. This was evidenced in subtle attitudes and by overt descriptions by travellers of the Himalayan region as 'another world', a 'different world' or even 'another planet'. This attitude of essential otherness not only pertained to the Himalayan region, but to India and Asia more generally and other non-Western societies and regions around the globe. The perception of a dual world reflects a longstanding, global theme of western modernity, encapsulated in the discourse of the 'West and the rest' (Scruton, 2002), orient and occident (Said 1978) and the 'Great Divide' between

moderns and non-moderns (Latour 1993), and also points to themes of authenticity and alienation.

In the case of the middle Himalayas and perhaps other destinations which bring together ethnic, eco and spiritual tourism, the region 'promises' western travellers experiences that are perceived to be unavailable at home. I found that what most travellers in Nepal and northern India yearned for were glimpses into and first hand experiences of a place and people imagined as purer, more spiritual and authentic. Such utopian yearnings and nostalgic projections raise important questions about cross cultural relationships and attitudes, but ultimately point back to the dual themes of authenticity and alienation that are central to the discourse of western modernity.[10] After briefly surveying the concept of authenticity, I explore certain modern tensions and paradoxes through analysis of two key encounters I had with travellers in Kathmandu shortly after my arrival there. The discussion of authenticity intersects with the related theme of alienation, the two of which I argue are crucially linked by technology.

The emergence of authenticity as a modern ideal

Authenticity is a moral and ethical concept emerging from the great transformations western culture has undergone over the past two hundred and fifty years and continues to hold a central position in both scholarly and popular discourses of modernity (Ferrara 1998; Habermas 1987; Lindholm 2008; Potter 2010; Taylor 1991, 2007; Trilling 1972).

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[10] But not only modernity. Alienation and 'fallenness' have been around for much longer and appear to be an archetypal dimension of the human condition.

Authenticity has and continues to be a prominent topic in tourism and pilgrimage research, spanning the seminal writings of Boorstin (1964), MacCannell (1973, 1976) and Cohen (1979, 1988) to the present (Andriotis 2009; Belhassen et al. 2008; Brown 2013; E. M. Bruner 1989, 1991, 1994; E. Cohen 1982, 1988; E. Cohen and Cohen 2012b; Crick 1989; Dallen 2011; Hongyan 2009; Jamal and Hill 2002; Konstantinos 2011; Kontogeorgopoulos 2003; Lau 2010; MacCannell 2011; Matthews 2009; Pearce and Moscardo 1986; Rickly-Boyd 2012; Selwyn 1996; Steiner and Reisinger 2006; Urry 2011b; Vannini and Williams 2009; Wang 1999, 2000).

Although definitions and conceptualizations vary, authenticity is the lead member of set of a values that includes sincerity, essential, natural, original, and real (Lindholm 2008: 1). Giddens (1991: 79) discusses authenticity as a moral concept arising in the era of 'reflexive modernisation' and is based on the romantic notion of 'being true to oneself'. Literary critic Lionel Trilling (1972: 93) traces it to an earlier modern concern with sincerity and describes how authenticity's becoming 'part of the moral slang of our day points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual existence'. As Trilling suggests, authenticity as a moral concern emerges in modernity, but emanates from a deeper engrained Christian sense of being expelled from the Garden of Eden. This idea is thus reminiscent of Eliade's theory that since being expelled, human beings have a subconscious 'nostalgia for paradise' and a desire to transcend historical time.

The modern ideal of authenticity, however, is generally seen as emerging from the social transformations in Europe beginning in the

sixteenth century, related to the breakup of the feudal system, the decline of traditional authority and divinely-sanctioned and hierarchically organised social structures (Davies 1996; Taylor 2007; Weber 2003). Such traditional structures had kept feudal Europeans functionally immobilized, tied to both geographic locations and social positions, a fact which also left them lacking both subjective identities and historical consciousness in the modern sense (Bauman and Vecchi 2004; Ferrara 1998; Gadamer 1988; Giddens 1991; Lash 1992; Taylor 1989; Urry 2007). Rural-urban migration, a growing merchant class, increased literacy and a Protestant ethic emphasizing individual integrity and personal salvation, along with the growth and development of scientific reason and Enlightenment ideals of autonomy are also linked to the modern emergence of authenticity as a moral concern (Ferrara 1998; Taylor 2007; Trilling 1972).

Rousseau is frequently credited with being the initiator of the 'cult of authenticity' and the more general, Romantic Movement, which arose in response to the Enlightenment rationality and the alienating forces of the industrial revolution (Koch 1993; Lindholm 2008: 8). As Charles Taylor (1991: 27) points out, Rousseau is an important figure here not because he inaugurated the change or invented romanticism; rather, his great popularity came from articulating something that was already happening, which Taylor (1991: 26) calls 'the massive subjective turn of modern culture'.

Feeding this cultural shift with widely read social critiques and his famous pronouncement that 'man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains', Rousseau was the first to present the issue of morality to the reading public as 'that of our following a voice of nature within us'

(Taylor 1991: 26). Taylor translates the new moral ideal of authenticity as 'self-determining freedom', a uniquely modern and by now largely engrained 'idea that I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than being shaped by external influences' (27).

Image 18: The romantic search for authenticity
'Wanderer above the Sea of Fog', Caspar David Friedrich, 1818.
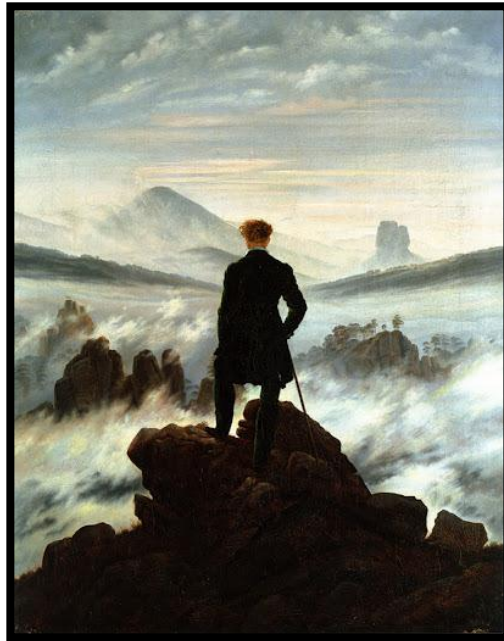
http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/

More recently, Taylor (2007: 473-504) has gone so far as to call the cultural history of the West since the 1960s the 'age of authenticity', in which the chief value is above all, choice, or the freedom to choose for oneself. 'Authenticity' writes Taylor (1991: 67-8), 'is itself an idea of freedom; it involves finding the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity.' Heelas (2005: 5) is in clear agreement when he claims that Taylor and others are right 'in supposing that the subjective turn has become the defining cultural development of modern western culture'. Compared to a pre-modern life modes in which 'supra-self orders' such as religions, kinship systems, feudal or class systems served as people's primary 'sources of significance'

(Taylor 1989), 'the key value for subject-centred life modes is 'authentic connection with the inner depths of one's unique life-in relation' (Heelas 2005: 7). Although authenticity is central to the discourse of modernity, the concept is generally used in two broad senses.

Existential and object authenticity in pilgrimage and tourism research

It is important to emphasize that authenticity is a highly relative concept that is used in various senses, depending on authors' subjects of focus and epistemological and ontological positions. Surveying the wide range of literature discussing authenticity, the concept is typically applied in two broad senses. First, it is used in relation to notions of selfhood and subjectivity having to do with 'self-determining freedom' and 'being true to oneself'. This is more the territory of what is commonly discussed as 'existential authenticity', a subjective state, experience or way of being that is meant to be simpler, freer, truer and more spontaneous than in everyday life (Brown 2013; Guignon 2004, 2008; Malo-Fletcher 2011; Wang 2000: 50). In the tourism and pilgrimage literature, certain authors argue that travellers are preoccupied with achieving an existentially authentic state, which is allegedly activated by qualities of the travel process, particularly ritual inversion, liminality and anti-structure (Belhassen et al. 2008; Brown 2013; Noy 2004; Steiner and Reisinger 2006; Wang 1999). The goal or meaning of existential authenticity points to a recovery or realization of an original nature or 'true self' which is allegedly lost amidst the busyness, hypocrisy and inauthenticity of everyday life, yet is imagined to be somehow accessible 'out there' (Wang 2000: 358).

The second sense of authenticity has less to do with subjective states
and is rather a property or quality ascribed to objects, such as original
artworks, museum artefacts, musical renditions, peoples and places
thought to be unchanged from the past (Cohen 1988; Konstantinos 2011;
Lindholm 2008; MacCannell 1973). Because it deals with attributes and
projections onto concrete artefacts, as opposed to an existential state of
being, this is generally discussed as 'object authenticity' (Olsen 2002:
164; Wang 2000). In tourism and pilgrimage research concentrating on
'object authenticity', the focus tends to be on perceptions and
projections of travellers onto objects, places and even peoples believed
to be pure, original, in natural or unchanged states. For authors like
MacCannell (1976), these qualities are ascribed an almost sacred status
by modern tourists, whose quests for authenticity are seen as a form of
secular pilgrimage, but are seen as being undertaken in what Sartre
calls 'bad faith'.

Despite numerous contesting definitions and conceptualizations of
authenticity, it is important to recognize that like alienation, it operates
essentially as a contrast concept. That is, notions of authenticity –
whether existential or object-oriented – presuppose inauthenticity, just
as the idea of alienation assumes the possibility of an unalienated
condition. Despite the epistemic and ontological problems both
authenticity and alienation pose due to their claims surrounding
alleged original natures, what matters is that for roughly the past two
hundred and fifty years, authenticity has occupied a central place in the
discourse of modernity that continues in the twenty first century. While
the concept is too broad to cover in its entirety, here I focus primarily
on travellers' projections of object authenticity onto Himalayan cultures

and landscapes. Importantly, however, such projections were found to be connected to subjective perceptions of existential authenticity that travellers experienced by coming into contact with these phenomena.

Focusing on a semiotics of opposition, I explore romantic, utopian projections of authenticity by travellers onto the Himalayan region, in contrast to the critical and ambivalent attitudes travellers often expressed towards their home societies. Viewing travel as ritualized and relational practice and not taking authenticity as a static category, I consider it as a social process that reifies or reproduces an 'aura' of authenticity (Rickly-Boyd 2012) via the embodied performance of travelling (Zhu 2012). Following Cohen and Cohen (2012a: 1269), authenticity can be thought of as an active process of 'authentication'. Understanding authentication as a social and relational process requires attending to the interplay of the ritual act of travelling, travellers' subjective experiences and object-related projections.

Authenticity in Himalayan travel

As I discovered, there was a utopian yearning for lost origins and simpler, purer and more spiritually integrated times among travellers in Nepal and northern India. The Himalayas and certain other peripheral 'power places' around the globe, such as Machu Picchu (Arellano 2004) or the Australian outback (Frost 2010; Narayanan and Macbeth 2009), are represented as not yet corrupted by modernity, still 'pure', 'wild' and 'authentic'. Such perceptions and ritualized practices such as tourism and pilgrimages to idealized, imagined destinations such as the Himalayas reveal a relational politics that critiques western modernity and expresses nostalgia for the west's own sense of lost

innocence. This nostalgic attitude, at once utopic and dystopic, expresses what Bruner (1991: 240) calls the 'master narrative' of tourism, in which 'civilized persons go on tour to experience the primitive, the exotic, the erotic, and the Other, in order to recover their origin, an original state seen as pure and as yet not polluted by European civilization'. One Himalayan traveller who expressed such modern sentiments and seemed to enact performances of authentication was in fact the first person I met upon my arrival in Kathmandu.

This first participant turned out to be a type of traveller all too familiar with the 'Great Divide' allegedly separating the 'West and the rest'. He was a cultural anthropologist, and a veteran one. Our encounter took place in the dim, candlelit restaurant located on the first floor of the Hotel Vajra in Kathmandu. This was on the evening of my third day in Nepal. For those three days, I only knew Kathmandu from the ambient sounds and the smells that would drift through the window of my third story room, where I had been holed up, too ill to go out. The room looked down on a large courtyard garden, encircled by a wall of bamboo, beyond which I could see the brick roofs of houses, schools and the pointed roofs of pagodas. The Hotel Vajra compound was indeed how the website had described it: a 'sanctuary within the city'. I had been recommended to stay at the Vajra by one of the participants I had interviewed back in New Zealand and had chosen to stay there not only because of its attractive architecture and setting, but because it seemed to offer the prospect of conducting research in and around the hotel. The following description from the Hotel Vajra's website demonstrated its suitability in this regard:

The Vajra is situated on the foothills of the Swayambhunath Stupa and its age-old pilgrim road, also near the Bijeswori Temple complex, two of the power places of the Kathmandu Valley. The Vajra is surrounded by trees and flower trail gardens, creating a place of serenity and beauty, overlooking the entire Kathmandu Valley up to the snow peaks of the Himalayas. And on any early morning you may join the pilgrims – Nepali, Tibetan, Bhutanese, in fact, you may see a Buddhist from any part of the world on their ascent to the great 2000 years old Swayambhunath Stupa.

The Vajra was indeed well placed for my research, but for the first three days I barely left my room. When not lying in a feverish haze, I sat by the window looking down on the garden. From time to time a woman wearing what appeared to be traditional dress worked in the garden. I was impressed at her strength and efficiency as she pulled weeds and chopped bamboo with a small hatchet before slinging a great bundle on her back and disappearing through a wall of thick brush. Barefoot and silent, she seemed absorbed and content in her work. Gazing down at her, I wondered what it might be like to live her life. Beyond her work in the garden, I had little idea what such a life entailed, but from my short glimpse into her lifeworld, it looked like a simple and healthy life, a peaceful life, possibly an authentic life.

Besides the narrow footpaths adorned by Buddhist and Hindu sculptures of gods and goddesses and alcoves for guests to sit and read or meditate in, the garden provided organic produce for the hotel restaurant. Having eaten my last meal with the Chung family in Kuala Lumpur during my fateful layover, after three days of subsisting on jugs of water left outside my room and rice crackers brought from

Japan, I decided it was time for a real meal. I made my way downstairs and took a seat at the small table in the dim, ground floor restaurant. Scanning the room, I observed tables occupied mostly by fit looking Europeans speaking French and German. The ages of diners ranged from thirties to sixties. From their natural fibre and outdoor clothing and body hexis, they struck me as the types who practiced yoga, enjoyed hiking and the outdoors, were diet and health conscious, well-educated and well-travelled. Studying the menu, which boasted a global bricolage of Nepali, Indian, Chinese and European fare, I ended up ordering a bowl of plain rice, vegetable soup and a fruit salad. Despite the menu offering manifold versions of curry, after the experience in Kuala Lumpur, curry was the least appetizing dish I could imagine.

As I waited for my simple meal to arrive, a lone, grey haired man who looked to be in his mid-sixties sat down at the table next to mine. Despite his age, he appeared healthy and vigorous, with a strong and serious expression that was offset slightly by mischievous gleam in his bright blue eyes. He appeared perfectly at ease, as if he was a regular not only to the restaurant, but also to this part of the world. I noticed that he was tapping his foot to the traditional Indian music playing in the restaurant. In an effort to make conversation, I complimented him on knowing the tune, which to my ears sounded indistinguishable from most other traditional Indian music – a twanging sitar, the steady, hypnotic beat of *tabala* drums and airy female vocals. Turning towards me, he laughed and in a German accent said, 'I'm no musician, just hungry'. I asked if he was travelling alone. He said indeed he was and would be leaving the following morning. Judging by his rather serious

looking hiking boots, I guessed he was going trekking, and asked where he was heading.

'I'll be catching a ride north from Kathmandu. The drive will take about eight hours. From there, it's a ten day hike to the village I'm going to. You see, I'm an anthropologist,' he explained matter of factly. 'An anthropologist?!' I blurted out. 'What a coincidence, I'm also an anthropologist! Well, I'm working on a PhD in anthropology, anyway. I'm here to do fieldwork for my thesis. My name's Chris, by the way,' I said, trying to conceal my surprise and excitement. 'Mack, good to meet you,' he said, not looking nearly as impressed.

Mack ordered *dhal bat* (lentil curry, a Himalayan staple) and a large bottle of Indian brewed 'Hummingbird Ale'. Waiting for our meals to arrive, we chatted across our two tables. Explaining how he had been doing research in Nepal for the past forty-five years, Mack was a virtual encyclopaedia on the country, albeit a highly critical and rather nostalgic one. Eventually our meals arrived. Poking at my rice, I listened as Mack spoke passionately of how 'magical' Kathmandu was in the early days before electricity, cars and roads, none of which had arrived to the former kingdom until the early 1960s.

> Kathmandu was magical then. No electricity, the whole city lit by candles and lanterns at night. Not a single car, well except for the king – he had the only car in Nepal – but no roads. It was truly amazing. Of course it's all changed now. This is your first trip, right? Unfortunately you will never know how it was.

Mack was particularly critical of both roads and electricity, which he saw as the central destroyers of what he referred reverently to as 'the

tradition'. 'Roads destroy everything! Once there are roads, it all goes to shit,' he said with a pained scowl. 'And as for electricity…' he said, leaning in closer and looking me in the eye, 'as we like to say, when the lights go on, the tradition goes out!' He then leaned back in his chair, shaking his head and laughing ironically before taking a big gulp of beer. I pondered the stance of my anthropologist interlocutor: No roads, candles and lanterns and the tradition were amazing, magical, authentic; electricity, cars, roads were destroyers of culture and authenticity.

What I was hearing from Mack was part of the same discourse of nostalgia and authenticity I was to hear in the course of subsequent conversations with other travellers. Moreover, it was prominent theme in dominant media representations and narratives, such as those found in films such as *Seven Years in Tibet*, *Kundun* and *Eat, Pray, Love*. Following a semiotics of opposition, there was a tendency to celebrate 'traditional cultures' (and not just in the Himalayan region), while lamenting the destruction and loss that accompanies modernisation, globalisation and development. Nostalgia for an idealized, unchanging and authentic past thus expresses a meta-critique of modernity, which is symbolized by electricity, roads, automobiles and other technologies. The 'problem' with such modern technological developments is that increased mobility and interconnectivity means that fewer places remain untouched, unexplored, 'natural', 'pure' and 'mysterious'. Paradoxically, then, it is the same modern mobile conditions and technologies that make Himalayan travel (and global mobility more generally) possible that are critiqued for their alleged destructiveness and forces of inauthentication.

I asked Mack what exactly he researches in Nepal. He explained that he 'works on' several hill tribes, though it was unclear what aspects. What he did emphasize was the remoteness of the villages he goes to, and how they could only be reached on foot. He spoke of the emptying out of the villages as increasing numbers of rural Nepalese migrated either to 'this terrible, overcrowded capital' [Kathmandu], or else sought dubious opportunities abroad, usually in the Middle East or Malaysia. In these places, he explained, they are typically conned and exploited, and eventually return to Nepal worse off than when they left. 'Emigration is the single biggest issue facing Nepal in the next thirty years,' declared Mack.

'Yeah, here and other places,' I added, recalling Zygmunt Bauman's (1998: 77) reflections on the consequences of globalisation; whether tourist or vagabond, 'nowadays we are all on the move'. Eventually Mack asked about my plans in Nepal and the nature of my research. I explained how I was interested in the intersections of pilgrimage and tourism in the Himalayas and how this could be related to certain modern themes. Due to the topic, I explained how I was planning to go where western travellers go, as opposed to the remote villages where he visits. After Kathmandu, I said, I was heading to Pokhara, a popular destination for trekking, yoga and meditation retreats, and later to Dharamsala and Darjeeling in India. Mack listened quietly and intently. Squinting his sharp blue eyes, he appeared to be turning my words over deeply in his mind. After finishing my explanation, he paused for a moment, staring into the flame of the candle on the table, before suddenly looking me directly in the eye. 'May I make a suggestion?' he asked quietly. I nodded, sensing I was about to be lectured.

> Don't go to Pokhara. You will find absolutely nothing there. The tradition is lost and the people don't know who they are. They have lost their identity, their *collective* identity. They sold it long ago. Go there if you *vant* to eat chowmein and swim in the lake! [volume rises and bangs his hand on the table] But don't expect to find anything interesting! [mounting anger and strengthening German accent]

Sipping his beer and smoothing his dishevelled silver hair, he lowered his voice and leaned in once again, his eyes twinkling in the candlelight.

> If you *vant* to find something interesting, you must go to the village where no roads go. There you will find something worth knowing about.

I relented that I had heard that Pokhara was pretty touristy. 'Oh yes, it's awful, awful, and so is the road to get there! Nothing but highway trash, tin shacks and wires the whole way. Horrible, horrible!' Once again, Mack highlighted the loss of traditional culture in Nepal, which he blamed on forces of modernisation and development. In the case of Pokhara, he attributed this loss not only to roads and electricity, but also to the cultural commodification which had resulted from its emergence as a popular tourist destination. Despite its location in central Nepal, surrounded by the towering peaks of the Annapurna range, Pokhara had allegedly become a place where anyone with the two essential ingredients of global mobility – time and money – could go and eat chowmein, pizza or any other ubiquitous global fare. Mack's attitude towards tourism thus fit with the critical side of tourism studies which emphasizes its consumptive and destructive tendencies

(Baudrillard 1997; Boorstin 1964; Crick 1989; MacCannell 1973, 1976, 2011; Turner and Ash 1975; Urry 2001), as opposed to seeing its positive potential for facilitating development and cultural understanding.

Seeing as my research did not appear to hold much interest or credibility in Mack's eyes, I sat back and with a dose of irony asked, 'So, where is Shangri La?'

'Ha! There is no Shangri La, at least not anymore. But you can get close if you go as far from the roads as possible,' he said matter of factly, continuing:

> You should go to the high jungle of west Nepal. There are peoples there that few, if any, westerners have ever seen. They still have their tradition, for now anyway. They play very interesting ritual music on unique instruments. Ja, you should go to west Nepal. There you can find something interesting.

