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Interactive comment on "Just passing through: the risky mobilities of hazardous materials transport" *by* J. Cidell

J. Gabrys (Referee)

j.gabrys@gold.ac.uk

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This paper re-assesses the location and specificity of risk by analyzing two case studies, freight traffic in Chicago suburbs and nuclear waste transport to Yucca Mountain, Nevada, which demonstrate how the risk of hazardous materials transport is transient, mobile, or not easily identified and fixed in one place. Working with theories of risk, the paper brings an additional theoretical dimension to located theories of risk by suggesting that the topology of 'fire space' (drawing on Law and Mol) may help to develop a more mutable notion of risk in terms of how and where it materializes, and how these more mutable qualities of risk in the form of hazardous materials may also influence policy.

The paper brings an interesting perspective to the understanding of the mobilities of

hazardous materials transport and risk involved. It also implicitly raises questions about what other non-static topologies of risk might have been developed in other areas that could contribute to these arguments. Climate change, for instance, is a topic that certainly has been addressed through risk discourse, and is an event that is not easily or singularly locatable. Reference is made to these literatures, but the suggestion is made that because climate change is a more ubiquitous phenomenon, its topologies of risk may play out rather differently. Nevertheless, climate change will manifestly differently in distinct locations, and it may be that the literatures related to the mutable and multi-located environmental risks of climate change could also inform notions of the topologies of risk developed in this paper.

The 'fire space' concept hinges on 'absent presence', which works well to develop a topology of risk that is more intermittent than constant. It would be interesting to see a bit more development around the notion of fire space to demonstrate how this is the most compelling concept for drawing out the itinerant problems of hazardous waste transport. What other event-topologies, such as spills (for instance, oil spills), might also provide a relevant reference point for thinking about the material qualities of potential hazardous materials spills? The point about the absent presence of hazardous materials as a potential and mobile form of risk is certainly interesting and valid, but 'fire space' at times seems a somewhat abstract way of addressing the topologies and materialities of hazardous materials.

The case studies, which largely draw on testimony for environmental impact assessments, are appropriate and compelling for the study. The case studies document how the aspect of prior hazardous materials accidents in other locations are a recurrent and important reference point for documenting the potential risk of mobile hazardous materials, and to argue against the transport of these materials through affected communities. This would be a useful element to draw out further in relation to fire space, particularly with respect to the distinct topologies and materialities that emerge with mobile hazardous materials. What are the circumstances of these prior mobile hazardous

waste accidents that residents use to argue against transport through their communities, even if dismissed eventually within environmental impact assessments; and how do the materialities of these events inform understandings of the absent-present risks of hazardous materials transport?

The case study analysis focuses on perceived possible hazardous materials events, such that the understanding of risk mobilized integrates with the notion of absent presence. The hazardous waste incidents that have occurred in other communities and that contribute to the complex risk topologies of mobile hazardous materials could also be drawn out to contribute to advancing the notion of fire space not just as the indeterminate and future occurrence of a risk event, but also as something that could be further understood through the material histories of accidents and spills that have happened, and the material imaginaries around how these risks may occur again. Risk could be understood not just through futurity, but also through an accumulation of accidents and environmental harm that informs responses to and concerns about possible pollution events. In this way, mobile risk cannot be rendered simply as a probability within policy spaces, since it involves a material commitment to possible environmental futures.

Overall, this paper brings new insights to the mobile geographies of hazardous waste transport by demonstrating the relevance of approaching environmental risk and policy making through a topological and mobile perspective. The topologies discussed here begin to open up further provocations for how to develop material and mutable approaches to environmental geographies of risk.

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