I said this indeed all sounded very interesting, but that I needed to meet other western travellers in order to collect data for *my thesis* and that if I went to visit the tribes in the high jungle, I would not likely run into many. 'Ja, ja,' he waved his hand dismissively. 'Then by all means go to Pokhara. You will find what you're looking for.' For Mack, Pokhara was a tourist trap with nothing 'interesting' to offer, a place where local people had allegedly sold their 'collective identity' and no longer know who they are.

For Mack, the only place to find 'something interesting' and 'worth knowing about' were places as far off the beaten track as possible, away from roads and tourists, away from anything to do with advanced,

industrial technology and modernity. These were apparently authentic places that had not yet been subsumed by modernity, where authentic human beings lived authentic lives in harmony with pure and authentic nature. This was a common attitude I observed in Himalayan travellers. The logic seemed to be that the more remote and less connected a place and people were to the West or perhaps what might now be called global capitalist society, the more real and authentic they are imagined to be. As I observed, there was a common tendency amongst travellers to share stories and compare how far off the beaten path they had travelled. Although I considered going to India and Nepal relatively adventurous, from the level of tourist infrastructure, the large number of foreign visitors and their attitudes and behaviours, I soon saw that these were no longer the 'hard-core' frontier destinations they once were. From what I heard on numerous occasions, the new and perhaps final frontiers for truly getting off the beaten path meant going to places such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran or Yemen.

There was often an element of competition and one-upmanship in travellers' tales of how far 'out there' they had been. Despite the occasional sense of *communitas* among Himalayan travellers, I found that they often engaged in games of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) that revolved around how well travelled and 'cosmopolitan' one was. This was based not only on how many countries had been visited, but how remote, obscure and culturally distant those countries were and how immersed one had managed to become in the culture there. For instance, I can recall a conversation involving four travellers and me at a guesthouse in Darjeeling in which a French Canadian woman in her late twenties boasted endlessly of her exploits in places such as

Pakistan, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan, among other places which struck me, personally, as rather dangerous places. The other three travellers tried to interject with their own exotic adventures 'out there', but the French Canadian always had a better story waiting, showing that she was clearly more adventurous and worldly. It seemed that for travellers such as her, the experience of being immersed in non-Western, radically other places conferred a sense of existential authenticity by affording a heightened sense of 'self-determining freedom' that demonstrated she could travel the world freely and decide 'for herself' where she would go and how she wished to live. The travel writer Paul Bowles (2000: 9-10) illustrates this theme when he writes:

> Another important difference between the tourist and traveller is that the former accepts his civilization without question; not so the traveller, who compares it with others, and rejects those elements he finds not to his liking.

Like the French Canadian woman, Mack the anthropologist displayed a similar attitude and also seemed to enjoy displaying his accumulated cultural or perhaps exotic capital. He continued telling me about various 'fascinating tribes' he had 'worked on' over the past forty-five years in remote corners Nepal until the candles on our tables had burned low. Explaining he had an early morning start, we said goodnight and never saw each other again. Such were my fleeting encounters with Himalayan travellers; here one moment gone the next. For all I know Mack is out there at this very moment, finding 'something interesting' in villages where no roads go.

Authenticity and the relational politics of travel

The more I listened to Mack, the more I realized I was speaking with a romantic anthropologist from what seemed to me like a bygone or nearly bygone era. He appeared interested only in what was exotic and other, which he portrayed as frozen in time, pure and authentic (Fabian 2002). What's more, he seemed to suggest that 'exotic others' are not only timeless, but that they should *stay timeless*, closed off to the world and should not follow the path of 'fallen moderns'. The discourse of the 'west and the rest' can be traced back to the age of exploration, when Europeans came into contact with and compared themselves to other world cultures (Graburn 2001). Believing themselves superior in most every way, Europeans felt justified in conquering and exploiting, as well as a moral duty to civilize peoples seen as backwards, barbaric and savage (Said 1978). As the 'science of otherness', anthropology has been critiqued for unwittingly playing a part in advancing European colonial agendas (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988, 1997; Fabian 2002; Latour 1993) and reproducing a hegemonic discourse of a civilized West versus a primitive rest.

The modern Us and Them attitude continues to be held by many travellers from western countries, as my fieldwork and other empirical research demonstrates (Van den Berghe 1994), and remains a dominant theme in the discourse of authenticity. Potter (2010:63) summarizes the common perception as follows.

> Modern society is alienating, while primitive societies promise
> a return to our lost unity and natural wholeness, where we can
> avoid the status competition, and raw commercialization of
> society and embed ourselves in a true community based on

simple, non-exploitative relationships. In this view, the search for lost authenticity is essentially an exercise in retrieval, as we harken back to our pre-modern past.

Extracting key signifiers in Potter's summary and adding a few more from the broader discourse of the Great Divide betweem moderns and non-moderns, we see how the modern social imaginary is constructed according to a semiotics of binary opposition:

| **Modern** | **Non-modern** |

Image 19: Modern oppositions

Modern	Non-modern
Inauthentic	Authentic
Alienated	Connected
Individualistic	Communal
Competitive	Egalitarian
Commercialization	Natural wholeness
Dominant over nature	Oneness with nature
Disenchanted	Enchanted
Detraditionalized	Traditional
Complex	Simple
Rational	Non-rational, emotional
Controlled	Spontaneous, free
Fallen	Spiritually attuned

Ultimately, the discourse of Us and Them says more about its primary producers. As Said (1978: 12-13) observes, the 'cultural and political fact' of orientalism 'has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our" world'. Galani-Moutafi (2000: 220) similarly reflects on how '[t]ravelers, anthropologists and tourists can be considered as observers who gaze into the elsewhere and the Other, while looking for their own

reflection'. By travelling on foot to remote Himalayan villages 'where no roads go', was Mack not negotiating his own ambivalent relationship with modernity, expressed in his disdain for technology, development and his nostalgia for Nepal's endangered cultural traditions? Of course I only shared a single dinner with Mack and thus can only report on was said that evening. The next morning he woke at dawn and set off for village whose name I never caught.

Mack's reverence for 'the tradition' and his contempt of Nepal's modernisation could be seen as an example of 'imperialist nostalgia' (Rosaldo 1989) or orientalism as 'a kind of western projection onto and will to govern over the orient' (Said 1978: 95). Later on in Pokhara, yes, 'awful awful' Pokhara – I told my week-long travelling companion, Jason, an environmental planner who works for a government NGO in Cambodia, about Mack's disdain for electricity and technology. Extremely well-travelled in Asia, with experience living in several Asian countries over the past ten years and fluent in three Asian languages, Jason remarked: 'That attitude kills me. I mean, who are *we* to say who should and shouldn't have cell phones?'

The 'attitude' Jason speaks of reveals a potential neo-imperialism which seeks to preserve 'exotic others' as a timeless spectacle to be gazed upon (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Fabian 2002; Urry 2002b). One could argue that Mack's entire career and economic livelihood depended on objectifying, reifying and 'authenticating' 'exotic others' who could be assumed to receive little if anything in return. This all points to a relational politics in which identities are constructed according to relationships of difference. As McHugh (2006: 53) suggests, travels represent 'boundary crossings, political overtures that

engender questions of 'other' and, hence, 'self''. I reflected on the differences between Mack and I. He had been disappointed and baffled as to why I was not going to a place like the high jungle of west Nepal to 'work on' villagers who few, if any, westerners had ever seen. I, on the other hand, was suspicious and critical of Mack's and anthropology's *illusio* (interest and commitment) in objectifying 'exotic others'. In fact this unease was a major reason I chose to do a 'native anthropology' that focused primarily on western travellers and the relational dynamics of contemporary global mobility, of which the anthropological enterprise itself is a part.

A major reason for the gap between Mack and me, I suspected was generational. Mack was roughly my father's age. A great deal has changed not only in the social sciences over the past half century, but Mack had also observed immense changes occurring in Nepal as the country transitioned from a closed, roadless Himalayan kingdom until the 1950s to the present in which the country's economy is largely dependent on tourism. In fact, 2011 was 'National Tourism Year' in Nepal with the government aiming to bring one million tourists into the country by the end of the year and reminding the Nepalese citizens of their culture's ancient adage, 'guests are gods' (Ministry of Tourism 2011). This fact pained Mack, who remarked on the subject, 'despite the economic gains, this country is being ruined by tourism. It's short-term thinking which will only bring greater losses in the end'.

Mack was not the only anthropologist to observe immense transformations as Nepal opened to the world and to lament the encroachment of global tourism. Sherry Ortner describes dramatic changes to the Solu Khumbu region surrounding Mount Everest in

eastern Nepal, where she returned to over the course of forty plus years of fieldwork. Like Mack, Ortner recalls how in the early sixties she only encountered a handful of foreigners, whereas by the seventies she wrote in her fieldnotes: 'There were a *million* tourists. Both the trail and Lukla itself were *awful*, essentially *polluted* with tourists' (Ortner 2001: 199).

This sounded like something the Lévi-Straus of *Tristes Tropiques* or Mack, my dinner companion, might say. Ortner is well aware of the irony of her statement, however, for this is the same anthropologist who describes authenticity as 'another problematic term, insofar as it seems to presume a naïve belief in cultural purity, in untouched cultures whose histories are uncontaminated by those of their neighbours or of the West (Ortner 2006: 45). However critical of modernity anthropologists or self-described 'travellers' may be, interestingly, they generally did not see themselves as playing a part in processes they claimed to oppose. If there was an acknowledgement of the irony, travellers expressed a reasoning analogous to that of certain meat eaters who when reproached by vegetarians for contributing to the genocide of animals say things like, 'well the animals are going to be killed whether I eat them or not, so might as well eat them'.

Travellers often saw the irony of the equation that contact equals contamination, but generally they did not let it get in the way of their desires for seeing the world. For instance, I interviewed a middle-aged woman named Bo in New Zealand, a natural healer who was making a trip to Nepal to trek and 'have a vacation that doesn't involve lying on a beach'. She had booked an organised trek online in the Annapurna mountain sanctuary, just outside of Pokhara. Along with Himalayan

vistas and physical challenge, Bo looked forward to intimate experiences with the local people whom she would be staying with along the way. Curious about my 'academic' opinion about Himalayan travel, as most travellers I spoke with were, she asked what I thought of such pursuits. I made the gentle suggestion that tourism is somewhat paradoxical in that visiting such places may result, for better or worse, in changing them, and that relations between 'hosts and guests' were neither politically or economically neutral.

The irony was not lost on Bo, who insisted on going trekking in the Himalayas regardless. 'I see that,' she said, 'by going there we contribute to the destruction. But I want to meet those people, see how they live while there is still the chance, before these places disappear'.

'These places?' I asked. Like other travellers, Bo thought that opportunities for experiencing 'authentic' people and places such as in the Himalayas were rapidly disappearing in a culturally homogenizing global order. A participant from Sørensen's (2003: 853) *Backpacker Ethnography* expresses the late modern predicament much like Bo:

> The differences between places or cultures disappear rapidly, they all become more or less like us. If you want to see anything different from our Western countries you have to do it quickly, before it all vanishes.

We arrive once again at a modern paradox. Discussing the internal contradictions of quests for authenticity, MacCannell (1976: 83) observes how 'every nicely motivated effort to preserve nature, primitives and the past, and to represent them authentically contributes to the opposite tendency – the present is made more unified against the

past, more in control of nature, less a product of history'. This suggests that paradoxically, once something is deemed 'authentic' or 'natural', that very authenticity or naturalness is compromised by virtue of becoming a spectacle.[11] Van den Berghe (1994: 9) likens the quest for authenticity to the advancing line of a savannah fire in that it consumes and destroys the very commodity it searches for. More than thirty years after initiating the debate on authenticity in tourism studies, MacCannell (2011: 2) continues to argue that the modern quest for authenticity 'out there' contains a hidden hegemonic agenda:

> Modernity first appears to everyone as it did to Levi-Strauss, as disorganised fragments, alienating, wasteful, violent, superficial, unplanned, unstable and inauthentic. On second examination, however, this appearance seems almost a mask, for beneath the disorderly exterior, modern society hides a firm resolve to establish itself on a worldwide basis.

As a social practice and global process that brings people and places into ever-increasing relations and interconnectivity, tourism as the world's largest industry plays a major role in altering places and cultures. As Sheller and Urry (2004) note, tourist places are not only places to play, but are also *places in play*. In Dharamsala, I met an American traveller – yet another San Franciscan – named Ross, who was in the area attending an international peace conference and running a program called 'Art for Peace' at a local school for Tibetan refugees. Ross had visited the hill station ten years previously. Along

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[11] Similar to Latour's (1993) reflection that by seeking to define 'society' in opposition to 'nature', moderns automatically and artificially place themselves outside of it.

with a Swiss companion, the three of us set out one day to hike to a waterfall said to be sacred for local Hindus. Passing through tourism-oriented villages on the way, Ross commented on how much Dharamsala had changed, how many more people – both tourists and locals – hotels and traffic there were. Ironically, our trip to the 'sacred waterfall' turned into several hours of picking up garbage at its base, which turned out to be littered with plastic bottles, food wrappers and other human refuse. On the way back, satisfied by our effort but visibly disheartened, Ross remarked, 'It's definitely changed here. I don't think I'd come back [to Dharamsala]'.

Perceptions of authentic life and death

On the morning following my dinner with Mack and my first day exploring Kathmandu, I encountered a French traveller at Swayambhunath, known to foreigners as the Monkey Temple, a short walk away from the Hotel Vajra. Our conversation, as with Mack and many other travellers, was a one-off encounter, yet in a relatively short period of he told me numerous revealing things about his travel experience and impressions of life in Nepal compared with his native France, expressing similar Great Divide sentiments as Mack, Bo and other Himalayan travellers.

Having climbed an endless set of stairs and arriving at Swayambhunath, I caught my breath, bought a bottle of water and wandered around the large hilltop complex made up of small shrines, courtyards crisscrossed by colourful prayer flags, all of which centred around a great *stupa*. The visitors at the Monkey Temple were an eclectic group: shaven-headed Buddhist monks in their maroon or

saffron robes, lay devotees offering prayers and lighting incense in front of statues of various Hindu and Buddhist divinities, and a large number of foreigners from a broad spectrum of countries. Many were in organised tour groups of ten or more, meandering around the temple complex, taking pictures and surveying the views of the Kathmandu valley and the Himalayas. After taking in the scene for a while, I came across a man who looked to be about thirty years old, smoking a cigarette with apparent gusto while gazing out from a viewpoint. His tanned face was marked by a subtle smile and a look of utter satisfaction.

Already knowing the answer, I asked if he was having a good trip and whether he minded if I asked him a few questions for some anthropological research I was doing in Nepal. Taking a short drag on his cigarette, he looked me over, then smiled and in an unmistakably French accent, said, 'Sure, but I don't have much time. I have to get back to my group. I'm just having a smoke'. Asking about his general impressions of the place, he exclaimed, 'I love Nepal! This is my first trip, but it definitely won't be my last.'[12] When I asked what he liked so much, he replied:

> The nature, the mountains, it's so beautiful, so powerful and pure … and the people, they are amazing. The way they live, I mean, it's just amazing! They live very spiritual lives. Not like only in a religious way, though. They just live simply, with nature, surrounded by these giant mountains. It's an incredible way to live.

[12] Such a response would surely make the people at Nepal's Ministry of Tourism happy, as the slogan of 'Nepal Tourism Year 2011' was 'Nepal, once is not enough'.

His tour had included a ten-day trek through in a mountainous region outside of the Kathmandu valley. Each day the group hiked and stayed the night in a different village. Continuing to describe how impressed he was by the mountain villager's way of life, he said:

> The people, they don't have much, but they have everything they need. They have no running water or electricity. If you want to take a shower or brush your teeth, you have to go get the water in a bucket from the river. When it gets dark, they light candles … I mean, they *make* the candles themselves. It seems like such a simple thing, a candle, you know. But I have no idea how to make a candle! Do you? At night you just sit and drink tea and talk, you end up going to bed really early. No internet, no TV, no alcohol, none of these distractions. You feel clear and refreshed in the morning, ready to walk again. The life in the mountains is so healthy and alive. It's like, this is *real life*, you know? It was amazing.

Like Mack, the Frenchman reflected on how using simple technologies such as candles and buckets contributed to making the Himalayan way of life more 'real' or authentic than that in the highly technologized societies. In Pokhara, for instance, Mike the Londoner and I discussed how relative experience of bathing via 'bucket showers' as opposed to the long, hot showers we enjoyed back home. Firstly, because you typically got just one bucket of hot water from the 'geyser' (a small water heater), if you were lucky, you quickly learned to conserve and appreciate every drop in the bucket. Secondly, the act of crouching or squatting naked in what would typically be called 'basic' or 'crude' facilities by western standards, and pouring a bucket over one's body

seemed to facilitate a different relation to the body, as Mike reflected upon:

> I remember feeling at first like I was washing an animal, or like some foreign body, but actually it turns out that animal was 'me'. I guess it has to do with the way you have to sit – crouching down naked – and pouring the bucket over you. When you're not used to encountering yourself like this, in these very raw, basic facilities, it's rather strange, feels a bit primitive. But actually I've learned to enjoy my bucket showers and I definitely don't take water for granted like I probably do at home. Back in London I could stay in the shower for ridiculous amounts of time. But here I've learned to be quick and efficient, and to appreciate the water more.

I could relate to Mike's reflections on bathing. I also experienced my body in a different way and will tell my own story of bathing in Nepal in the following chapter. Important to the discussion of authenticity and alienation here is the phenomenological notion of technology as a way of mediating or revealing the world.

Technology as world disclosing

It seemed that the connection travellers made to the use of simple technologies – such candles and buckets – and authenticity, or a sense of 'realness' had to do with the less-mediated, more basic sense of being-in-the-world that such modes disclose. Heidegger celebrates simple, pre-modern technology because it facilitates a 'fundamental attunement' (*Grundstimmung*) necessary for human beings to dwell 'authentically'. Modern technology, on the other hand, creates increasing distance between human beings and nature, leading to a

'forgetfulness of being' and existential inauthenticity (Heidegger 1977). By growing their own food, gathering water from glacial streams and making candles to light their modest dwellings, Himalayan villagers were perceived by visitors from highly technologized countries to be living more original, natural, and existentially authentic lives. This suggests, as mentioned earlier, that there is an overlapping between object-related and existential authenticity. As my observations demonstrated and with Zhu (2012: 1500), we can thus say that 'authenticity is neither objective or subjective, but performative' and relational.

Attuned to the cycles of nature in the high altitude environment, the villagers could hardly afford to be forgetful of being. By going to the Himalayas, Western travellers temporarily re-attuned to more basic, less technologized modes of dwelling. The experience of being removed from modern technologies and thrown into radically other ways of life afforded a sense of existential authenticity by illuminating more fundamental aspects of being alive. Listening to travellers praise the 'authentic' life-worlds of the villagers and their mountain experiences, I was reminded of Henry David Thoreau, who left urban life and went to live for a time in a rustic hut on Walden Pond. Thoreau's desire for leaving urban life were similar to those of Himalayan travellers: 'I wanted to live simply and deliberately'. But what does the practice of living simply and deliberately do for people and how is it connected to processes of authentication?

Authenticity and immanent spirituality

My attention had been drawn to the Frenchman's remark that the Himalayan villagers he encountered 'live very spiritual lives … but not like only in a religious way'. When I asked him if he could say more about this, he explained:

> Their way of life is so pure, so connected to the environment. In a way, they live very simply, but at the same time, their life is so deep … this is what I mean by spiritual. I mean, they're Buddhist or Hindu or whatever, but it's the way they live that is spiritual.

He then spoke about how at one point along the trek, he had witnessed a funeral at a small mountain temple, complete with an open fire cremation. Gazing off towards the mountains in the distance and taking a long, wistful drag off his cigarette, his eyes narrowed as he described watching the ashes from the cremated body blow away into a river.

> This was a very powerful experience for me. It's a different way of seeing life. Watching the body burning, the smoke … seeing this made me think about living and dying in a different way.

Hearing this story, I recalled a similar experience I had on Nusa Lembongin, a small island between Bali and Lombok in Indonesia nearly ten years prior. I was twenty-one years old and on my first solo trip in the so-called 'developing world'. At that point, I had only been to one funeral, my grandfather's, when I was eight years old. The funeral had taken place at a cold, sterile cemetery in an industrial area of South San Francisco, not far from the airport. I vaguely recall seeing

a casket, but what I remember most is the sight of a small metal box with my grandfather's name engraved on it being inserted between other such boxes in the silent, sterile hall of the mortuary.

One day on Nusa Lembongin, I had wandered into the local village behind the beachfront lodgings where visiting surfers stayed. A billowing cloud of grey smoke had sparked my curiosity. Following the smoke, I stepped into what seemed like a parallel reality, I came across a large group of people standing in a circle around a burning body. Watching in mild horror and peculiar fascination, I realized that this was my first raw, unadorned vision of human finitude. Of course I had seen plenty of dead bodies in movies, but this was another story. Later, back at the beach, I pondered how regardless of how funeral rites are conducted, everyone is ultimately reduced a pile of ashes. For some, like the Lembongin islanders, the Nepalese villagers or Hindus on the banks of the Ganges, these remains blow away in the wind, carried into a river or the sea, while for others the remains are sealed in metal boxes and placed in sterile mortuaries. The sight of the burning body in the island village left a lasting imprint on my memory, as it seemed the Frenchman's analogous experience would. What the experience suggested was not only life's essential finite condition, but also that different ways of dealing with death reflect different worldviews and relationships to life. For the Frenchman, the funeral was another example of the less technologized and thus more spiritual and authentic lifeworld of Himalayan villagers.

He had emphasized not only extreme contrast between Nepalese and Western ways of life, but his attitude revealed a moral judgment which

is part of the modern critique I found running through Himalayan travel.

> Here is a different world. You know, at home in France, it's all fast paced, globalisation, money, stress … over here, it's more spiritual, ya know. In the villages, they have very little, but actually they have everything. They don't need all the extra stuff. They're happier without it, they're more free.

The general consensus I found among Himalayan travellers was that the villagers were projected to be happier, more spiritual and authentic than their Western counterparts. Spirituality for the Frenchman and others was often equated with a lifestyle perceived as simpler, less materialistic, more traditional and in balance with the cycles of nature. Such a life was imagined to be more spiritual and more authentically human. Expressing an immanent or this-worldly orientation, perceptions of the Himalayas as a utopia were amplified by magnificent mountain landscapes and by the dominant media representations that project and reproduce an aura of spirituality and authenticity.

John, the American-cum-New Zealander we met in the previous chapters, post-travel reflections further illustrates the relations between authenticity and technology. John and three friends had spent two months trekking in Nepal in celebration of his sixtieth birthday and their mutual retirements. In an email to friends and family, he summarized the experience as follows:

> So - great people, great way of life, spectacular lifestyle fuelled by any labour leading directly to obvious tangible (and often edible) benefits – the Nepalese mountain inhabitants had an

idyllic life and were consequently very happy, peaceful and content and absolutely beamed with joy if they noticed a guest enjoying themselves!! Amazing people – there was nothing in their houses except their food and some basic furniture, yet they were as generous and content as anyone I ever came across. Never a harsh word to the children, workers always surrounded by workmates making the fields and the construction zones very social (and quiet without electric motors or machinery of any sort). Even the Water Buffalo they used to plough the fields and from which they got their daily mild (milk, yogurt which they called curd, and cream they churned at night for the next day's butter) and Yaks, (the beasts of burden and source of the cheese we came to love, the Nak cheese - Nak is the female of the species, the ones that give the milk for the cheese) were mellow. Dogs looked to be very relaxed - barely moving, likely because they rarely ate... Mellow all round. The only music playing anywhere (and often there was some) was om mane padme hum (sp?) chanting - beautifully serene, soothing stuff.

John's reflections resemble those of other Himalayan travellers, such as Mack, Bo and the Frenchman. The 'mountain inhabitants' were perceived to live an 'idealic life' that was socially integrated, simple and non-materialistic, in tune with nature, happy and 'mellow all around'. Once again, it appears that travellers found the life-worlds of the villagers to be more authentic and less alienated than their own. Demonstrating a semiotics of opposition, there is a clear contrast between romantic notions of authenticity and utopia as an idealized state of living in harmony with 'nature' and modern alienation. Leading into the conclusion, I would like to once again highlight the role technology plays in such contrasting perceptions.

Technology as mediating nature-culture relations

The notion that modern technology is potentially dehumanizing and destructive to both nature and humanity has been a central motif in classical social theory, nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy and has also been an issue of public debate, particularly recently in response to climate change, nuclear meltdowns and apocalyptic intimations of planetary unsustainably. Marx (1961) and his followers argue that the technological mode of production of industrial capitalism knows no bounds, has no ethics or 'social goals' and will seek profit and expansion above all else (Jameson 2000: 62). Capitalist ideology not only presents a threat to the natural environment in that it views nature simply as a repository of 'resources' to be exploited, but also leads to alienation from an alleged human nature. As Marx wrote, '[a]lienation estranges man from his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual aspect, his *human* aspect' (1986: 42). For Marx, alienation or 'estrangement' occurs when humans experience the world passively, as subjects separated from objects in a world which stands over or outside them. Travellers such as Mack, the Frenchman and John indirectly alluded to Marxian ideas of (un)alienated labour by praising the villagers who lived and worked directly for their subsistence in a harmonious, non-exploitative relationship to nature and one another. John, for instance, wrote of the 'great way of life' of the villagers, the 'spectacular lifestyle fuelled by any labour leading directly to obvious tangible (and often edible) benefits' and concludes 'the Nepalese mountain inhabitants had an idyllic life and were consequently very happy, peaceful and content'. Although Marx, like Rousseau, did not believe moderns could or should return to a peasant life mode, he

issues a harsh critique of alienated labour under capitalist conditions, which he describes as follows:

> …work that is external to the worker, that it is not part of his nature, that consequently he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery, not of well-being, does not develop freely a physical and mental energy, but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure, whereas at work he feels homeless' (1961: 177).

Many travellers I met complained about the boredom, drudgery and sense of meaninglessness of their work at home, and how happy they were to be free of it. Numerous travellers, as we saw last chapter, were contemplating making major changes in their lifestyles and careers (becoming a yoga teacher seemed to be a popular alternative). Recall Janine, who described part of her motivation for travelling to Nepal and India as taking a break from 'my busy life and boring job', or Mike, who sought to escape a work environment he described as 'full of backstabbing'.

Both experiencing object authenticity and achieving existential authenticity were concerns for the travellers I encountered, both of which reveal an implicit critique of modernity. Although they surely did not speak in Heideggerian terms, travellers generally perceived that Himalayan villagers dwelled authentically. Don Pablo, for instance, the New Zealander who described his four week trek to the base-camp of Mount Everest as 'the best thing I have ever done in my life, explained how the 'dramatic scenery and scale of the Everest region filled me with

a sense of awe and a sacred feeling', which was further enhanced by 'seeing the way the Sherpa live in harmony with the landscape'.

Rather than being immersed in technological life-worlds that create increasing distance between human beings and 'nature', the mountain inhabitants were perceived as dwelling authentically in originary relations. It was these qualities of everyday, practical dwelling, even more than the religious traditions the middle Himalayas is also known for, which led travellers to find the mountain inhabitants spiritual and authentic. [13] While I continue the discussion of technology and dwelling in relation to contemporary Himalayan travel in the following chapters, to conclude I once again highlight the tensions and paradoxes of 'contact' and authenticity.

Conclusion

Tourism, including in the Himalayas, can and does radically reconfigure places and cultures, as Mack, Ross, Bo and many travellers were more or less aware of, and as academic research observes (Crick 1989, 1999; Gurung and Seeland 2008; Kolås 2004; Lim 2008; Mydans 2008; Nash and Smith 1991; Nepal 2000; Shackley 1994, 1995, 2006;

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[13] Such a view of what is authentically human, as expressed by both the travellers and the philosophers mentioned, reveals the presupposition that there is such a thing as an original human nature. Technology, it is often claimed, inflicts violence on and alienates an essential nature. An alternative perspective that human nature is not determined was proposed by anthropologist and bio-philosopher Helmuth Plessner in the 1920s. According to Plessner, as homo sapiens evolved, diverging from their primate cousins and other animals, they developed a 'broken relation' to the world. Plessner distinguishes humans by their 'ec-centric positionality', brought forth by a set of mental faculties that allow reflexive distance from nature. Plessner claims that as such, the human condition is one in which human beings are 'alienated by nature' and 'artificial by nature'. As mediating how humans perceive and act in the world and changing and evolving with human cultures, technology helps re-invent the human. Follwing this early 'posthuman' perspective, Himalayan villagers would be no more or less 'human' than an iPhone-conjoined dweller of the contemporary hyper-mediated West. Such an idea is also at the core of Latour's (1993) thesis that so-called 'moderns' have never been as modern as they think.

Shepherd 2002; Shinde 2007; T. V. Singh 1992; Van den Berghe 1994).
Like a savannah fire, ironically the quest for authenticity paradoxically
destroys the object it searches for, leading to cultural commodification,
homogenization and simulacra (Baudrillard 1997; Boorstin 1964; Cohen
1988; MacCannell 1973).

Bruner (1991: 246) argues that contrary to the popular belief in the
pedagogical value of tourism, in touristic encounters it is the native
who is transformed more than the tourist. Tourists, according to
Bruner, are driven by an imperialistic nostalgia for what the West has
previously destroyed and feels lacking in itself. Looking through a
Lacanian lens, Bruner argues that even when actual encounters
between western tourists and 'exotic others' take place, tourists remain
in the realm of the imaginary. Structured by the symbolic systems of
Western culture, tourists never gain access to the 'real' life-worlds of
these people, but only imagined, pre-structured versions. MacCannell
(2011) has also followed the Lacanian path more recently, coming to
essentially the same conclusion that tourism has little educative and
moral value and represents Western modernity's on-going
subconscious will to dominate the world. Such a perspective, however,
does not allow for seeing a flipside of orientalism – that western
encounters with 'exotic others' may allow the West to reflect critically
on its own forms of life, deficiencies and conquering mentality.[14]

Many of the travellers I spoke with were highly critical of the West and
idealized the more 'real' and 'authentic' people of the Himalayan

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[14] See Clarke's Oriental Enlightenment (1997) for a discussion of orientalism that presents another side to
the story which is less sweeping and one-sided than Said's and other post-colonial critique.

region and other peripheral non-Western societies. People from these places were typically represented not only as 'exotic others', but 'superior others', superior due to their low materialistic yet spiritually rich and simple and happy lives. The Himalayan villagers and their environment were idealized by travellers, reproducing the utopian myth of Shangri-La (Bishop 1989). Yet this process of authentication carries the seed of its own destruction. The small trickle of western travellers venturing to the Himalayas in the early sixties has given way to a gushing river by the new millennium, as Nepal's 'Tourism Year 2011' campaign demonstrates. Nepal, the fourth poorest country in Asia, capitalized on its cultural and environmental resources, marketing itself as a utopia for Western tourists seeking spirituality, authenticity and adventure. The tourism industry and travellers thus mutally participate in reifying and authenticating the Himalayas as place where one can 'walk with the gods' and where the 'guests are gods'.

In this chapter I attempted to unfold the relational politics of authenticity in contemporary Himalayan travel. Analysis of encounters with travellers revealed that discourses hinged on desires for both object-related and existential authenticity. Demonstrating the centrality of authenticity to the pursuits of travellers points to how such journeys read not only as meta-critiques of modernity, but as a performative enactments of modernity. Which is all to say that that the whole phenomenon of travel – be it tourism, pilgrimage or ethnography – begins at home, where the personal is always political. As a dialogical encounter between self, other and worlds, the quest for authenticity reveals an on-going relational politics between not only the 'West and

the rest', but perhaps even more so represents the West's own attempt to reconcile its own sense of fractured identity.

CHAPTER SIX

Travelling and Travailing: Affect, Bodily Disruption and the Sting of the Alien

Our movements are not spontaneous initiatives launched against masses of inertia; we move in an environment of air currents, rustling trees, and animate bodies.

> Lingis (2000: 29)

The experience of the alien assumes radical characteristics when it ascends to the *becoming-alien of experience*.

> Waldenfels (1993: 23)

Having established that being challenged, experiencing other forms of life, seeking authenticity and transforming the self were central goals and meanings for travellers in Nepal and India, the next task is to consider how travel experiences played out on practical, embodied levels. That the Himalayan region is generally not considered an easy travel destination where tourists go to simply relax, but a place promising challenge, adventure, authenticity and spiritual richness is part of the dominant narrative reproduced in media representations

and people's travel stories. Connected to the *pull* of the exotic, the spiritual and the authentic and the *push* to leave – at least temporarily – certain negatively perceived features of late modern life, travellers came to Nepal and India and other parts of the non-Western world in search of experiences that would both challenge and transform them. Travellers often referred to these journeys as a search for 'perspective'.

In this chapter I explore some of the everyday travel experiences that may account for such shifts in perspective, focusing particularly on the practical, bodily and affective dimensions of Himalayan travel. From a phenomenological perspective, I begin by qualifying travel as a boundary crossing in which a traveller leaves a familiar 'home world' and crosses into an unfamiliar 'alien world'. Estranged from the world of relative predictability, cultural norms and habitual routine, such boundary crossings or disruptions have practical implications for embodied travellers. Challenges to practical sense, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, largely account for the shifts in 'perspective' that travellers sought and experienced in Nepal and India.

I explore the process of arrival and travellers' initial experiences and affective responses to the alien worlds encountered, using my own entry and first impressions of Kathmandu. Comparing this experience with other travellers', I then consider certain practical, everyday travel situations that challenged practical sense and led to the productive disruption of *habitus* and *doxa* as embodied knowledge schemes. Taking such disruptions or breakdowns as a form of generative, bodily learning, I move into a discussion of what it means to be(come) well-travelled, seeing how accumulated travel experience facilitates

expanded somatic knowledge and the cultivation of an embodied cosmopolitanism.

Travel as interplay between home and alien worlds

I identified two broad ways in which travellers faced challenges in Nepal and India. The first set of challenges involved experiences of being exposed to situations of normative difference. These challenges encompassed bodily, emotional and cognitive coping in foreign environments, staying healthy and facing gaps and barriers in cultural knowledge. Broadly speaking these challenges emanated from travellers being strangers or outsiders who had crossed thresholds separating what in phenomenological terms are referred to as the 'home world' and an 'alien world' (Husserl 2012; Schutz 1944, 1995; Steinbock 1995: 170–78). Husserl describes the home world as a 'sphere of owness' [*Eigenheitssphäre*], a familiar, taken for granted cultural order where things appear as 'normal' and without question. As a 'geo-historical horizon', the home world 'is not only the world we experience, but the world *from which* we experience' (Steinbock 1995: 222 emphasis in the original). Characterized by a certain steadiness and relative predictability, the home world reproduces its stability through the shared and repeated practices, traditions, customs and habits of a community. An alien world is constituted in relation to a home world, the two of which are separated by boundaries or 'limit zones' that emerge from ordering processes. Such boundaries or borders are not closed, but permeable and constantly in question (Waldenfels 2011: 8). This relative openness is particularly salient under contemporary global conditions, characterized by liquidity, mobility, flows and networks of connectivity (Appadurai 1996, 2003; Bauman 2000; Beck 2006; Castells

2000; Giddens 2003; Lash 2010; Urry 2000, 2003). While an alien world is a sphere or otherness and unfamiliarity, its borders can be entered or transgressed, resulting in intercorporeal and intercultural encounters. Home world and alien worlds are thus not absolute, objective categories or completely separate spheres, but serve a heuristic function for making sense of relations between the familiar and unfamiliar, the distant and proxemic. In this sense, we may view home and the alien worlds on a continuum of relative difference and familiarity that will vary for cultured body subjects.

Crossing thresholds into alien worlds not only puts a traveller in the precarious social position of being a foreigner or stranger, but the experience reorders subjective perceptions and understandings of both home and alien realms. The experience of travelling in foreign places is challenging in that the relative predictability, norms and habituated routines of the home world are disrupted as travellers are faced with new and unfamiliar demands. A second source of challenges western travellers in Nepal and India faced came in the active pursuit of 'nature-challenge activities', namely mountain trekking and climbing, and adventure sports such as white water rafting and paragliding, and spiritual activities such as yoga and meditation retreats. While these were significant components of travellers' journeys, here I focus more on the first set of challenges, exploring: how crossing boundaries and entering alien worlds elicited pathic and affective responses, how the practical challenges of travel may be viewed as a form of bodily learning, and how such learning is transformative and can be related to pilgrimage.

Affected body-being in the world

The challenges travellers spoke of in India and Nepal related primarily to their embodied experiences. Once in the field, I quickly learned an important lesson in the limitations of language and a purely logo-centric approach in doing justice to the multi-sensorial, affective and bodily dimensions that comprise much of Himalayan travel experiences. Adopting an embodied (auto)ethnographic strategy, I used my body and senses as a tool and medium for participant observation. I decided that if ethnographic research is truly predicated on 'being there', then the pre-reflexive, sensing body is not only an ontological starting point (Merleau-Ponty 2002), but an indispensable (and unavoidable) tool for practical engagement in and understanding of the manifold dimensions of lived experience which ultimately outrun and overwhelm linguistic expression (Serres 2003, 2009; Tucker 2011). Turning towards the bodily experience of travelling also meant turning towards affect, understood both in the emotional and broader sense.

Affect is an umbrella term, covering all kinds of overlapping bodily and emotional phenomena such as sensations, desires, passions, feelings and moods (Blackman and Venn 2010; Clough and Halley 2007; Wetherell 2012). Yet affect extends to non-human realms, where it is taken as a living force, a transfer of energy taking place in a 'logic of relations' (Serres 2003). Affect may thus encompass anything from sunrays and gravitational pull to the piercing look of a stranger or the growl of a dog that prepares us for a fight or flight. Affect suggests something which is done to us which we do not initiate. To be affected is to be acted upon, touched or moved; it is something which happens to or befalls us. The so-called 'turn to affect' which has gained

momentum in certain strands of the social sciences and humanities has been resuscitated from Spinoza by way of Deleuze and is also part of a shift towards embodiment, process ontology, relationism and vitalism (Clough and Halley 2007; Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Clough 2010).

In opposition to Cartesian mind-body, subject-object dichotomies, Spinoza explored affect as an ideal-type of relation, a pre-conscious, proto-social moment in which the multitude of potential interactions crystalize into the actuality of a specific interaction or response (Shields et al. 2011: 3-4). Affect is a lived ability or potential to act; affectivity is what activates an embodied subject. As such, affects are signals, indicators of a dynamic reality emerging from what Michel Serres (2007) calls 'noise'. Noise designates a realm of chaos and disorder that pre-exists all forms of organization. 'We are surrounded by noise,' writes Serres, 'We are in the noises of the world, and we cannot close our door to their reception. In the beginning is noise' (2007: 126). As an undifferentiated and invisible territory, Serres' 'noise' resembles what his student Bruno Latour speaks of as 'plasma', a background or hinterland which is 'not yet formatted, not yet measured, not yet socialized … a vast space of unsocialized material!' (Latour 2005: 243-44). Crystalizing from this unformatted realm through networks of connectivity, affects communicate between various bodies, objects and elements and as such are far from limited to human sociality alone.

Being affected depends neither on our knowing nor on our willing – that is, on consciousness – but points back to the body (Waldenfels 2011: 46-47). The body, as I observed in chapter three, is not the sole property of an isolated individual or autonomous agent, but is rather 'dividual' and exists in a web of relations constituted by human and

nonhuman forces and materials. Given this situation of radical immanence, 'experience cannot be separated independently of the way the world affects and solicits us' (Käufer 2012: 468). The question guiding this chapter similarly revolves around how travellers responded to the various affective solicitations they experienced in Nepal and India. Turning to affect means attending to the non-verbal, subconscious, bodily dimensions of experience; re-engaging with movement, sensation, memory, perception, attention and listening. Paying heed to such 'fuzzy' dimensions of human experience traditionally overlooked by the social sciences has been receiving greater attention in recent times (Bourdieu 2000; Csordas 1990, 1993; Desjarlais and Jason Throop 2011; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Ingold 2011; Jackson 1989, 1996; Porcello et al. 2010; Stoller 1989, 1997; Throop 2010; Vannini et al. 2012).

In retrospect, turning to my own and others' bodily situatedness and the sensual and affective dimensions of travel happened before I even touched down in Nepal. Rather than being a pre-planned theoretical strategy, my own turn to affect was a lived demand, facilitated largely by the fact that I landed in Kathmandu quite ill after my consequential layover in Kuala Lumpur, as recounted in chapter three. Arriving in a feverish delirium in Nepal's capital city where my fieldwork was to begin, I remained intermittently ill during the entire fieldwork period, eventually departing from Calcutta three months later after a stay in the Darjeeling public hospital for what I was told by a doctor there 'could be malaria, typhoid or giardia'. Sickness and health and bodily coping thus became major, albeit serendipitous themes in my fieldwork and my personal situation forced me to tune intensively into the travelling

and travailing body. As I experienced my body continually breaking down and observed how I was being affected in India and Nepal, I became interested in how other travellers were faring. This led to a more general interest in the nature and centrality of embodied experience, the interplay of the senses, emotions, habits and cognition and how somatic knowledge is generated and incorporated. What especially interests me in this chapter is how travellers responded to the alien worlds they encountered in Nepal and India on bodily-sensorial levels. A convenient place to begin exploring such themes, indeed exploring the experience itself, is with arrival, when the sting of the alien is felt most sharply.

Arrival as a point of departure

As demonstrated in chapter four, journeys are often imagined, prepared for and in a way pre-structured before travellers set forth. Despite problematizing the notion of journeys having clear beginnings and endings, for most travellers there is indeed a profound sense of corporeal beginning upon arrival in a foreign country. This is especially so when it is a country one has never visited before and is culturally distant from the home world departed from, as was the case with my participants. As Simmel (1997) has shown, strangeness can be conceptualized spatially, on a spectrum of distance and proximity, similar to the way hermeneutic phenomenology considers interpretation according to a 'polarity of familiarity and strangeness' (Gadamer 2004: 262). For western travellers, the middle Himalayan region was both geographically and culturally distant, and this aura of distance and strangeness were a major part of the region's allure.

On a spring morning, the heightened sense of crossing a threshold and entering an alien world began with the captain announcing the plane's descent into Kathmandu. Clouds gave way to distinct geographic forms, buildings, roads, cars and people moving like ants, civilization came into focus and finally, the violent thud of the airplane on pavement. An atmosphere of anxiety and excitement filled the cabin as passengers unclicked their seatbelts and begin shifting restlessly in their seats. Reaching for their belongings, their eyes darted and glanced about as they prepared to step out into the worlds which awaited them. As the plane approached the terminal, I noticed some foreign passengers becoming quiet and inward, focusing their gaze on the seat back in front of them. They appeared to be gathering their thoughts and composure, as if imagining and rehearsing the scenarios, movements and actions which would soon be demanded of them outside. Those passengers apparently returning home, on the other hand, seemed excited, grabbing for their handbags and jostling with alacrity towards the front of the plane.

The flight from Kuala Lumpur via Bangkok had passed in a feverish daze. Finding myself in a half hallucinatory state, in mild disbelief that this was in fact happening, I dragged myself through customs. Strapping my backpack on, I took a few deep breaths and planted my hiking boots on the cracked pavement outside the terminal. I was struck almost immediately by an acute sense of being cut loose, set suddenly adrift in unknown waters. *So here I am. Is this really happening? It seems it is. Where am I? Kathmandu. How did this happen … what now?* were my thoughts, my mild disbelief during those first few seconds. In this semi-bewildered state, the same one which I recall from other

occasions in which I have found myself transported across seas and continents and thrown into alien worlds, for a few moments, I simply stood there, blinking absently. The scene impressed itself on me through various sense mediums – sounds, sights, the feel of the crisp, dry air on my face, the smell of car exhaust, dust and smoke. I soon accepted that this was really happening, that indeed I was there, and I was there alone. As this realization took hold, my breath suddenly became short and my heart began to race as I took in the chaotic scene I approached and which was rapidly approaching me.

Two steps out of the terminal I found myself surrounded by an onslaught of shouting taxi drivers, hotel representatives and small children begging for money. In the face of ensuing chaos, I quickly reached for my sunglasses as a great clamour of noise penetrated me from all sides: car horns, engines, the slamming of doors and trunks, ringing cell phones, jets roaring overhead, shouting men's and children's voices. Various noises and voices arrived from all directions, my body becoming an acoustic responsorium.

> Where you go, I take you! Very cheap good sir! Rupees, hello, rupees please! Honk, honk, honk! Best guesthouse in Kathmandu! Very nice, take a look. Slam! Cheap for you! Bang! Hello my friend, hello! Screeeech!

Amidst this raucous auditory assault, my memory flashed to a near identical scene at Denpasar airport in Bali during my first solo trip to the 'developing world', the same trip where I had observed my first open air funeral, as discussed in the previous chapter. I recall experiencing the same sensorial hyper-stimulation combined with the

same mixture of nervousness, disorientation and sudden sense of wonder at how I even ended up in this alien world. I recall being encircled by aggressive taxi drivers who had grabbed at my gear and tried to muster me into their awaiting vehicles, clouds of sweet smoke from their clove cigarettes penetrating me through thick tropical air. Sensing a disruption of the normal order of things, such affective situations represent the initial shock or sting of an alien world. Waldenfels (2011: 53) writes how otherness or alienness announces itself or solicits us in terms of pathos or affect as a kind of pre-reflexive suffering or irritation:

> We are touched by others before being able to ask who they are and what their expressions mean. The alienness of the Other overcomes and surprises us, disturbing our intentions before being understood in this or that sense.

Such was my experience as I wandered through the crowd in search of a man with a sign for Hotel Vajra, where weeks before I had made an online reservation and was promised an airport pickup. Not finding the man with the sign, the swarm seemed to sense my confusion and weakened state and this only seemed to excite them more. Or perhaps it was I who became increasingly aware of my weakened and vulnerable state. In any case, I found myself anxiously pacing around with a multiplying brigade of shouting, desperate looking men smoking hand-rolled cigarettes, the smoke of which drifted through me and into the sky. I moved and jostled with these men, who kept trying to capture my attention, yelling in my face and grabbing my arms. Waist-high children had also surrounded me, latching onto my legs and tugging at

the straps of my backpack. Looking upwards, they screamed 'Hello, hello, hello! Rupees please, rupees please, hello!'

In the midst of all this noise and friction, I felt my strength waning. Although I felt anxious and highly affected by the seeming *inhumanity* of the situation, I tried to maintain a strategy of conscious detachment. My eyes, the 'gateway to the soul', remained hidden behind dark sunglasses. I feigned an air of cool, focusing on not allowing myself to be penetrated by the chaos I felt around me. I looked around to see how other freshly arrived travellers were faring. Much like me, I saw tall foreigners wearing backpacks and hiking boots surrounded by bands of shouting taxi drivers, and also much like me, most seemed to be handling the situation through a similar strategy of detachment and intentional disaffection. 'No thanks, I'm ok, no, sorry, we're good, we already have a reservation …' I heard them saying patiently and automatically, broken by the occasional shouting of 'NO!' Close by a big man with a British accent yelled 'fuck off mate!' at an aggressive taxi driver. Eventually the foreigners disappeared into taxis, speeding towards the city. Glancing up, I caught sight of a large billboard reading, 'Nepal Tourism Year 2011: Welcome to Nepal'. Returning my vision to the scene unfolding outside the terminal, *welcome indeed* I thought, as I pondered the absurd notion that tourism is a simple relationship of 'hosts and guests' (Smith 1992).

Intersecting gazes and affective encounters

Having the means to undertake leisure travel in the Himalayan region or other parts of the developing world reveals an uneven distribution of economic capital and symbolic power. Yet it would be a mistake to

equate power solely with the economic capital, as I discovered in Nepal and India. Using a Foucauldian framework, Cheong and Miller (2000) discuss the dynamic power relations inherent in many tourism situations. They argue that tourists, contrary to being in presumed agentic positions, often assume the more passive role of 'targets', whereby 'brokers' (such as tour operators, hotel representatives, taxi drivers) assume dominance due to their place/position within particular networks of relations. According to Foucault (1994: 214), '[i]ndividuals are vehicles of power', while power is 'circulating and never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth'. This means that a variety of people can possess and disperse power in varying circumstances and at different points in time and space. Important to specific spatial arrangements are the place individuals occupy in hierarchical power relations. Active agents, according to Foucault (1977), gaze upon passive targets, who internalize the gaze and regulate their behaviour accordingly. This idea highlights not only the intersubjective, but intercorporeal dynamics of 'host-guest' relations and problematizes Urry's (2002b) 'tourist gaze' theory, in which tourists are assumed to be in agentic positions and locals are targets based solely on economic capital.

Outside the airport terminal, power circulated frenetically, yet it was the taxi drivers and hotel representatives who were the agents in this case. Although I strived to maintain a façade of calm detachment, I felt strongly affected and somewhat overpowered by the energy outside the Kathmandu airport, not least of all because I was sick. Free floating energy circulated as an affected and affecting body experienced arrival. Bodies touched, smells assaulted the nose, the eyes and ears taking in

diverse sights and sounds. As Russell (2006: 68) writes, '[a]ny feeling, no matter how basic, is already a highly complicated event, though feelings, like the rest of our sensory apparatus, are highly integrated, organised, seamless, and for the most part, a relatively silent level of organization'. Sensing and feeling could be called an 'incarnate form of thinking' (*leibhaftig*), yet one which is not at our free disposal or is reducible to voluntary decisions (Waldenfels 2011: 51-52). Being affected and responding reveals the human as a being who like other beings moves and responds, but not purely by their own volition. Following on Freud's notion that a subconscious realm exists beyond our grasp and control and as such 'we are not masters of our own house', Waldenfels (2011: 56) says the same applies to the body:

> …my own body could be described as a half-alien body, charged by alien intentions, but also desires, projections, habits, affections, and violations, coming from others.

I never did find the man from Hotel Vajra. Amidst the noise and chaos outside the airport, I was eventually overcome by dizziness and felt on the verge of fainting. Becoming desperate, I pointed to a young man who had what struck me as a pleasant and honest face and said, 'Can you take me to the Hotel Vajra?' Angry indignation ignited in the swarm as the chosen man, despite his apparent shy and peaceful demeanour, waved his arm and yelled them off forcefully, demonstrating once again that power is dependent on specific spatial configurations. Without ever looking at me, the man took my backpack and threw it into the trunk and gestured hastily for me to get in. On one hand, I felt like I was hiring a service, while on the other I felt like a herd animal.

Experiences of arrival such as this are to be endured and passed through as soon as possible, in my view, yet how strongly affected travellers are by such situations surely varies from person to person, as my conversations confirmed. Travelling in Nepal and India in general was a different experience for different people. In this sense, I make no claims regarding what I am calling 'Himalayan travel' as a unified, generalizable experience. How they experienced the alien worlds they traversed depended greatly on a host of factors, such as personality type (such as allocentric/ideocentric, introvert/extrovert), confidence levels and sense of ontological security, world travel experience, cultural background, sensitivity and thresholds of anxiety, state of health and so on. Such factors seemed to dictate the relative openness to alien experience and abilities to adapt and cope with adversity. For instance, not all travellers were strongly affected by the shock of arrival, while others were. Marisa, the twenty-two year old New Yorker I met in Darjeeling explained how upon arriving in New Delhi, she spent the first three days locked in her hotel room:

> I was too afraid to go out. I don't know exactly what happened, but I just got really freaked out when I arrived. I knew it would be intense, but you don't *really know* until you get here. I cried in my hotel room for three days, thinking I was going to have to go home. I thought I couldn't handle it. I felt depressed and really disappointed in myself. But I forced myself to go out and little by little I learned that it wasn't so scary. I started small, by just walking around the neighbourhood around my guesthouse, gradually venturing further out. Eventually I passed through that phase and now I feel pretty comfortable almost everywhere I go. I learned you just have to let go, get out of yourself, open yourself up and embrace the experience.

India challenges you on so many levels. You gotta know how to handle yourself and manage your emotions in the face of all that intensity that *is* India.

As this shows, Marisa's arrival in India was highly affective and traumatic, but she gradually learned to 'pass through that phase', to 'handle' and 'open' herself to the experience of difference. She was one of many travellers I met who spoke of India's 'intensity'. I asked if she could say what in particular had struck her as so 'intense'.

You know, just the general chaos of India. It can be totally overpowering, especially at first. There's just so many people, so much noise and smells and weird, sometimes shocking things going on. I mean, just walking down the street can be pretty overwhelming. All your senses are bombarded as you're taking in all the things going on around you. Sometimes I felt like I was hallucinating. It's just so … different. I mean, for the Indians I guess it's normal, but when you're coming from a country like the U.S., it feels pretty intense and chaotic. You see things here you would not see back home. The poverty can be really disturbing, and the beggars with missing limbs, it's heart-breaking. And you feel powerless. I cried a lot during the first few weeks. But there is also so much beauty and wisdom here, so many small, profound moments that make you just stop and think. India is so alive, and when you're here, you can't help but become caught up in … part of that all that life. There's just this rawness to life here which you don't get back home. You don't really have much choice other than to embrace it, cause it's in your face from the moment you arrive, as soon as you step out onto the street.

I heard many similar accounts to Marisa's impressions of India. 'Chaotic', 'intense' 'overwhelming', 'raw', a 'bombardment of the

senses', 'stimulating' and 'alive' were frequent words used by travellers to describe the sensorial and affective experience of being there. I could relate to such initial sense impressions, as I too had been struck by a certain affective intensity when I arrived in Kathmandu. Scanning my field notes, scribbled after the thirty minute taxi ride from the airport to the Hotel Vajra, my first impressions were expressed as follows:

> Kathmandu appears…dirty, chaotic, ramshackle, ugly, poor, disorganised, rough, lots of motorbikes and taxis, lots of beeping of horns, incredible amount of beeping horns! Lots of people, people everywhere, densely populated, noisy, narrow, winding streets, cows walking down streets, thin, mangy dogs, air is hazy, polluted, dusty outlines of mountains but sight not clear, smells like car exhaust. After being in Japan and coming from New Zealand, my impression is one of general foreignness and disorder. It appears as chaos, but I know this can only be an appearance. Organised chaos?

Image 20: Streets of Kathmandu, a site of pathic and affective encounters.

http://www.tripadvisor.com

Struck by my own heightened perceptual awareness and sense of 'organised chaos', from day one, I made a point to attend to how I and

other travellers were being affected by and responding to new environments and situations, exercising what phenomenologists call *epoché*, a bracketing or suspension of the so-called 'natural attitude'. Pointing out the cultural influence on human perception, Duranti (2010: 18) suggests that the 'natural attitude' can more accurately be rendered as the 'cultural attitude'. Watching and analysing my own and other travellers' affective responses to everyday events and situations were significant in that they revealed the interplay of habits, emotions, perceptions and embodied schemes brought from the home world, that is, the world *from which* we experience other worlds. Crossing cultural thresholds into unfamiliar environments leads to disruptions or breakdowns in practical sense. This is due to the fact that the practical knowledge that is valid at home in the 'sphere of owness' (Steinbock 1995: 175) is suddenly called into question under new, practical conditions.

A break or breakdown designates a rupture in normal experience in which the home framework or *doxa* is thrown off balance. Husserl distinguishes between two kinds of breaks; a 'light break' or slight disruption of normal experience in which things do not quite jive (*stimmt nicht*) with previous experience, and 'heavy breaks', as major disruptions and 'limit situations' (*Grenzstituation*), such as the death of a loved one or a devastating natural disaster (Steinbock 1995: 240-41). I found that travellers, including myself, experienced innumerable 'light breaks' or minor breakdowns throughout our travels in Nepal and India. These breaks, which occurred in everyday situations, shed light on the *habitus* and *doxa* – the embodied schemes of perception and knowledge – which travellers carried with(in) them into new fields.

What social actors perceive as 'normal' and taken for granted (*doxa*), as well as what is aesthetically pleasing, are shaped and reproduced by sociocultural processes and are relative to particular social fields (Bourdieu 1984, 2002). Like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu seeks to overcome subject-object dualisms, arguing that knowledge schemes and perceptions do not exist in the mind as representations, but are embodied structures produced and reproduced through socialisation and engaged, habitual practice. Habitus, as described by Bourdieu (1990a: 63), is a 'feel for the game' based not on conscious mastery of rules or mental representations, but on tacit knowledge and strategies acquired through practice. Knowledge is thus more a matter of *knowing how*, rather than *knowing that*, with the game based largely on 'practical faith', that is, on the 'undisputed, pre-reflexive, naïve, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field' (Bourdieu 1990b: 68).

Noticing and reflecting upon the role of practical sense, *habitus* and *doxa* that travellers bring with them to Nepal and India became an important element of my research strategy. I proceeded to observe closely the movements and behaviours of other travellers, as well as my own. I attended to what drew their attention and interested them, what they shrank back from, how they interacted with locals and other travellers, how they moved and carried themselves. Along with these micro observations, in conversations I asked them simple, open questions about their experiences, such as 'what's it like for you to be in Nepal?', 'what are your impressions of India?' or 'what kinds of things do you notice here?'. Andreas, a traveller from Berlin I met in a popular

traveller café in Dharamsala, replied to such a question in the following way:

> Travelling is like normal life, but somehow more concentrated. In India, I feel like everything is alive, everything is illuminated. You start seeing all these small things you never pay attention to at home. You wake up to life and that's the refreshing thing about being here. Just being here is enough. You don't even need to go looking for things…I just walk around, open my eyes, freestyle. Interesting things are happening all around.

The 'illumination' Andreas speaks of can be traced to a number of related factors. For one thing, travellers were in liminal, leisurely positions away from both the predictability of the home world and the general busyness of life they described there. Stepping out of normal habituated life with its routines, pressures and urgencies allowed travellers time and space to notice and dwell on the 'details' and 'small things' generally taken for granted in the home world. Prefiguring Bourdieu's unconscious 'feel for the game', William James observed how 'consciousness goes away from where it is not needed' (in Searle 1992: 139). Where consciousness, or perhaps attention, is not needed is generally in the habituated realm of everyday life in the home world.

At home, cultural patterns offer readymade 'directions for use' and 'trustworthy *recipes* for interpreting the social world', all of which allows everyday 'thinking as usual' to go largely unnoticed and unquestioned (Schutz 1944: 501). And yet, in alien worlds, travellers as strangers encounter all kinds of micro, meso and macro differences and disturbances which cause things normally overlooked to become, as

Andreas put it, 'illuminated'. Awakened from their *doxic* slumber, the stranger finds their habitual 'thinking as usual' and ready-made practices relatively thwarted or somehow invalidated. Outside predictable cultural patterns, Schutz observes that the stranger is 'no longer permitted to consider himself at the centre of his social environment', an experience which 'causes a dislocation of his contour lines of relevance' (p. 504). Although breakdowns can lead to experiences of estrangement, disruption and vulnerability, they can be productive in the sense that they create conditions for seeing the world through fresh eyes, which was precisely what travellers were seeking.

Out of practice

As mentioned earlier, travellers came to India and Nepal knowing they would be challenged; indeed for many this was a central reason for going. Yet the ways in which they were challenged mostly came in the mundane practices of everyday life. Below I offer an autobiographical story of just such a practical situation that defied my practical sense and illustrates the practical, bodily and affective aspects of travelling in an alien world. Any traveller to Nepal quickly learns that the country has a limited electrical capacity. There are daily rolling blackouts in which any given neighbourhood will be without power for approximately ten hours a day. Inconvenient as it is, local inhabitants are used to it and travellers soon learn to adjust their routines around it, particularly when it came to internet use. And yet, sometimes one is quite literally caught in the dark, as I was one night in Kathmandu. On my second night at the Hotel Vajra, I had stepped down the hall to take my first shower since leaving Tokyo four days prior. After making it from the airport to my room the previous day, I had collapsed into a long, coma-

like sleep, not waking until the afternoon the following day. I had sweat through my clothes – the same clothes I had been wearing since Tokyo – as well as the sheets and found myself in a more or less wretched state. I finally willed myself to take a shower; exiting my room and walking slowly and quietly down a dim hallway to the shared bathroom.

Halfway through the shower, lathered up with soap and preparing to shave, the lights suddenly went out and the bathroom went pitch black. I was all alone. *Ok, no problem, just rinse off in the dark and go back your room and light a candle*, I thought. With slow, concentrated movements, in complete visual obscurity I rinsed the soap from my body, shaved carefully and turned off the lukewarm shower. *So this is what it's like to be blind*. The drain was clogged and an ankle deep pool of soapy water sloshed around in the darkness below. Feeling for the door latch to exit the shower stall, my fingers finally came upon it. Prodding it lightly to unhook it, I gave it a gentle push and felt a small piece of metal give way. Plooooop, I heard from the dark pool below. The tiny latch had fallen into the soapy pool at my feet. *Great, just great.* Feeling trapped, I began pushing, shaking and eventually violently banging on the shower door, but my efforts were useless. My heart raced and like a caged animal, I searched for a way of escape. As Sennett (1994: 310) observes, 'the body comes to life when coping with difficulty'. Taking a few deep breaths to regain my composure in the darkness, I called out, 'Hello, hello, anybody out there?! I'm stuck in the shower! Help, I'm stuck in the shower!' There was no response. In the darkness, the only sounds I heard were my own breath and water sloshing down below.

It seemed as if I was the only one in the hotel. *I'm really and truly stuck in a shower in Kathmandu. How absurd is this?* I thought. No one seemed to be coming to my rescue. In my damp nakedness, I crouched down in the pitch-black shower stall and reached my hands into the lukewarm water. Feeling around for the small metal door latch, my fingers stumbled upon a large clump of hair mixed with soap scum. I became nauseous and thought I was going to vomit. Not finding the latch, I felt tears welling up in my eyes. I soon realized this was pointless and switching gears, I vented my anger through a string of loud profanity. I cursed the Hotel Vajra, who marketed itself as a fine establishment with a high standard, but just like the rest of Kathmandu, was full of cracks! Everything in this country seemed to be falling apart, though I later came to see that everything was holding together just fine, and rather I was the one falling apart. Realizing this performance was not going to get me out of the shower, I regained composure and began searching once again for the latch which lay somewhere in the pool below. Finally, I found it and standing up, I felt around for the fixture. After trying numerous angles and amounts of pressure, without sight I somehow managed to refit the latch back onto the shower door and frame. Impressed that this actually happened, I tried carefully to undo the latch and open the door. After several careful attempts…plooooop, it fell back into the pool below! More profanity ensued and I gave the door a wild beating. *What the hell am I doing stuck in pitch-black shower in Kathmandu?!! How did I get myself into this mess?* Standing cold and naked, I called out again and again for help. Nobody came for what seemed like hours, but was probably more like thirty minutes. It is amazing how slowly time passes when one is naked, locked in a dark, dirty shower.

Finally, someone entered the bathroom, announced by the dim flicker of candlelight on the ceiling and the sound of footsteps. In an American accent, the voice of a woman said:

> 'Hey, are you alright?'
> 'Not really! I've been stuck in the shower forever. The door latch broke and I can't get out.'
> 'Oh really? Wow, bummer.' she said. 'Hey, where are you from? Your accent sounds familiar?'
> 'Yeah, it *is* a bummer. I'm from California. Look, I really gotta get out of the shower. Can you please go get the hotel guys to come get me outta here?' I pleaded.
> 'I knew you were from California! Hey me too! Which part?' she asked.
> *Why doesn't she just go get help and we can do this later?* I wondered.
> 'The Bay Area [San Francisco]' I replied.
> 'Wow what a coincidence! Me too. I knew it! Ok, wait, I'm gonna go get some help.'
> *Obviously I'm not going anywhere.*

After what seemed like a long while, the woman returned with two members of the Hotel Vajra staff, one of which proceeded to scold me in a thick Nepali-English accent:

> 'You what are you doing in there?! You must come out of there!'
> 'Yeah, I want to come out! I'm stuck. The door latch broke. You gotta help me get out!' I yelled.

The pair began muttering in Nepali. They sounded annoyed, mad at me for getting myself stuck in the shower, during a blackout of all times. At

the time it seemed utterly absurd, them being mad a me, but later I came to think they had a point.

> 'I think they need to go get some tools,' said the Californian. 'Wait a moment, sir, we will return soon,' the man said. His tone was less hostile, as if he had grasped the fact that I was not refusing to come out of the shower, but was locked inside. *I'm still not going anywhere…*

About ten minutes later, the men returned. During this time, I spoke with the Californian woman, who stood on the other side of my wet cage. She was travelling solo in Nepal, and said this was her third trip. Her plans, she said, revolved around trekking and attending a Buddhist meditation retreat at a temple somewhere in the Kathmandu valley. She said she loved Nepal because 'it's just so different from the U.S.', going on to explain:

> It can be challenging here. I mean, *you know*, you're locked in a shower. There's these power outages, and you have to be careful about food and water and stuff. But the people here are so beautiful, and the mountains are incredible. It's a wonderful place. That's why I keep coming back.

Finally, the two men returned with flashlights and tools. Almost at once they got to work, banging on the door with what sounded like a hammer and crowbar. After about a minute of pounding, the door swung open and there I stood, my naked, goose-bumped body illuminated by a mixture of flashlights and candles.

> 'Hi,' I said quietly, feeling at that point beyond humiliation. 'Oh! Right…where's your towel?' the Californian asked with

amused surprise.

'Over there,' I answered, pointing to the opposite wall. 'Can you hand it to me please? Jesus Christ I'm glad that's over. Thanks for getting me out, guys. Man, you really need to fix that thing.'

'Ok goodnight sir,' one said gruffly.

Collecting their tools and muttering amongst themselves, the two men shuffled out of the dark bathroom. No apology, no explanation, nothing. It was incredible. The Californian said she too was going to bed. I thanked her for helping me and made a vague suggestion that we hang out another time. She made a friendly and equally vague response and we never saw each other again. I went back to my room and made a voice recording of the whole episode from start to finish, recounting every minute detail I could recall.

Why recount this strange and seemingly trivial episode, both privately, to friends and family, and now in this academic text? Because it was an experience which would be highly unlikely to befall a middle-class person in their Western, home worldly environment, where things like showers and electricity usually function more or less smoothly and predictably. As I noted in the previous chapter, the act of bathing took on new significance in Nepal and India in the sense that foreigners had to consciously adjust their usual practices and habits. Taking a shower at home requires little to no conscious thought, as 'consciousness goes away from where it is not needed'. Yet, in Nepal or India, such practical, taken-for-granted things such as bathing, electricity, hot water, drinkable water, toilet paper, and so on can disrupt our bodily schemes. Despite taking place in the dark, the shower episode was an

experience that 'lit up' by virtue of its surprise and disconfirmation of expectations. The thwarting of expectations in turn opens up new possibilities and insights, and as such are a defining character of experience (Gadamer 2004: 350).

The potential transformative power of journeys to Nepal and India, I found, came largely in the typically mundane details of everyday life, which become illuminated as the cultured body is disrupted. And this was the point. As Yann, the German traveller I met in Sikkim told me, 'India is all about challenging your assumptions'. Offering an example, he explained how he found that in India, just because there is a sign for a bus stop does not necessarily mean that a bus will stop there:

> I waited at this 'bus stop' [quotation marks gesture] only to watch buses zoom by in clouds of dust and honking horns. In Germany, this would never happen. In fact we have digital clocks which tell us exactly when the bus will arrive. And it always arrives right when it says it will. But in India, no no no … nothing is ever this clear. I watched the locals, who give a little signal and just jump right on the bus wherever, sometimes while it's still moving. So, I imitated them. That's how it's done here.

It was these types of experiences: 'light breaks' in everyday practical sense that seemed to be highly significant to travellers I met, who were eager to recount their stories to each other in cafes or guesthouses, on long bus or train rides, and in emails, travel blogs or Facebook postings. Communicating such experiences seemed to be a way of not only sharing, but also processing and making sense of certain impressions and common sense defying experiences. Speaking with other travellers,

sharing stories, impressions and experiences was not only a form of entertainment, but also had a pedagogical value. Travellers learned from each other and exchanged practical information, such as where to stay and not stay, where is good to eat or should be avoided, where to catch the bus or train, and other relevant advice.

Be(com)ing well-travelled

For Dewey, all experience is a form of learning; we learn by doing, and we especially learn when we are challenged. Challenge can be conceived of as a form of learning involving the dynamic interplay of habit, thought and emotion. Cohen (2007: 777) summarizes the process originally proposed by Dewey as follows:

> Challenge arises when emotions are engaged by a task and established habits are insufficient to accomplish it. Cognitive powers are then mobilized to diagnose the reasons for the breakdown and to redeploy capabilities in new combinations that may be expected to succeed. As we endlessly repeat this cycle of emotionally engaged perception and activity, periodically interpreted by breakdowns and cognitively intense repair work, it generates a vast repertoire of reasonably effective – and mutually coherent – habits.

Exiting familiar habits, routines and the relative predictability of the home world, travellers left what they typically referred to as their 'comfort zones'. Although trips to the Himalayas and elsewhere are voluntary leisure, the experience is not always pleasant or easy, but full of challenges, dissonances and breakdowns. In other words, travelling can be hard work. Numerous travellers spoke of learning how to

'handle' themselves in India and Nepal, like Marisa, who struggled initially when she first arrived in India, but 'little by little' had overcome her apprehension by 'letting go' and 'opening' herself to the experience. Months after we had both returned from our respective travels, I corresponded with Marisa, who told me, 'New York is easy after India. Everything is easy after India…' When I had met her in Darjeeling, she had been travelling for approximately four months in India and was on her way to Nepal, followed by Tibet. She exuded a worldly confidence that made it difficult to imagine her crying in a hotel room for three days, too afraid to venture outside. She had remarked that it was crucial to 'know how to handle yourself and manage your emotions in the face of all that intensity that *is* India'. I interpreted this as saying that she had been challenged, and that through a series of breakdowns and repairs, she had adapted and learned to cope in an alien world perceived initially as overly chaotic and 'intense'. Just as a carpenter learns through practice how to handle a hammer, travellers learned how to handle themselves in Nepal and India in the face of situations which challenge or address them.

Being-in-the-world for Heidegger is a matter of 'skilful coping' in which human beings rely largely on practical, tacit knowledge built up through repeated practice or habits. When on-going, non-reflective engagement in an activity is disturbed and our usual skilful absorption breaks down, an aspect of experience becomes 'lit up' (Heidegger 2010: 62-76). The significance of such breakdowns and lighting ups is that we learn from them and expand our practical knowledge by challenging engrained habits. Dewey observes how 'the more suavely efficient a habit the more unconsciously it operates' and '[o]nly a hitch in its

workings occasions emotion and provokes thought' (in Dreyfus 1991: 70). By travelling into foreign environments where travellers are largely out of practice in the home worldly sense, they are provoked or solicited in numerous ways and must respond to these demands.

Adjusting habitual repertoires, becoming attuned to and coping in new environments, travellers in a sense cultivate an embodied cosmopolitanism (Germann Molz 2006). As an intercultural practice that poses numerous challenges to one's normal 'feel for the game', navigating through alien worlds can lead to more than what Molz (2005) calls 'gaining a flexible eye', but to the cultivation of a 'flexible body'. As actors travel and travail, they cultivated new awareness, adjusted habits and practical abilities, altered forms of interacting and communicating. Travelling thus works on the habitual yet adaptable body as travellers expose themselves to situations of normative difference.

Embodied cosmopolitanism

Jason, my weeklong travelling companion in Nepal was a good example of a well-travelled person who had cultivated such an embodied cosmopolitanism and displayed an according *body hexis*. Originally from California, Jason lived in Cambodia, where he worked for the government as an environmental planner. Before Cambodia, he had lived in China and before that, Indonesia. He was fluent in three Asian languages and despite his Anglo-Saxon appearance, seemed quite at home in Asia and did not seem to stand out like certain freshly arrived travellers did. Being well-travelled does not simply mean that Jason had simply visited many places and countries in the world.

Indeed he had, but more than this, it was the way he carried himself and interacted with others that demonstrated he was a person who was highly adaptable, flexible and confident in a wide variety of circumstances. Being well-travelled in this sense means one has been exposed to situations of difference and has learned and built up a repertoire of skills for coping with diverse situations.

Jason and I first met over lunch somewhere between Kathmandu and Pokhara in central Nepal. At the half way point of our eight hour bus ride, foreigners and locals poured off dusty, run-down buses, stretching their legs and backs and looking relieved to be on solid ground. While locals mostly wandered off, foreigners moved like a slow herd into an open-air roadside restaurant, where local women spooned rice, lentil curry and fried *momos* (dumplings) onto plates. I took my plate behind a group of young, tanned Swedes and looked for a place to sit. Recognizing someone from my bus that had caught my attention, I approached and asked if I could join him. 'Sure, sit down,' he answered in an unmistakably friendly American accent. I took a seat and evaluated the plate in front of me. For the previous week, I had been sticking to a steady diet of mostly bananas, papayas and crackers.

> 'What a ride, huh?' I said.
> 'Yeah, it's as smooth as an airplane,' he replied.

I paused, not knowing if he was joking or serious. Unable to read his expression, I laughed and said,

> 'Oh really? I was about to say that's about the bumpiest ride
> I've ever been on.' And I meant it.

'Pfffffff. Wait 'till you get to India. This is nothing. It's another level entirely,' he said laughing.

We ate our lunch overlooking a large valley divided by a gushing, muddy river fed by the melting snow of the Himalayan spring. A few small farm settlements dotted the riverbank. The sky was hazy. Jason explained the smoky air was due to the burning off of one of the year's three crop cycles. As an environmental planner, he seemed to know about such things, and began telling me about the water quality of the river below; how it was fed by glacial melt but appeared contaminated by agricultural runoff. Returning to the theme of bus riding and travelling, he told me how he had been spent the past month travelling around northern India.

Yeah, the bus rides are much more intense, as are the car horns and people in general. I'm pretty surprised at how mellow the Nepalese are. Nepal is like India, but India's a hundred times more intense. It's absolutely wild, but it's great.

I for one had a hard time imagining a bus ride more brutal than the one to Pokhara, let alone a place one hundred times as intense as Kathmandu. Yet Jason, by virtue of having the experience of riding many different buses in many different countries, had grounds for comparison that I did not. He spoke with great enthusiasm about his recent trip through northern India and how he had learned, as he put it, 'to penetrate deeper into the culture'.

On my first trip to India, when I was in my early twenties, I was pretty freaked out by the whole place. I got sick and didn't get to know it as deeply as I would've liked to. But on this trip,

it kind of clicked. I kinda got it. You have to find the right rhythm in India in order to penetrate deeper into the culture. You have to be in sync with the energy; otherwise it can completely overwhelm you. But once you get it, once you learn how to be comfortable and engage with people, it's absolutely great. I can see why people keep going back. India takes time. It's an acquired taste. But I really dig it. I'm sure I'll be coming back. I think this was probably one of more trips to come for me.

Building up an acquired taste means gaining a gradual appreciation for something though repeated experience. Many travellers, like Jason, spoke of finding a 'right rhythm' in India or Nepal. Like building up an acquired taste, this took time and repeated exposure, adjusting to new practical conditions and learning how to cope skilfully. For travellers, finding the 'right rhythm' meant knowing how to handle themselves comfortably and confidently in everyday situations in Nepal and India and not being overwhelmed by 'intensity'. Developing skills for coping, interacting and syncing to local rhythms were crucial elements that allowed for what Jason called 'penetrating deeper' into the culture and enjoying the experience. Finding the 'right rhythm' was ultimately an exercise in experiential, embodied learning, which took place largely in everyday situations such as taking a bus, finding one's way around town, buying food and bathing in the dark. However, such practical, learning experiences were not explicitly sought after nor were they consciously reflected upon as learning experiences. Instead, I found these minor trials and tribulations were put by travellers into terms of 'perspective' and 'challenge'.

As I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to authenticity, bathing practices took on heightened significance for numerous travellers, who were forced to adapt to having often limited supplies of water and much more basic facilities than they were used to at home. In general, travellers learned that 'basic' things such as water and electricity, though generally reliable at home, could not to be taken for granted in Nepal and India. Light breaks in everyday experience thus led to the adjustment of habits, of de- and re-habitualising, shifts in perspective and practical knowledge disruption and generation. The accumulation and integration of travel experiences as a process of embodied memory hence opens new ways of relating to the world, leading to expanded horizons and a more cosmopolitan being-in-the-world.

Conclusion

I came to understand Himalayan travel as an intercultural practice in which the socially habituated yet dis- + re-placed traveller is in constant relation and adjustment to the practical conditions and demands of new fields. The *habitus* and *doxa* travellers bring with them into these new fields, or alien worlds, as embodied schemes of perception and modes of interpretation can be related to the hermeneutic notion of 'prejudices' (Gadamer 2004). As embodiments of history and culture, prejudices and 'fore-meanings' shape understandings and self-definitions, while remaining largely unconscious until there is a rupture in experience. However, by placing themselves in alien worlds, travellers did not leave the home world completely behind. Rather, they brought the prejudices, fore-meanings, habitus and *doxa* from home to the new situation. Travelling, like engaging in a dialogue with the Other – be it

another person, distant epoch, foreign culture or a text – brings actors' specific 'embodied histories' (Bourdieu 1990b: 56) and beliefs into question. The dialogical process can lead to openings and expanded horizons, enlarged awareness and revised understandings of both self and Other (Marotta 2009: 270). Breakdowns in practical knowledge can lead to new knowledge generation and integration, demonstrating that prejudices, *habitus* and *doxa* are durable dispositions, though not fixed permanently.

Travelling can thus be seen as an embodied practice, process and a form of learning. Exiting familiar habits, routines and the relative predictability of the home world, travellers left their 'comfort zones' and went in search of new experiences and perspective. As an affective process in which travellers expose themselves to uncomfortable or even dangerous situations, travelling as learning follows the ancient formula of *matheín – patheín*, or 'learning through suffering' (Mitgutsch 2009). All the travellers I spoke with knew beforehand that travelling in India and Nepal would entail degrees of hardship, discomfort, potential danger and most likely illness at some point. Choosing to leave the relative comforts, predictability and orderliness of the home world, they embraced such challenges and risk as part of the game. Yann, like other travellers, including me, had had a somewhat difficult trip, becoming quite sick early into a three-month journey through northern India:

> It's been a hard trip. I can't say it's been so fun. Actually, I
> suffered a lot. But I have learned many things, and this seems to
> be the point of coming here. I didn't come to India on a spiritual
> journey or pilgrimage. If I can say why I came and what I will

take from this experience, it is perspective. I'm sure I will see Germany quite differently when I return. Before I came I was very critical of my country, but now I think I will appreciate it more.

This is not to say that there was no pleasure or enjoyment involved in Himalayan journeys; most people were highly positive about their experiences, despite certain challenges. What I have observed here is simply that travellers voluntarily put themselves in precarious positions by virtue of exiting their 'spheres of owness' and entering unfamiliar alien worlds. Such boundary crossing experiences were enthusiastically embraced and as one traveller put it, 'worth the risk'. This attitude is found not only in Himalayan travel, but is reflected more broadly in the contemporary popularity of adventure tourism, 'nature challenge activities' (Davidson and Stebbins 2011), 'edgework' (Lyng 1990) and other cultural practices involving voluntary risk. The logic of risk-taking appears to be about potentiality, for as Zaloom (2004: 365) observes, 'risk reaps reward'. As the Turners (1978) observed, pilgrimage also appears to be about potentiality and transition. Thus, facing challenges and overcoming perceived limitations facilitated conditions for transformations of self and enlarged horizons, which were the goals and ideals of most Himalayan journeys.

Following a process and movement-oriented perspective on pilgrimage (see Arellano 2007; Coleman and Eade 2004; Collins-Kreiner 2010a; Frey 1998; Slavin 2003), I found that the transformative qualities of

Himalayan travel were not centred on the reaching of specific sites[15], but manifested in the daily practices, movements and interactions constituting the overall experience. In liminal positions, travellers exposed themselves to affective and pathic experiences, the sum of which led to disruptions, shifts in perceptions, enlarged awareness and metanoia. Even when there were interests in local spiritual traditions and practices, as I suggested in the previous chapter, contemporary Himalayan journeys were not transcendentally-oriented, but revealed this-worldly forms of immanent spirituality.

Although there appears to be a trend in contemporary western societies to seek out relatively challenging and even painful activities in order to feel alive (Lyng 1990), this is not completely new behaviour. Voluntary risk taking can be read as a meta-social commentary on overly rationalized, routinized and increasingly sedentary late modern lifestyles, but the roots appear to go deeper. Many traditional pilgrimages, rites of pasSage and religious rituals were, in Turner's (1973) words, 'arduous and fraught with peril'. Glucklich (2005), for instance surveys how ritual practices involving pain and suffering are necessary ingredients for transformation in many of the world's religious traditions.

In this chapter, I looked at Himalayan travel experiences not in terms of organised rituals or as defined pilgrimages, but rather as practical experiences that made travellers intensely aware of the new environments, cultural differences and limit situations they

[15] Although having specific goals, such as making certain treks or attending teachings by Dalai Lama were also significant, as I discussed in chapter four.

encountered. Pathic and affective experiences in alien worlds challenged travellers, leading to a form of embodied learning and transformation. Thus, rather than overt religious or spiritual practices or lofty ideals, it was the embodied intersection of home and alien worlds that typically led travellers to describe their Himalayan journeys as spiritual and transformative.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Somewhere Between Everywhere and *Now*here: Embodied Interplacing in the Age of Digital Ge-Stell

I am never here only, as this encapsulated body; rather, I am there, that is, I already pervade [the world] and only thus can go I through it.

> Heidegger, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' (1978: 359)

My body is wherever it has something to do.

> Merleau Ponty (2013: 298)

Thus, the formula of modernizing processes is as follows: Progress is movement towards movement, movement toward increased movement, movement towards increased mobility.

> Sloterdijk (2006: 37)

The world is a place and a world of places. To travel is to move in space-time between places. Although embodied travellers are always emplaced *somewhere*, bodily and technological medias allow human being to extend beyond a delimited body and its immediate spatio-temporal location or emplacement. More than ever before,

technological forms of life reveal being-in-the-world as a truly global event that *takes place* here, there and many places in-between. Contemporary lives are thus characterized as being increasingly mobile and interplaced. Thus the willingness and readiness to be 'on the move' seem to have developed as a strong imperative in our liquid times with far-reaching effects (Bauman 2008; Sennett 2006; Urry 2007).

Perhaps the most unforeseen and striking observation to emerge from my fieldwork in Nepal and India was the role mobile technologies played in mediating travel experiences and the placing of travellers. Thanks – or in any case due – to mobile technologies in a global age of networked communication systems, more than ever before, travellers are able to imaginatively, corporeally and virtually move through and *be* (tele)present in many places and times at once. In an increasingly interconnected world, possibilities for accessing and inhabiting multiple realities and be(com)ing interplaced are intensified. Enframed by the mobile, technological milieu of the information age, contemporary media practices reveal new modes of travelling-in, dwelling-in and ultimately being-in-the-world. Examining certain technological practices, narratives and the relational dynamics of hyper-mobile travellers encountered in Nepal and India, here I explore reconfigurations of place, space and time and the placing of body subjects situated in a mobile and mobilizing technological era.

Building upon the topics addressed in the preceding chapters, namely, the connections between imaginary and corporeal travel, the quest for authenticity, the practical, bodily and affective dimensions of travel, this chapter will revolve around a phenomenological conception of interplacedness. As I have attempted to demonstrate thus far, travelling

is not an isolated event which takes place solely *here* or *there*, *now* or *then*. Rather, it is a relational and processual event in which embodied travellers bring past experiences, memories and imaginings, as well as home-worldly habit(u)s, prejudices and knowledge schemes into dialogical encounters with alien worlds as relatively separate yet permeable spheres. In other words, travellers bring their worlds and hence 'themselves' to these other worlds, resulting in relative reconfigurations and transformations in travellers' relations to both home and alien spheres. Travelling can thus be viewed as a recursive, world-making encounter and a spiralling process of becoming in the sense that worldmaking 'always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking' (Goodman 1978: 6).

In this chapter, I develop a phenomenological understanding of place and emplacement as well as the role of mobile technologies in mediating place and travel experiences and realities. Phenomenologically, I first explore place and emplacement as embodied life-worldly and relational or processual events, especially with regard to the status of travelling between worlds. Then I investigate the role mobile technologies play in mediating and reconfiguring corporeal travel and experiences of place and emplacement, respectively inter-placedness. Observing the trend in travelling with and through mobile technologies, I argue that contemporary technologies and corresponding practices are radically altering what it means to travel and be emplaced. The situated practices of travellers in Nepal and India in regards to mobile technologies revealed a tendency to drift in and out of 'planetary landscapes' (Augé 2008) via networked 'portable personhood' (Elliott and Urry 2010). This

form of moving and dwelling points not only to a digitally enframed form of travelling, but a way of being-in-the-world, which following Heidegger (1977) I shall call 'digital Ge-stell' (enframent). Technologized mobile practices thus manifest and reflect a broader social trend in life orientations and narrative trajectories, characterized for their becoming increasing mobile, global, contingent, and personalized.

Place and emplacement as embodied life-worldly event

> To be is *to be in place*, and to be a phenomenon, in appearing, is similarly to be placed, or, as one might say, to *take place*.
>
> Malpas (2012b: 46)

As I have emphasized, travellers are embodied. As such, the act of travelling is a bodily 'event' (*Ergeinis*) in the phenomenological sense of a 'happening' or 'taking place', which is both spatial and temporal. If travelling is an embodied event which takes place, here I ask just where such events happened for travellers who journeyed to Nepal and India, yet remained connected to home worlds that appear global in scope. I consider what framed the conditions of these particular happenings, and what such events reveal about travelling and dwelling under the technologized conditions of late modernity. Although travelling, including ethnographic travelling, are predicated on experiences of 'being there', my concern here is understanding what 'being there' and 'being-in-the-world' means when 'being' does not take place only here or there, that is, in discrete locations and isolated, place and flesh-bound bodies.

Following Heideggerian (1996: 50-51) notions of human being as 'being there' (*Da-sein*), I consider being-in-the-world as an event that is dispersed across and between moving horizons and a multiplicity of bodies, places, spaces and times, and how this event is impacted by forces of dis-+-hyper-connectivity situated in the age of digital Ge-stell (en-framing). In pursuing such an enquiry, I follow a radicalized phenomenological understanding of place, as briefly outlined below.

Embodied place(d)

More than mere location or container, place, space, time and the body are basic conditions for existence. In and through temporalized spaces and places is where the world manifests itself to human beings and where being-in-the-world happens (Bachelard 2008; Casey 1993, 2001; Heidegger 1996; Ingold 2000; Küpers 2010). Contrary to static, dualistic and de-temporalized approaches, a phenomenological understanding considers these as the interdependent elements of lived experience and the existential grounds for all life-worldly events. Equipped with a spatial framework, living bodies mediate and navigate within and towards places via primordial and specific socio-cultural 'environing' practices (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Movements, rhythms and interactions between body subjects and places facilitate the co-creation of 'place-scapes' in which bodies and environments are 'congruent counterparts' (Casey 1993: 25, 103). As Merleau-Ponty (1962: 117) observes, 'far from my body's being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space for me if I had no body'. The coupled body and world form a dynamic spatio-temporal connection that is always perceived, mediated and oriented through a body which is always already emplaced (Dreyfus 2002, 2009; Malpas 1999, 2006; Merleau-Ponty 2002).

Emplacement refers to an immediate and concrete placement in which the interplay between living body and place is situated (Casey 1993: 3-23). As Edward Casey puts it, 'bodies belong to places just as places belong to bodies … place is where the body is' (1993: 102-3). Emplaced being thus entails sensing, feeling, moving, orienting, thinking and acting through a body which is co-constituted by the places and spaces within which it is practically engaged. Place is thus 'a structure comprising spatiality *and* temporality, subjectivity *and* objectivity, self *and* others' (Malpas 1999: 199 emphasis original). As such, places are best understood as relational processualities that are not fixed or closed, but relatively open and emergent structures.

Travelling between places as relational and processual events

A relational and process oriented approach understands place and space as the emerging results of inter-relational processes. Spaces and places are dynamic, temporal and multidimensional phenomena comprised of physical, environmental, socio-cultural and personal dimensions. A relational perspective interprets a particular place not as bounded and static, but as a relatively open, layered, multiple and emerging space within a dispersed and inherently indeterminate process of continual reconfiguration (Malpas 2012a; Massey 2005). Places are thus not discrete, bounded locations, isolated from one another by empty geometric space, but relational processualities that should be understood as events rather than things (Casey 1993: 85; Küpers 2010). As Massey (2005: 139-41) notes, the event of place is not pre-given or 'intrinsically coherent', but is rather a contingent product of 'throwntogetherness'. 'Here' thus becomes a site of 'encounter' …

where spatial narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctures of trajectories which have their own temporalities. As such, questions of time become as problematic as those of place.

Beyond individual actors, the taking place of global mobility involves vast networks, configurations, conjunctures and webs of relations between human and non-human agents and things. Any trip to Nepal or India, for instance, is made possible and constituted by local cultures, institutions, circulating capital, information communication systems, actors, buildings, aircraft, automobiles, trains, electric and petroleum energy sources, food and water chains, geographical bodies, plant and animal bodies and so on. Local and global socio-material resources and relations are all mobilized and implicated in the process of any single trip's emergence or 'taking place', which is then really a micro event occurring within a much larger system. Following an event ontology is important and revealing as it focuses on the relations *between* time, space and place, bodies and things, and on the contingency of orders and the potential breaking or morphing of extant conditions (Massumi 2002: xxiv). As events are happening everywhere and all the time, we are caught up in a world of movement and becomings where any ordering remains cursory, volatile, thus leaving a future which is contingent and undetermined (Anderson and Harrison 2010: 21; Deleuze and Guattari 2004).

While all places undergo processes of continuous making and remaking, global cities and tourist zones such as Dharamsala, Kathmandu, Pokhara and Darjeeling, as cosmopolitical crossroads are particularly subject to change and reordering in the midst of global confluences of people, objects and information. Such places are

(re)produced through combinations of tourist and local performances and practices, all of which is fundamentally made possible through flows of capital, people, objects, organizations, institutions, information systems, machines, buildings, signs, transportation and other infrastructures (Urry 2007; 2011b: 119). As 'places to play and places in play' tourist zones are situated in a 'swirl of global processes' existing at 'different stages and locations within global flows' (Sheller and Urry 2004: 8-9). Taking place within larger cultural fluxes and flows, consequentially 'new cool places for each new cool generation are produced', while no-longer cool places become left behind (9). This pattern and risk represents a central warning and critique offered by anthropologists and geographers against tourism for host communities and the local environments which are impacted by tourist development (Bruner 1991; E. Cohen 1988; Crick 1989; Gupta 1999; Gurung and Seeland 2008; Nash 1996; Nepal 2000; Shackley 1994, 1995; Terzidou et al. 2008).

As I discussed in the previous chapters, being 'out there' and encountering alien worlds does not mean simply leaving home worlds and corresponding identities behind. On the contrary, home worlds accompany travellers into alien worlds, just as people bring their histories and prejudices to any dialogical encounter. The home world is carried by travellers in embodied forms, such as habits, tacit knowledge, cultural attitudes and dispositions, memories and imaginings. It is also inscribed in the body hexis of travellers and through the material artefacts they carry, such as clothing, backpacks, books, music, medicines and other personal items. The home world also may manifest in social interactions with other travellers and in the

availability of familiar foods and drinks, such as the lattes and cappuccinos that were found to be readily available in many of the locations I carried out fieldwork. Increasingly, the home world – 'home' as a place-world departed from and/or a network of inter-connected people and places spanning the globe – especially accompanies travellers in their movements through and temporally dwellings in alien worlds through mobile technologies.

Mobile technologies and 'inter-placedness'

During the fieldwork, I was struck by the ubiquitous use of mobile communication technologies by travellers. More than the occasional visit to an internet café, as was common travel practice since the late nineties, the fact that many people travelled with laptop computers and/or portable media devices such as smart phones, i-Pads, -Pods and -Phones told me that both a new technological era and corresponding mode of travelling had arrived. With mobile technologies and the increasing presence of wireless internet connections in traveller hubs such as Kathmandu and Pokhara in Nepal, and Dharamsala and Darjeeling in north-eastern India, travellers were found to spend significant amounts of time online and offline coupled with their portable devices. In fact, I encountered some difficultly 'making contact' with travellers in the cafes, restaurants and guesthouses where they frequented, because they were often deeply absorbed in their mobile devices, maintaining connections with their respective spheres while disconnecting from localised environments.

As my fieldwork observations and further research demonstrates, over the past two decades or so there has indeed been a diffusion or

'spillover' of internet and mobile technologies across multiple life domains, including pilgrimage and vacation contexts (Elliott and Urry 2010; Hjorth 2012; MacKay and Vogt 2012). Such technologies allow for home worldly familiarity, continuity and comfortable routines to carry on in transported environments. Urry and Elliot (2010) coin the term 'miniaturized mobilities' to describe the proliferation and impact of ever compact and sophisticated digital communication devices such as mobile phones, laptops, tablets and smart phones. As they observe, mobile, networked technologies have rapidly permeated the social fabric of contemporary in the information society. While 'miniature mobilities' open possibilities for and reinforce increased mobility, of importance is how networked technologies alter social contexts and transform embodied experiences of place, space and time, self and others.

One of the first interactions I had with a traveller in Nepal, for instance, after my dinner with Mack the anthropologist and the Californian woman who helped free me from the shower I had become trapped in, took place across open laptops. Our encounter was in the bar on the rooftop terrace of the Hotel Vajra, where I was told the best wireless internet signal was located. I had already been in Nepal for three days and felt somewhat overdue in sending an email to my family in California and my partner in New Zealand, who I sensed were probably wondering about me. At the small bar I joined a blond woman in her forties who wore colourful, silk clothing that appeared locally made and donned a red Hindu *tilaka* on her forehead, or 'third eye' space. Glancing up from her laptop, she forced a quick smile and hello before averting her eyes back to her screen. In an effort to make

conversation, I asked her for the Wi-Fi password and commented on the pleasant location of our wireless 'hot spot'.

The third floor terrace of the Hotel Vajra offered a panoramic view of Kathmandu, including Patan and Durbar Square to the west, and the towering Himalayas to the north and east. Before settling in at the bar, I had spent some time contemplating the distant, looming mountains, imagining Tibet somewhere on the other side. After telling me the password and warning me of the rampant power outages in Kathmandu – the next one which was due in an hour or so and would mean no internet access for at least ten hours – the woman and I made some light conversation. I learned that she was in Kathmandu for a yoga and meditation retreat and would also do some trekking in the Dolpo region of northern Nepal. From her confidence and familiarity with place names and regions in Nepal, her relaxed demeanour and fashion, I deduced this was one of many trips to Nepal. My intuition was correct, as I learned that she came to Nepal from Seattle annually for one to two months. Apparently not interested in hearing my story, her eyes soon fell back to her screen and silence ensued. Taking this as a cue that our conversation was finished, I did the same. Looking out the window, on the roof of the Hotel Vajra, just above the clamour of Kathmandu, I watched crows flying across the hazy silhouettes of the Himalayas before turning my eyes to my own screen. Facing one another, eyes glowing in the flickering pixels of our illuminated crystal screens, a steady rhythm of clicks and taps took us in other directions, to other places. Our presence drifted into these digital portals, and out of Kathmandu, towards our own particular 'spheres of ownness' (Steinbock 1995: 175), to our respective place-worlds. I read and wrote

emails to my family in California, my partner in New Zealand and my newlywed friends in Japan, while she plausibly connected with her own significant others. Like the people we reached out to around the globe, in that small rooftop bar, the woman and I remained together, but separate. Many subsequent encounters took place this way and made me wonder about the nature and quality of experiences travellers were having in terms of corporeal emplacement. More specifically, I wondered what was happening when travellers tuned in to digital worlds and out of local ones.

The overlapping of virtual and corporeal mobilities

Edward Casey (2012: 175) begins a recent essay by posing the question: 'What does wireless technology mean for us as embodied human beings?' and goes on to argue forcefully that fundamental features of our existence suffer neglect in a wireless world in which our experience of ourselves, others and the living world are changed. His first critique is on account of the 'irreplaceable value' of being with other humans in a face-to-face manner by virtue of being in the same place. He writes how there is 'simply no substitute for the nuanced reading of the other's face and indeed, his or her whole body … expressions and dialogues made possible by being in the presence of a person are of an intricacy and scope that simply cannot be experienced otherwise' (175). Casey also critiques the 'illusion' of omnipresent availability characterizing the age of wireless technologies, or the notion that another person is available to me merely because I carry a cellphone or laptop (176). Admitting that being able to take everyone in my address book 'with me' everywhere I go is useful on many occasions and even necessary on others, he points out that the emplaced corporeal self

cannot be everywhere at once. And yet, says Casey, 'the technologically mediated presence of another person brings with it the presumptive illusion that I can, without cost or loss, replace the concrete other with his or her icon' (175). Along with the consequences for dialogical interaction, for Casey the wireless world causes human beings to lose touch with the 'the primary requirement for existence' – body and place:

> When I use wireless technologies that take me out of place, no matter how convenient or practically valuable that move may be, I am moving into a disembodied experience that deprives me of the very basis of my personal and interpersonal identity (177).

Along with disengaging us from our immediate corporeal emplacement, wireless technologies have major implications for experiences of time and space. The flow or cascade of images and words which rapidly appear on screens through digital networks disregard time and space and bring past and future horizons into an eternal present. In Merleau-Ponty's phrase, a 'freezing of being' occurs as past, present and future relations give way to a succession of ahistorical *nows*, leading to what Erikson calls 'the tyranny of the moment' (Casey 2012: 179; Eriksen 2001). According to Casey, it is not so much that temporal horizons are cancelled or eliminated – 'they continue to exist for *any* event' – but the 'organic link to the present is severed'.

> In short, the kind of becoming that is intrinsic to the full experience of time is short-circuited; it is reduced to what-has-now-become – and only insofar as it is set before me on a liquid

> crystal display, plasma screen, or other representational surface
> (179).

Before setting forth from New Zealand, I had deliberated about bringing my newly acquired laptop and iPhone for reasons similar to those outlined by Casey. I was concerned that travelling with such technologies would be disruptive to the embodied experience of being in Nepal and India. After all, travelling and doing ethnography, I thought, were about 'being there' – experiencing peoples, places, and local life-worlds as fully as possible with one's complete presence and attention. Thus, I had originally considered going into the field with only paper notebook and small camera, so as to be unencumbered and fully engaged in the places I would encounter. Another reason for not bringing a computer and iPhone had to do with concerns over their security – I did not want to spend my time worrying about losing or having these expensive devices stolen (the reason the laptop was new was that the previous one was stolen).

My brother, a journalist, managed to convince me that it would be wise to document everything as completely as possible. 'The technologies are there, why not use them?' he said, as if stating the utterly obvious. With a mixture of reluctance and embrace, I followed his advice and struck up a close albeit ambiguous relationship with my 'miniaturized mobilities'. On the plus side, travelling with an iPhone enabled me to take good quality photos and videos, make voice recordings and get online when wireless internet was available. For its unobtrusiveness and multi-functionality, I came to consider the iPhone the ultimate ethnographic and travel tool and my travels would not have been the same without it. Having a laptop also allowed me to type up notes,

organise and edit them on the move, download photos, videos and voice recordings from the iPhone into auto-organising libraries, as well as bring up drafts, articles and scanned books during 'down time'. This meant that the processes of data collection and data analysis became increasingly intertwined and part of the mobile methodology. Despite these advanced technologies, I still kept a hand written notebook, however, out of both convenience and perhaps a sense of nostalgia.

As a place which is represented as being spatially, temporally and symbolically set apart from the modern world, the Himalayan region seemed antithetical to modern technologies, the speed and the demands of the information age. As dominant media representations and contemporary travellers continue to reify, the Himalayas are seen as a 'lost horizon', a mysterious, enchanted world located above and beyond the profane spheres below. Placed literally and symbolically away from modern life, the Himalayas as a place 'out there' is also a place 'out of time' (Fabian 2002; Ortner 2001; Said 1978). Moreover, travelling in the Himalayas seemed to centre on moving the body, not sitting in front of a screen. While trekking, climbing, appreciating natural landscapes, exploring local life-worlds, practicing yoga and volunteering were significant bodily, sensual activities of most people's trips, I also found a highly prevalent use of mobile technologies amongst travellers.

Despite my own initial apprehensions, I found that travelling with 'miniaturized mobilities' was common practice in Nepal and India and were thus integrated in travellers' place experiences. Most were found, like me, to be carrying laptops and/or smart phones, and wireless internet 'hot spots' – usually located in traveller cafes, restaurants and

guesthouses – appeared as nodal points which served to orient and choreograph the daily rhythms of mobile-carrying travellers. Attending to digital matters become woven into the daily rhythms, routines and place-scapes of mobile carrying travellers in a manner akin to what phenomenological geographer Seamon (1979) calls a 'place ballet'. Following Merleau-Ponty, Seamon attends to the ways in which 'body subjects' are governed largely by habituated and automatic perceptual and knowledge schemes which serve to orient or choreograph the rhythmic movements and practices that constitute everyday place experiences. As 'extensions' or 'organs', mobile technologies simply became part of travellers' place experiences in Nepal and India.

Mobile technologies and multiple travel phases

That being said, I should note that mobile media use was most prevalent during interludes in urban and tourist centres like Kathmandu, Pokhara and hill stations such as Darjeeling and Dharamsala. In these places, more home-worldly amenities such as familiar foods and beverages and internet access was more widely available compared to the more remote towns, villages and mountains that were also visited. Technological practices were thus relative to both location and the phases of people's trips. For most people I spoke to, in more urban and tourist centres, an estimated hour or two a day was spent online, sometimes divided into two or three rounds on any given day.

Equipped with my own miniature mobilities and much like my participants, in such places I too found myself fall into this habit and rhythm of daily or near daily email checking. I also spent time in the evenings on my laptop, typing up notes and reflections and organising

digital voice, photo or video recordings of the day's events taken on my iPhone. Noticing and reflecting on my frequent use of these mobile medias and how they affected my experience of the places moved through and dwelled in became an increasing object of interest, made all the more so because I was far from alone in this technologized mode of travelling. During my month in Dharamsala, most mornings I would stroll through town with my laptop or iPhone to either Moonpeak Espresso or Rogpa Café, two cafes that were very popular with travellers. Despite being located in Northern India and run by young Tibetan refugees, I found stepping into these places was like being transported to a scene one might find in San Francisco or Wellington. Once inside, familiar music played (some of which was in my own collection) as I would soon find myself surrounded by a congregation of quasi-bohemian types sipping espresso, tapping away on laptops or swiping touch screens, reading books and occasionally, speaking to one another. The surprising sense of *déjà vu* at finding such home-worldly environments in Northern India was at once comforting and disorienting, yet soon became strangely normal and reasonable. After all, it was 2011, the digital revolution had already happened, bringing perceptions of a 'planetary landscape' with it. Several thousand miles away Arab governments were being toppled by young citizens armed with digital connectivity and indignation.

Initially, I frequented such cafes, both in Dharamsala and in other places I visited, as a way of meeting travellers who were otherwise notoriously mobile and difficult to keep track of. The lure of coffee, familiar food and free wireless internet drew them in and made for meeting places where I 'hung out' and conversed with whomever was

willing and not too preoccupied with their mobile device. So what did travellers do on their wireless devices? From glancing over their shoulders in these cafes and asking the simple question, I found they spent time emailing, instant messaging, Skyping, sending and viewing photos, using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, updating and reading blogs, checking news, travel and job sites, managing bank accounts and credit cards and watching video clips. Some worked online, on university courses or even on masters or doctoral theses. As an Australian woman named Anna I met at a café in Pokhara explained, working on her PhD thesis (on indigenous rights in Australia) was 'cheaper and more fun' on the move:

> As long as I have a decent internet connection, I can do everything I need to from here. I can rent a room or apartment for like a month and spend less than I would in a week in Perth. Plus I can go hiking, practice yoga, attend [Buddhist] teachings, eat out, meet interesting people. I can work when I feel like it, go at my own pace. As far as doing a PhD goes, it's a pretty good lifestyle.

Having internet access and a laptop allowed people such as Anna to maintain continuity with work and life at 'home' from a distance. Jason, the environmental scientist on a three month break from work in Cambodia which would take him on a circuitous journey through India, Nepal, Turkey, England and back to Phenom Phen, also travelled with a laptop on which he worked on a report for the Cambodian government. During our stay in Pokhara, some days he did not leave the guesthouse where we were staying except for meals, explaining, 'I really have to finish this thing' [the report]. As his two-year contract in

Cambodia would be coming to a conclusion not long after he returned from his global sojourn, he was also searching the internet and applying for jobs. This was another common and noteworthy practice among mobile carrying travellers. As many travellers were between jobs (either being laid off, contracts finishing or deciding to quit), had recently finished university studies or had decided to make major life changes, contemplating and searching for future possibilities online while travelling were significant activities. Mobile technologies thus appear to be part and parcel of contemporary mobile lives (Elliott and Urry 2010). The narrative trajectories of such mobile-technological lifestyles, exemplified by 'global nomads' such as Jason, are characterized by their being increasingly improvised, contingent, non-linear, individualized and assembled on the go.

Organising and Deciding on the move

Rearranging air tickets and travel itineraries and researching future travel destinations were also subjects of much time online and virtual and imaginative mobilities, especially for those on relatively long and/or around the world trips. For many independent travellers, their journeys were loosely structured, following flexible and often improvised itineraries. Air reservations were made online and frequently rearranged according to a host of factors and decisions made *on the move*. Places were visited and stayed in for various periods of time which were determined largely by travellers' affective responses and feelings towards the 'new' places they encountered. Many travellers explained how they did not know what to expect in the places they had planned to visit and would decide to stay or go after a few days spent getting a feel for the place. I watched some travellers arrive

in Dharamsala, take a look and decide to leave the very next day. Others would arrive and spend a month or more. These decisions seemed to depend largely on what travellers described as a place's 'energy' or 'vibe'. For instance, a British woman named Sarah explained to me how she was leaving Dharamsala after just three days and heading to Rishikesh because she was 'just not feeling the vibe here.' Asking what she meant by this, she explained, 'It's got this heavy energy. I guess it's too political for me'. In Dharamsala, as the site of the Tibetan government in exile and home to many displaced Tibetan refugees, NGOs and activist projects, there was indeed a sense of politics and (in)justice in the air. While unappealing to Sarah, who was looking for a mixture of adventure, spirituality and relaxation on her trip to India and especially doing yoga, the politically charged atmosphere of Dharamsala affected and inspired others differently.

Emily, a Canadian traveller claimed that Dharamsala had 'this amazing energy' and said she planned to stay for several months (although from my observations, this was easily subject to change). Although many travellers kept their trips relatively open and flexible, having certain orienting goals was also significant. These were either specific places to visit, a certain event such as a yoga or meditation retreat, or a certain trek to make. Often times these goals were focal points of the broader journeys and added a pilgrimage quality to what sometimes seemed more like leisurely, improvised wandering. And yet, mobile technologies afforded travellers expanded possibilities for rearranging itineraries, researching other destinations and redirecting journeys between and around these other more concrete activities.

Global travel and the will to (dis)connection

Along with redirecting travel and life paths with the aid of mobile medias, other time was spent editing, filing and scrolling through photos, videos, documents, watching downloaded movies, listening to music or podcasts. To be fair, as mentioned in chapter four, there was also a significant amount of book reading amongst travellers, so they could be found absorbed in either screens or books. Despite their inherent differences, we can understand both mobile technologies and books as media which facilitate virtual or imaginative flights from the present. Such media in a sense transport their users' presence out of immediate actual situations and into virtual and imaginative spheres. Whether reading an Umberto Eco novel, 'poking' friends on Facebook or Skyping with friends and family spread across the globe, I wondered what this meant for 'being there', in Nepal or India.

Travelling with 'miniaturized mobilities' in a digitally networked world means that one is contact-able and response-able for 'keeping in touch'. As Casey points out, carrying digital communication devices fosters the 'illusion' that one is always available for communication. Travelling with my laptop and iPhone, I felt a strange compulsion to check my email regularly, keeping up with and providing updates to family, friends and supervisors, sending them photos sometimes taken on that very day. I tried to find appropriate times to Skype my partner in New Zealand, who was going through a difficult period and needed more support than I could offer from a distance, with or without mobile medias. In fact, by about half way into my four months away, she was very upset with me for the insufficiently frequent communication we were having and in fact our relationship nearly came to an end over it.

There seemed to be an expectation that since I travelled with a computer and iPhone, there was no excuse for not being in regular, almost daily contact. Hjorth (2012: 141) captures the paradoxes of travelling with an 'electronic leash' when she writes, 'the mobile phone sets us "free" to roam geographically, but its always-on function means that we are seemingly always available'. What my partner did not seem to realize (or be willing to accept) was that being 'always available' in Nepal and India was in fact much more complicated than in New Zealand. Not only were there time zones to consider for Skype calls, but also local internet networks were often too slow or would suddenly become unavailable with the frequent power outages. Moreover, sometimes I was on the move, riding buses or trains for days on end. Or else I found myself in remote locations with little or no chance of accessing the internet, such as was the case in Sikkim. Other times I was simply too sick to do anything, let alone seek out a sketchy internet connection. Knowing that my significant others, particularly my partner, were expecting to hear from me, these periods of temporary disconnection or unavailability gave rise a sense of anxiety and even guilt which indeed impinged upon and altered my place experiences in Nepal and India. If I had not 'checked in' in more than a week, I found myself in a state of vague concern about the people and mesSages I was seemingly neglecting, about my email inbox which would no doubt be filling up and awaiting me.

I observed that I was far from alone in negotiating the seeming paradoxes involved in experiencing places with mobile technologies. Wondering how other travellers coped with this, several explained how they felt varying degrees of pressure to keep in touch, especially after

intervals of relatively prolonged disconnectivity, such as after a multi-day trek, yoga or meditation retreats or after being in a remote place with limited or no internet access. The fact that these travellers and I thought and worried about and *sensed* being 'out of touch' during such 'disconnected' intervals was revealing on two levels. First, it simply shows how engrained, habituated and pervasive media use is in contemporary life. Secondly, it shows that even when mobile medias are not available or in use, they may remain present in what Urry and Elliot (2010: 33) call the 'technological unconscious', a background realm in which digitally mediated social relations involving high degrees of absence, distance and disconnection are negotiated. The notion that there is a technological unconscious at work implies that in the age of global, network-driven systems, where digital technologies are corporeally and physically interwoven with mobile selves, there is arguably no place where one is really and truly 'out there', away from it all, even deep in the Himalayas.

Drifting in and out of place

Even if internet access is unavailable, travelling with 'miniature mobilities' means that photo, music and other personal, digitized libraries come along for the ride. As Urry and Elliot (2010: 6) observe, mobile technologies enable users to access and deposit affects, moods and dispositions into networked techno-objects. Digital affect storage and retrieval processes alter experience and 'generate new modes of identity that are less tied to fixed localities, regular patterns or dwelt-in cultural traditions' (ibid 6). Mobile technologies facilitate what the author's term 'portable personhood', a form of psychological *bridging* or overcoming of spatial fragmentation under conditions of intensive

mobilities (22). Portable personhood is similar to Raymond Williams's (1975) earlier notion of 'mobile privatisation', in which the spilling over of domesticated technologies such as the television and telephone proceed to blur the boundaries between here and there, home and away, the lived and imagined, the local and global. As Hjorth (2012: 140) notes, 'mobile technologies [in particular] have been important vehicles in extending co-present practices of place'. The following story of a long bus ride I took through central Nepal illustrates how travelling with mobile medias alters experience by facilitating a drifting in and out of place.

Early one morning I departed Kathmandu for Pokhara. I was one of six foreigners on a well worn bus. The rest were locals. I sat in the very back, as the whole row was empty and would allow me to stretch out on what would be an eight-hour ride. I soon learned, however, that the reason no one sits in the back is that the shock absorbers on Nepali buses are basically non-existent, meaning that every bump and hole in the road – and the roads in Nepal are full of bumps and holes – is experienced fully and violently. This leaves one's back tweaked and bottom sore, as mine were when we finally pulled into Pokhara. Nothing to do about the bumps, I contented myself with the novelty of being in Nepal and watching the passing scenery outside. We passed through small towns on the outskirts of Kathmandu, comprised of mainly shabby looking concrete boxes connected by spider webs of entangled wires. Cheap gaudy signs for soft drinks and cell phones, stray dogs, plastic bottles and wrappers lined the streets. People of all ages hung around shop fronts, looking bored and listless.

After an hour or so, having made our way out of the Kathmandu valley

and winding our way slowly through a series of high valleys, I took out my iPhone and noise-cancelling headphones. I had second thoughts about this, as if plugging into this device would corrupt the purity of the experience of being-in Nepal and weaken my powers of embodied perception and observation. After all, attending to given phenomena or tuning in also means tuning out of others. Yet with all the bumps and violent thuds, combined with Indian music blaring from blown out speakers, the bus was incredibly noisy. For about an hour the novelty of the situation was interesting enough, but eventually I become bored and uncomfortable. The air was hazy and the Himalayas were nowhere to be seen. The shrill female vocals were grating on my ears. I thought about striking up a conversation with my fellow passengers, but the locals looked indifferent to my presence. *I suppose for them I appear as just another tourist who walks through their backyard*, I thought. As far as the other foreign passengers were concerned, all six wore headphones, which among other things, essentially function as a 'do not disturb' sign.

Considering there was still about six or seven hours go on this long, becoming gruelling trip, I reached for my iPhone. Putting on noise-cancelling headphones, my attention soon drifted towards other places and realities. Nonetheless, the bumps in the road, though now silent, and the pain in my back and bottom, and my visual field told me that my body was still on the bus. And yet, what kind of 'being here' or 'being in' was this? I listened to a series of podcasts I had downloaded prior to departing for Nepal. The first was current affairs covering mainly the Arab Spring uprising, which was then just gaining serious momentum, thanks in large part to the use of mobile technologies and

social networking sites, particularly Facebook and Twitter. I then listened to an arts and culture podcast from the New York Times and a review books produced by a radio station in Los Angeles. Later on in the trip, I listened to some music, followed by two lectures from a UC Berkeley course on the history of anthropology, which I had downloaded from the program iTunes U. Staring out the window at arid mountains, terraced with rice and other crops and the occasional collection of rustic farm houses and huts, Professor Joyce was discussing Durkheim's ideas on the transition from traditional to modern societies and the differences between mechanical and organic solidarity. Observing my fellow passengers, mostly Nepalese, I thought back to Mack, who lamented the decay of 'tradition' and collective identity in Nepal. As he put it, 'When the lights go on, the tradition goes out!' Although I was no expert, I wondered about the state of Nepali society, about rural emigration and an economy largely dependent on foreign tourists, such as myself. *What kind of solidarity existed among the people on this bus?* I wondered. I could not speak for the local Nepalese (or with them, as my Nepali was limited to just a few phrases, and anyhow, they did not appear at all interested in the tourist forms of life aboard the bus (see Hepburn 2002). Later that day, at a guesthouse in Pokhara, in my notebook I wrote: 'The paradox of global connection is that it seems to simultaneously lead to greater disconnection'.

In Augé's (2008: 275) essay, 'Planetary Landscapes', the French anthropologist who roughly twenty years prior proposed a theory of 'non places' suggests that what is required at present is questioning the types of relationships created by communication technologies.

Reflecting on the paradoxes of virtual communications, he asks 'why people continue to feel so lonely in such a world which is, meanwhile, defined as being "connected"'. Augé goes on to revise his notion of 'non-places', which referred to 'spaces of communication, consumption and circulation … spaces of temporariness and transience, spaces that were not marked by any kind of social relations, shared history or signs of collective identification' such as airports, motorways and shopping malls (275). Essentially, 'non places' were the antithesis of the traditional African villages Augé had previously studied. In the age of global networked communications, however, the anthropologist comes to see the limitations of a place/non-place binary, recognizing that places and social ties are experienced and formed in all kinds of environments. In other words, places do not simply disappear or become non-places, but they do become altered, reconfigured and experienced in different and particular ways.

Dwelling in de-distancing in the age of 'Digital Ge-stell'

As described before, using the internet and mobile technologies were incorporated into the daily rhythms and embodied practices of travellers who despite being physically distant, remained connected to their life-worldly realties. This ability and propensity for staying connected or 'keeping in touch' can be related not only to the human need for maintaining social bonds, but to Heidegger's (1996[1927]) reflections on the spatial orientation of human being as Da-sein (literally 'being there') more fundamentally. Heidegger observes how '[a]n essential tendency towards nearness lies in Da-sein' (98), and notes

two defining characteristics of Da-sein as de-distancing (*Ent-fernung*) and directionality (*Ausrichtung*).

> De-distancing means making distance disappear, making the being at a distance of something disappear, bringing it near. Da-sein is essentially de-distancing (97-8).

> As being-in-the-world, Da-sein essentially dwells in de-distancing… As being-in which de-distances, Da-sein has at the same time the character of directionality (100).

The de-distancing, directional and 'bringing near' orientation of Da-sein is intensified and expanded by the use of information communication technologies in a digitally networked global order. Writing well before the digital revolution and the 'information bomb' (Virilio 2005) characterising the new millenium, Heidegger observes the increasing tempo and technological time-space compression occurring in modernity and the implications this has for immediate experiences of place:

> All kinds of increasing speed which we are more or less compelled to go along with today push for overcoming distance. With the "radio," for example, Da-sein is bringing about today de-distancing of the "world" which is unforeseeable in its meaning for Da-sein, by way of expanding and destroying the everyday surrounding world (98).

Paradoxically, the de-distancing or bringing near of distant worlds facilitated by digitally networked communication simultaneously appears to distance us from local life-worldly contexts. The apparent paradox deepens when we consider the 'adventures' most Himalayan

travellers claimed to be seeking. As Simmel (1997: 224) observes, the 'deeper meaning' of an adventure is given by its *taking place* 'outside the usual continuity of this life' and standing in contrast to usual 'interlocking life links'. And yet, by accessing the internet, keeping in touch and making future travel and life plans while on the move, life continued for travellers in Nepal and India. While pilgrimages, adventures and even tourist vacations have been associated with ritual inversions, technologically mediated forms of travel problematize the classic structure-antistructure dichotomy and notions of liminality. Contrasted with previous times, travelling in the twenty-first century becomes an event which no longer takes place strictly 'out there', but in and across a multitude of heres, theres and in-betweens. Liminal travellers are no longer 'dead to the world' (Turner 1992: 49). Instead, thanks to the mobile technologies they carry, they are available, contact-able and response-able; the information age demands that they stay *in touch*. They are still 'betwixt and between', but not in Turner's strict sense of social roles, but between places and activities, which they remain relatively involved in from a (physical) distance.

This is because mobile media serve the function of bridging, linking or de-distancing the space and time between various places. As extending, de-distancing and bringing near are already characteristics of Da-sein, digital technologies simply augment what is already a spatial orientation common of our being-in-the-world. McLuhan came to similar ideas regarding how different technologies transform spatio-temporal experience and thus ways of knowing, acting and experiencing the world. Like Heidegger, he provides a historical account of the technological annihilation of time and space:

> During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing space and time as far as our planet is concerned….As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village (McLuhan 2008: 12-13).

Two important themes are worth taking up here. First is the notion of technology as an extension of the body and senses. As embodiment is always already 'toolic' and 'equipmental', there is a reciprocal relationship between bodies and technologies. Technologies, according to Donna Haraway (2008: 249) are not mediations or things standing between us and the world, but rather are 'organs', 'full partners' which are 'infolded into the flesh'. She is thus in agreement with Ihde's (2001) basic commitment that insofar as technology is used or employed by human agents, human agents are also used by and employed by technology. In as much as the living, always emplaced body is the 'ground' or medium for all experience, including virtual or imaginative mobilities, the use of technologies is never disembodied. This does not mean that technological practice is neutral, however, for it profoundly conditions and transforms our experiences of place, self and others (Küpers 2010: 93). As Urry and Elliot (2010: 30) note, individual selves do not just 'use' or activate digital technologies in everyday life. Rather, in conditions of intensive mobilities, the self 'becomes deeply 'layered' within technological networks, as well as reshaped by their influence'.

And yet this does not mean that technology has to be seen necessarily as alienating humans from a supposed original or authentic nature or relationship to 'place'. As on-going, dynamic, historical and always in

formation, 'body-technology-world' couplings or infoldings evolve with and contribute to a continuous reinventing of the human. If technology is an 'extension of man', and the human is imagined as an ensemble of organs with technology as the sum of prostheses, *homo sapiens or animal rational* would become a 'technological animal, forever working on the extension of its radius of action and the optimisation of its artificial organs (Ihde 2001). The philosophical anthropologist Plessner had already articulated such a position in the early twentieth century when he suggested that as 'eccentrically positioned', human beings are 'artificial by nature' (Klein 2011; Lysemose 2012).

Ge-stell: Being en-framing

While mobile technologies indeed alter and reconfigure relations between and experiences of place, self and others in the context of travel, this is indeed part of a much broader historical trend in the technologization of life more generally. Once again, it is helpful to think of such conditions in terms of Heidegger's notion of enframing (Ge-stell), which I introduced in chapter five's discussion of alienation and authenticity. According to Heidegger, Ge-stell, literally meaning 'framing' or frame-work, is not a tangible object, but more of a 'concept', and way of being.

> Enframing is the gathering together which belongs to that setting-upon (stellen) which challenges man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. As the one who is challenged forth in this way, man stands within the essential realm of enframing (1977: 4, 13).

What Heidegger points to is the particular way in which the world is revealed to humans through technology as an ontological issue which cannot be reduced to epistemological or ethical considerations. In modernity, he notes that we are already *standing within* a technologically enframed world, a fact which both opens and limits our horizons.

The Ge-stell of a given epoch mediates an all-encompassing view and approach to the use of technology, not (only) as a means to an end, nor as technological, but rather as a mode of (human) existence. As such, it is gathering and disclosing stance towards the world (Heidegger 1977). This stance is one that arranges and transforms all into calculable, instrumentalised order that Heidegger calls a 'standing reserve' (*Bestand*). The greatest danger with contemporary mobile modes of 'dwelling-in travelling' (Clifford 1997: 108) in the age of digital Ge-stell is that through on-going mediatisation and hyper-connectivity of mobile, networked society (Castells 2000), the world comes to be resemble a standing reserve in which everything and everywhere appears accessible to and for human beings. Despite this appearance, global mobility comes at a cost to natural environments and local economies and cultures, not to mention inter- and intrapersonal experiences. Being enframed in the mode of standing reserve means being answerable to instrumental criteria and the logic of power and domination in which humans (including travellers) themselves are 'objectified' as they are converted into a calculable and reducible sets of pre-programmed informational patterns and 'resources' governed by a capitalistic use-value logic. Through its revealing powers, modern technology and its devices have an epoch-specific tendency to unlock,

transform, store, and distribute the resources that nature (and culture) has to offer in a contextual matrix of relationships. At the same time it also makes us ontologically reductive to see the whole reality and also humans as mere resources to be unrestrictedly disposed for maximal efficiency that is used and controlled, as materials and goods to be exploited and stripped of any intrinsic condition and meaning.

The greatest danger of 'destining' (*Geschick*) of modern technology as manifestation of rationally calculative thinking does not (only) lie in damaging the environment or destroying cultures. The real danger is that the technological comprehension of the world becomes the sole way to relate to things and to other human beings. Moreover, and simultaneously, this operation remains hidden indicating that the very fact that technology 'unconceals' Being in a particular, limited and exclusive way. The actual threat is that everything appears as a technological problem or solutions cannot only be technology-based, thus that calculative thinking is accepted as the only possible way of thinking. This implies that for example, nature, politics, culture, and values become exploitable 'objects' available for governance, production etc. as well as organising and consumption, including techno-mobilised travelling. A hyper-mediated world, as McLuhan observed as early as the 1960s turns the world into a village in which everywhere and everything appears close and accessible. Viewing the *Lonely Planet* website, for example, reveals the world as a storehouse or 'standing reserve' of places to play and have adventures. Critically interpreted, this could be read as manifesting a pervasive 'will to consume' marking late modernity (Baudrillard 1997; Bauman 2008; MacCannell 2011; Schor 2005, 2007; Soper 2004; Urry 2011).

Conclusion

For many travellers, Nepal and India represented places with unique qualities, such as authenticity, spirituality and pure, wild 'nature', but in practice appeared as mere exchangeable and consumable backdrops – places in which they could drift in and out of as described before. This optional and consumptive orientation seems to be a key feature of the contemporary technological attitude and digitally-enframed world. Mobile technologies and networked connectivity affords a life ever in motion, allowing people not to genuinely dwell here and now, but to be on the move constantly in a global inter-place which seems to everywhere and nowhere at the same time .

However, critically we may ask: Is the dominance of modern technology precisely the last consequence of the way in which metaphysics of now technologically processing nihilism has interpreted the world, a restless and unwavering 'will to will'? Such an interpretation turns both modern technology and the metaphysics of Ge-stell into homogeneous and one-dimensional things. Their apparent diversity would then be only something superficial. Such a radical position would prevent from discriminating among different technologies and different uses of present-day human beings. Facing the pervasive dominance of enframent, the challenge remains to develop creative and engaged ways out of technological nihilism and to cultivate ethico-political reflections as well as responsive and responsible attitudes. Such challenges will become increasingly salient as global humanity faces the consequences of technological tendencies to de-distance a previously vast and spacious planet. As we enter a new planetary epoch being called the 'Anthropocene', what kind of politico-

ethos can prevent the world from further be(com)ing a standing

reserve?

CONCLUSION

Looking back, this research on travelling has been a wayward journey itself. As stated in chapter three, the notion of a journey – as the act of travelling from one place to another – carries a dual sense. On the one hand, it is an act of intention, driven by a commitment to self-elaboration. On the other hand, the traveller, like the author or mythic hero, is not the monadological creator of his or her own life. In this way, with Ricouer (1984) we can say that a story in search of an author co-creates a supposed creator.

Twists and turns inevitably arise in the course of any journeying in so far as it may be called a journey. Yet to call a journey anything at all means to tell a story. With de Certeau (1984: 115), we can indeed say that 'every story is a travel story – a spatial practice', in so far as stories take us places and inter-place us. As I discovered in the course of this re-searching journey, travelling and narrating are mutually constituting processes. It is difficult to know which precedes the other. As a spatial *and* temporal process, travelling and narrating stories are chiasmically intertwined with the past, present and future; the chronotope of experience spirals within a hermeneutic circle. Without determinate or decipherable beginnings or endings, the stories we live by remain open and contingent, their meanings, as Derrida (1991) would say, endlessly differed. This recursive situation leads yet another French writer, Michel Butor (1992), to propose the idea of 'travel as writing and writing as travel'.

This is not to say that the travellers presented in this thesis were travel writers, but that like myself, their experiences in north India and Nepal generated stories that did not *take place* in isolation. Travel stories blend with other stories as tributaries flow into streams; storied streams filter into still larger seas, the oceanic body of which becomes the tale of our Zeitgeist. In this thesis, I have been a listener, reader, translator and finally, a writer of intersecting stories, which I have approached as a travelling narrator and narrative medium who travels.

Travel has been shown to be a universal narrative, used for expressing everything from mythical hero quests and allegorical journeys and pilgrimages, to tours, movement through life-stages or phases and the 'path of life' itself (Bruner 2002; Campbell 2008). As I demonstrated in chapter one, the human as traveller, pilgrim or 'viator' is a recurrent metaphor encountered in mythology, diverse religious texts, modern literature and popular culture alike. This presence and use can be attributed to the narrative structure of travel that mimics the spatio-temporal structure of a life (Ricœur 1984, 1985). As Mikkonen (2007: 286) explains:

> The narrative potential of travel lies in the fact that we recognize in it temporal and spatial structures that call for narration. The different stages of travel – departure, voyage, encounters on the road, and return – provide any story with a temporal structure that raises expectations of things to happen.

Through a particular narrative lens, in this thesis I explored some of the things that happened when certain actors, including myself, travelled to the Himalayan region. This meant considering processes of departure, voyage and encounters in their particularities and patterns, but also

required placing these in a larger historical situation and socio-cultural context that culminates and manifests in the complex milieu of late modernity. Like a journey, this task was marked by and filled with obstacles, predicaments, trials and tribulations of the kind that arise any time one steps beyond the realm of the familiar and travels into unknown territories. A pilgrim's journey, like that of an anthropologist field-worker, is predicated on both potentiality and transition. In this way it is or may be influenced by a future-directed 'anticipatory consciousness' of the possible but 'not yet' (Bloch 1986).

I had set out to explore and understand what it means to travel to a particular part of the world in the context of late modernity. I wondered how this phenomenon might reflect both specifically contemporary as well as characteristic aspects of a more general human condition. The motivation for this research was of a personal, an inter- and impersonal nature. As with any journey, it was driven by a commitment to self-elaboration, potentiality and transition, though it was not carried out in isolation by a monadological explorer. When I look back at the road behind, a road whose dust still hovers in the air, I see a polysemous and polyvocal story that emerged through many encounters with different actors, places, processes and times. Indeed, this dialogical excursion has led 'the author' on a path of continuous e-strangement, a becoming alien of experience itself. Despite this self-estrangement, which as Hegel says is the necessary movement of a spirit (*bildung*), I take responsibility for this textual assemblage as something of a crystalizing agent, a medium or alchemist who combined, arranged and blended different elements into a co-created montage that found form within these pages.

This thesis began with an interest in modernisation processes, especially mobility and the decline of religion. Taking Weber's 'disenchantment' thesis as a starting point, I originally intended to explore an aspect of the contemporary status of religion and spirituality through a case study on Western travellers in the Himalayas. As the research journey progressed, the phenomenon of contemporary Himalayan travel revealed many other dimensions that made an explicit focus on religiosity untenable. Although spirituality was a component of many people's travels to Nepal and India, there were many other aspects that required consideration if this research was to do justice to the inherent complexity and manifold dimensions of contemporary Himalayan travel.

My interest in travel and mobility, as I said in the beginning, had emerged from the experience of finding myself and a multitude of people around me caught up in rhythms or mechanisms of twenty-first century global mobility. As the first decade of the new millennium passed, I had come to reflect on what I considered certain irrevocable consequences of my own mobile life, which appears as being a seemingly disjointed narrative of starts and stops, contingencies and ever-shifting horizons. I saw that I was far from alone in my experience of being simultaneously en-, dis- and inter-placed; lives were be(com)ing increasingly dispersed across a vast yet shrinking planetary landscape. All of this led me to wonder how mobile lives were being assembled, made meaningful and coherent under contemporary conditions of globalised mobility.

I had also wondered where and in what ways people from allegedly secular, disenchanted Western societies were going in search of

meaning. My interest in what I was initially thinking of as 're-enchantment' led me to the Himalayan region, a place that was typically represented as an 'enchanted garden' and the spiritual antithesis of the modern West. Following a logic of oppositions, the Himalayas signified a place of extreme contrast that continues to be represented in popular media and described by travellers as 'another world'. Boasting the highest mountains on earth, Himalayan landscapes have been long been extolled for their magnificent scale, their savage yet sublime beauty and their lofty location above and beyond the bounds of a profane world 'down there'. The region is also known for a long history of spiritual asceticism and pilgrimage, and continues to carry the aura of a timeless utopia, a sacred place, above the lowlands and close to the heavens, where people have long gone (or imagined going) to 'walk with the gods'. Into contemporary times, the Himalayas continue to be represented as a blissful and majestic place to dwell spiritually, naturally and authentically. Such representations are placed in diametric opposition to an industrialized, highly developed world that stands at the forefront of modernisation and 'progress'. These perceived contrasts and binary divisions were and are major reasons for many travellers to make their journeys; the Himalayas promised things that were perceived as being lost or lacking in late modern societies. It was these differences, tensions and the interplay between the modern and pre-modern, enchanted and disenchanted, home and alien 'worlds' and the supposed gulf between the 'West and the rest' that interested me most. As part of a much larger story – the story of modernity – I viewed Himalayan travel as an expression not only of the desires or will of individual agents, but as a meta-social expression of the late-modern Zeitgeist.

Despite being drawn to difference, and also searching for authenticity and spirituality 'out there' and 'up there', contemporary Himalayan travellers demonstrated desires and tendencies to remain connected to realms of the same, the realm 'down here'. As chapter seven demonstrated, mobile technologies facilitated experiences of interplacedness by allowing contemporary Himalayan travellers to extend their embodied (tele-) presence across the globe, allowing them to be here *and* there, everywhere *and* nowhere at the same time. Contemporary mediated modes of 'travelling-in- and being-in-the-world' thus point to a historical situation in which de-centred travellers already dwell within a technologically enframed world. Augmented under these conditions, 'being there' is not confined to an immediate spatialized location, but becomes dispersed across vast networks of connectivity that de-distances global space-time.

In an age of 'digital Ge-stell', a networked global order seems to open innumerable possibilities for travel by making everywhere appear within reach, bringing the far near. Perceiving the world as a 'global village' (McLuhan 2008) or a 'planetary landscape' (Augé 2008), it is easy for the techno-mobilized to take for granted the material conditions, politics and consequences of global mobility in its enframing power. The 'greatest danger' of the modern age, as Heidegger (1977) warns, is that technological enframing presents nature and human beings as mere resources to be used unrestrictedly and controlled. As materials and goods to be mastered, exploited and consumed, techno-logical thinking strips the world of any intrinsic meaning or value and turns all in it into a 'standing reserve'.

What could be seen in the digitally enframed attitudes, motives and ideals of Himalayan travellers was that the globe and all that was visited appeared to them as a 'standing reserve' of potential places and experiences to consume and collect. In accordance with the neoliberal ideology that defines the current era, travel in the forms I observed in Nepal and India revealed desires for maximizing one's potential as a global traveller or cosmopolitan. Based on a taken for granted sense of freedom and entitlement to move about the globe and following a logic of accumulation, travellers from the highly developed world often pursued or expressed yearnings for *going everywhere and seeing everything* the planet has to offer. The Himalayan region, as I discovered, was often one among many desired travel destinations. Nepal and India were often not the sole destinations of people's trips, but were 'components' or parts of phases within broader travel itineraries in Asia and in many cases, around the world. This is not to say that the region was not chosen for the unique set of unique qualities I have identified and discussed. It was generally perceived as a 'power place', promising a tripartite of 'wild nature', cultural authenticity and spirituality, but according to my observations, the Himalayas were not an *axis mundi* or the elected spiritual centre for the travellers I encountered. Such findings make sense if understood according to the neoliberal and technological conditions and the underlying logics which frame them. On close inspection, they reveal a number of seeming paradoxes and contradictions.

Paradoxes and contradictions in Himalayan journeys

Although contemporary modes of travelling such as pilgrimage, eco, adventure and wellness tourism may be seen as expressing anti-modern sentiments, under late capitalist conditions, tensions and ambiguities appear. Reflecting what Daniel Bell (1978) describes as the 'cultural contradictions of capitalism,'[16] travellers who came to the middle Himalayan region relied heavily on information technologies and the global travel system to research, plan and transport themselves around the world. Despite critiquing complex, busy, inauthentic, materialistic and alienating ways of life at home, while simultaneously praising the allegedly simple, spiritual and authentic lives of mountain dwellers, travellers participated in the transglobal capitalist system that makes global mobility possible. Reader (2007: 225) captures the ambiguous nature of this phenomenon when he writes:

> While one can see recurring elements of the anti-modern in contemporary pilgrimage – for example, in the motives of pilgrims who step outside the normal restraints of society to seek miracles and meanings that provide a counter-balance to the demands of modernity and rationalisation – one must also recognize that the very activities they engage in to counter these

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[16] According to Bell, late capitalism is marked by the decline of the market and paid labor as the central orientation of society. With this cultural sea change comes an increased emphasis on leisure, individuality and the seeking out of new sensations and identities outside the realm of work. The implications of this 20th century shift is that under late capitalist conditions with the growing specter of individualism and the demise of collective projects, puritan and protestant work ethics and bourgeoisie values, social members experience extreme uprootedness, loss of social orientation and further alienation. Bell argues that the capitalist system essentially undermines itself and hence we have the cultural contradictions of capitalism.

forces – travelling, moving, seeking out places away from their
home – are part of modernity.

The anti-modern streak running through much contemporary
pilgrimage, including contemporary journeys to the Himalayas,
remains within the historical framework of modernisation. Performing
global mobility in the age of digital Ge-stell, travellers inadvertently
contributed to the processes of neoliberal globalisation they often saw
themselves as critically opposing and escaping. Highly mobile subjects
– largely from more affluent countries and backgrounds – today travel
great distances to seek what is perceived as lacking in their lives at
home and appears to be available elsewhere, such as authenticity,
spirituality and untouched natural landscapes.

For many travellers, 'getting away from it all' by travelling to
peripheral regions such as the Himalayas, the Australian outback (Frost
2010) or by walking traditional pilgrimage routes such as the Santiago
de Compostela (Frey 1998; Norman 2011; Slavin 2003) or the eighty-
eight temple Shikoku pilgrimage in Japan (Reader 2005), appears to
represent an avenue of temporary escape and for exploring other ways
of being in the world. On the other hand, as my fieldwork revealed,
mobile subjects as members of networked society tended to stay
relatively connected to 'home worldly' environments via mobile
technologies even while on the road.[17] Despite desires for what

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[17] 'Home', in this case not necessarily pointing to a particular dwelt-in locale, but to various
nodal points where travellers may 'feel at home'. As Molz (2008) has demonstrated, home for
'round the world' travellers who 'dwell in travelling' (Clifford, 1997) within a perceived 'global
abode' often becomes the internet. Email, blogs or Facebook pages come to be more stable and

travellers often called 'having an adventure', if we take Simmel's (1997) notion of adventure as a 'dropping out of the continuity of life', these cannot be called 'true' adventures. Then again, perhaps what is needed is a new definition of these quasi-adventurous undertakings that is suited to the technologically enframed, hyper-connected conditions of the twenty-first century.

As I discovered in Boudnath, Dharamsala and in other places across the Himalayan region, for contemporary travellers there was seemingly nothing contradictory, ironic or ambivalent about being in a Buddhist pilgrimage centre, drinking lattes and Skyping friends halfway around the world. Neither was bringing work projects, searching for employment and sketching broader life trajectories while on the move. Rather than representing a contradiction, this state of affairs simply reflects a 'global cosmopolitan reality' (Beck 2006) that is ever more tightly connected, complex and paradoxical. If the objective objectifying order is framed by a neoliberal logic that contributes to on-going globalisation, technologization and mobilisation, it is not difficult to see why travellers saw nothing paradoxical or contradictory about their journeys, which seamlessly blended the high or late modern with pre-modern. Rather than *paradoxa* (meaning outside or against standard opinion or expectation), contemporary Himalayan travel reflected a neoliberal cosmopolitan *doxa* in which seemingly contradictory elements and divisions have already been broken down and merged into a complex global order. Bourdieu (2002: 164) describes *doxa* as 'a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the

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continuous narrative mediums than the fleeting experiences of places that are merely passed through.

subjective principles of organization' and continues to claim that 'the stabler the objective structures and the more fully they reproduce themselves in the agents' dispositions, the greater the extent of the field of doxa, of that which is taken for granted (2002: 166). [18]

By 2011, when the fieldwork was carried out for this research, neoliberal globalisation appears to have produced a relatively stable objective structure that reproduces normalized beliefs and dispositions (at least in the middle and upper classes in highly developed societies) that led to approaching the world as a global standing reserve. Neoliberalism is performed through corporeal travel practices which are structured by virtual and imaginative mobilities produced through media and technologies, themselves manifestations of a transglobal capitalism which some have argued now circulates within and above the earth's terrestrial strata as a 'transcendental capitalism' (Greenhouse 2010; Hage 2003). As I have argued in chapter six, global mobility as practice and performance may be seen as generating forms of embodied cosmopolitanism by exposing embodied travellers to different practical conditions, but it also may be seen as mechanism for distributing neoliberal globalisation.

The danger, then, is that tourism and global mobility are forms of neo-imperialism, as claimed by critical authors such as MacCannell (1976; 2011), Bruner (1991), Urry (1990; 2011) and Baudrillard (1997). As

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[18] '…When, owing to the quasi-perfect fit between the objective structures and the internalized structures which results from the logic of simple reproduction, the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e. as one possible among many others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned, the agents' aspirations have the same limits as the objective conditions of which they are the product (2002: 166)'.

manifestations of broader economic and political processes – the capitalist system supporting such mobilities contains a hegemonic agenda, even if an indirect, unintended and subconscious one. This agenda brings potentially everyone (regardless of choice or who can afford) everywhere into a global 'mono-reality'. Neoliberal globalisation results in what Hage (2003: 17-18) calls a 'shrunken society' in which the nation-state framework and even the notion of 'society' goes into decline (see also Urry 2000). Paradoxically, being a member of a 'shrunken society' implies being thrust, willingly or unwillingly, into the fluxes and flows of a much larger and more complex, deregulated global marketplace.

Heidegger (2002 [1938]) wrote that '[t]he fundamental event of modernity is the conquest of the world as a picture'. By driving 'out every other possibility or revealing' (Heidegger 1978: 27), a Western mono-realist ontology based on rational calculative thinking becomes hegemonic in the modern age, closing other possible horizons and offering itself as the only possible reality (Hage 2011). For all his 'imperialist nostalgia', Mack, the anthropologist I recounted meeting in Kathmandu in chapter five had a point when he said: 'When the lights go on, the tradition goes out'. After two years of pondering Mack's witty remark and having looked closely at Himalayan travel on micro, meso and macro levels, I understand why he so despised roads and electricity, why he advised me that if I wanted to find anything 'interesting', I needed to travel 'to the village where roads go'. This is not say that two years later I necessarily agree and wish to seek out such disappearing 'authentic' places, but that I came to see that

increased mobility as a manifestation of modernisation processes has far reaching consequences.

As part of the project of creating a 'neoliberal utopia' (Bourdieu 1998: 95-103), representing and approaching the world as a standing reserve has tremendous socio-political and ecological implications. First, it leads to processes of cultural homogenization by imposing global capitalism on particular localities within a 'shrunken' global order. The normalized disposition that anyone is free to travel anywhere in the world – so long as those have the time, money and legal status – neglects (or even mocks) the fact that millions of people are immobile, or else are forced to be mobile as refugees by wars, natural disasters and threatening political circumstances (Beck and Ritter 2004; Clark 2011; Cresswell 2010; Hannam et al. 2006).

Global mobility also has ecological impacts that will become increasingly significant as humanity enters what some geologists are calling a new planetary epoch, the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Steffen 2003; Steffen et al. 2011; Zalasiewicz et al. 2010). The image of the globe as a sphere of mono-reality, as first noted by Heidegger, is dangerous for an ecologically minded 'cosmo politics' (Latour 1997b, 2004, 2013; Morin 1999; Sloterdijk 2008, 2009b, 2009a; Virilio 2010b, 2010a). The need for rethinking and re-imaging human-nature relations comes with growing awareness, knowledge and experience of the material consequences of anthropocentric worldviews and corresponding practices which place human beings at the centre of things, while relegating the non-human to the background. Anthropocentric life modes which continue to exploit, dominate and destroy 'nature' threaten the sustainability and flourishing of non-human species and

delicate eco-systems, but also humanity itself. As artificial divisions between 'nature' and 'society' call for rethinking and reorganising human and non-human relationships, the so-called Anthropocene issues an ethical demand for greater planetary responsibility. How human beings travel on and above the earth represents a key consideration in this regard, and one which anthropology and mobilities research can help critically discuss (Urry 2011a).

Clark (2011) has suggested a form of 'cosmopolitan hospitality' in which human beings must overcome taken for granted assumptions that the earth exists as the sovereign territory of human beings and instead become humble guests who are extended care. Not only does the earth not belong to humans to travel in and extract resources from, it is neither the property of human beings to save. I find myself in agreement with Clark that what is required if humans are to break out of destructive anthropocentric habits of thinking and acting, is greater reflexivity and 'e-strangement'. Just as the radical political imaginary of anthropology rests upon showing people that they can be other than who we are by demonstrating cultural relativism and contingency (Hage 2012), a more radical political and ecological anthropology can help show that human beings are always already other than *what* they are in a post-human sense. De-centring and resituating the anthropos in an extra-human logic of relations can help open pathways for seeing human beings as not only suspended in cultural webs of significance which they spun alone, but caught in much larger webs of human and non-human relations. Following Latour's (1997a: 15) challenge to 'open up the question of humanity' once again, anthropology must overcome

its traditional anthropocentric bias and consider that 'the non-human is not inhuman'.

As I have demonstrated in this thesis, the body's engagement and coupling with the world reveals a 'half alien body' that is charged by alien intentions and affects coming from the outside (Waldenfels 2011). Following an 'event' ontology, I have also shown how travel is not a singular event, but one which implicates a host of human and non-human actors and actants who are distributed and assembled across vast networks of connectivity. In my discussion of authenticity and alienation, by showing how technological and environmental conditions largely shape human beings as practical, body subjects, I adopted the post-human perspective first outlined by Plessner that human beings are 'artificial by nature'. Without predefined essences, with Spinoza we say that we do not know what the human is capable of becoming.

We can see from the discussed implications that this research on Himalayan travel has had far wider implications than being merely a place-bound snapshot of certain individual's trips to Nepal and India. This thesis has contributed to the discourse concerning mobilities and modernisation, the two of which go hand in hand. By showing that travellers are de-centred and dispersed across global networks, this research participates in recent post-human debates about the epistemological and ontological status of the 'anthropos' and the earth itself.

But the question remains, can contemporary Himalayan journeys be considered pilgrimages?

The answer will be yes and no. Yes in the sense that journeys both to the Himalayas and around the world were driven by values and ideals that reflect concerns that are relatively consistent with seemingly perential aspects of the human condition, namely the search for meaning and understanding. The Himalayas in particular was a place that carried symbolic value that coincided with certain ideals, desires and yearnings of contemporary travellers relative to the late modern socio-historical contexts that produced them. 'Late modern' as they appeared, contemporary Himalayan travellers demonstrated connections to mythical thought, for which high mountains in excentric boundary zones have universally symbolized timelessness and worldly transcendence. The symbolic value of the Himalayan region was primarily related to perceptions and representations of authenticity, spirituality and nature, qualities perceived to be lost or lacking in Western societies. In this regard, travelling to the Himalayas could indeed be called pilgrimage in the sense that it was a 'quest for valued ideals' (Morinis 1992b).

To be sure, it cannot only be called pilgrimage, however. As I have observed, these journeys were not only about pursuing 'valued ideals', but encompassed many other dimensions. Travellers were typically interested in exploring local culture, taking breaks from work and busy schedules at home, living simply and cheaply and enjoying leisured time. That pilgrimages involve other aspects beyond symbolic ideals and sacred centres is nothing particularly new, however. As Victor and Edith Turner (1978: 20) pointed out long ago and subsequent research

continuously reiterates, including this one, pilgrimage is rarely if ever a singular journey driven only by ultimate values. Contemporary Himalayan travel, as I discovered, was bound up with tourism, media, technologies, global transportation systems, commodity chains and flexible capitalist forms of individual and institutional organization. The fact that travellers remained connected to 'multiple realities' through digitally networked technologies, drank lattes and worked while on the road meant that they were not really and truly 'out there'. Moreover, trips to the Himalayan region were often part of broader travel itineraries with multiple destinations – typically spanning the globe. Numerous travellers were also found to be on nomadic, open-ended journeys with no particular point of return. For these reasons, contemporary Himalayan travel generally did not fit the ritual process or linear narrative structure that traditionally defines a pilgrimage, tour, or rite of pasSage. Not fitting with traditional conceptions of tourism or pilgrimage and collapsing divisions between structural and anti-structural positions, contemporary approaches to travel, such as those I witnessed in Nepal and India (and elsewhere) point to a 'post-tourist' form of dwelling in mobilities.

Using the tools of the information and technology age and the modern luxuries of travel to temporarily escape the realities and deficiencies of late modern life and discover or recover authenticity 'out there', contemporary Himalayan travel revealed what Weber (2003) calls an 'elective affinity', a symbiosis between global capitalism and

secularized value rationalisation.[19] As opposed to substantive or instrumental rationality, contemporary Himalayan travel was organised by a value-driven rationality in which neoliberal globalisation has created the objective conditions that facilitate dwelling in mobilities (once again, for those who have the time, money and legal status). Contemporary travellers demonstrated that the sense of unbounded freedom and the potential to *go everywhere* was a driving, valued ideal in itself. This shows a concern for authenticity of the type Taylor (1991: 27; 2007) identifies as 'self-determining freedom', or the freedom to choose, a moral ideal originating in the early Romantic period.

Although the Himalayan region embodied certain utopic ideals, the travellers I encountered were not on quests to any one particular *axis mundi*. Rather, their quests were oriented by a valued ideal of becoming well-travelled cosmopolitans who exercised 'self-determining freedom'. Ironically, despite being driven by desires for experiencing other places and ways of life, as a mechanism of neoliberal globalisation the form of cosmopolitanism performed through global mobilities brings everywhere and everyone under a single cosmos. The unintended consequence of this process is that it contributes to the destruction of the diversity, 'authenticity' or 'untouched' natural wonders it paradoxically intends to appreciate and preserve.

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[19] After Goethe's novel of the same title, 'elective affinities' became a central feature of Weber's methodology and especially his analysis of modern capitalism (Weber 1991; 2003). The term is used to connect two or more mutually refinforcing practices or instiutions, such as the substantive values of Calvinism and the instrumental calculation of capitalism.

Contemporary journeys in the Himalayas hence expressed both utopian and dystopian dimensions. On one hand, late modern travellers demonstrated dystopian attitudes towards Western societies, perceived once again, as alienating, inauthentic and disenchanted. Contemporary journeys in the Himalayas displayed both a specifically modern 'imperialist nostalgia' (Rosaldo 1989), but also a more basic 'nostalgia for paradise' (Eliade 1984) that reflects a universal religious and utopian impulse. According to psychoanalytic theory, the human condition is marked by subconscious lack and longing. As Bloch (1986) observes in *The Principle of Hope*, however, these conditions cannot be articulated other than through imagining their possible fulfilment. As I demonstrated in chapters four and five, Himalayan travellers were driven by 'narrative imaginings' that travelling to the region would transform them by expanding their horizons and helping them overcome limitations. By coming face-to-face with mountain inhabitants perceived to be living authentic and spiritual lives, and face-to-place with majestic Himalayan mountain-scapes, these journeys functioned as utopic excursions into 'therapeutic landscapes' (Hoyez 2007). Yet, these therapeutic landscapes have been produced and mobilized through modernizing discourses that run the risk of commodifying them, turning them into consumable 'resources' as part of a global standing reserve. As Bishop (2000: 15) observes at the dawn of the new millennium:

> Shangri-La seems to be caught between being a utopia and a brand name, between being a tourist destination and the goal of spiritual pilgrimage, between a museum or a theme park and a political and spiritual summons.

Contemporary Himalayan journeys thus reflect a complex historical moment in which sociocultural forms continue to undergo processes of intensive interpenetration. What in the end can we say about these ambiguous, overlapping journeys other than they were hybrid, quasi-pilgrimages that simultaneously critiqued and enacted the times they are situated in. If Himalayan travel is fraught with paradoxes, contradictions and 'postmodern' ironies, it is because global cosmopolitan reality is complex and full of such ambiguities and tensions itself. In the end, with Walt Whitman, we can say that Himalayan travel contradicts itself because it is large and contains multitudes. Like all pilgrimages, the story of Himalayan travel is more than one of individual travellers on their way to some place; rather it is part of a much larger story of times past, present and to come. As part of the storyline of globalised modernity and the story of human be(com)ing, how will the meta-narrative of travel further unfold? Which horizons will open and close for the anthropos as a traveller and dweller within a shared and moving

 world?

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