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Enthusiasm - Allison Hui

Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. The way of life is wonderful. It is by abandonment.

(Emerson, 1951: 227)

While researchers attribute many characteristics to contemporary mobilities, enthusiasm is rarely among the list. Descriptors of speed, distance and temporality are familiar standards, while the possibilities of many other imaginative attributes remain unexplored. This chapter therefore examines enthusiasm as a key characteristic shaping the relationships, momentum, and possibilities of contemporary mobilities.

Enthusiasm has long been connected to understandings of mobilities. Plato described enthusiasm in terms of inspiration, comparing it to a magnetic stone that attracts iron rings and gives them the ability to likewise attract others (1953: 107-8). This image of attraction made an early connection between enthusiasm and ideas of “communicability, circulation and transmission” (Herd, 2007: 5). While these enthusiastic mobilities could be positive and inspiring, they also came to be feared. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the potential of enthusiasm to aid the circulation of unorthodox religious or philosophical ideas was deemed dangerous, and led people to associate enthusiasm with madness and mental illness (Heyd, 1995: 45). Enthusiasm, and its potentially damaging and uncontrollable mobilities of ideas, were medicalized and “counterposed to reason” (Herd, 2007: 5). Evaluations of enthusiasm’s capacity to move, however, transformed over time, and the “tradition of enthusiasm” became an esteemed hallmark of Modern American literature (Herd, 2007: 22). The mobilities of enthusiasm, which were once feared and fought, later fostered cultural heritage to be prized and passed on.

As these examples make clear, enthusiasm is not just a subjective emotion. It is not merely one person’s excitement or intense interest. Rather, the “rapturous intensity of feeling” and “passionate eagerness” of enthusiasm (OED, 1989) needs to be situated within relations – as an affect. Whereas emotions belong to subjects, affect “is not bound to particular individual bodies” (Bissell, 2010: 271). Instead, affects are located in-between objects and bodies as a “capacity to relate” (Adey, 2008: 439) or a capacity to act (Hynes, 2011: 66). Affect “depends on a sense of push in the world” that exists between things (Thrift, 2004: 64). It can also be seen to pull, as “relations that inspire the world” (Dewsbury et al., 2002: 439). Therefore while emotions are understood to be subjective states where the body is an object of emotion, affects are pre-personal relations, existing in-between people and things as potentials (Hynes, 2011: 66). Seeing enthusiasm as an affect foregrounds “the motion of emotion” in relations (Thien, 2005: 451).

Exploring enthusiastic mobilities is therefore not about identifying people who move during emotional states of passion. It is about interrogating relationships where passion and inspiration are manifest in mobilities. As this chapter illustrates, enthusiasm inspires the body to be pushed and pulled through space. Enthusiastic relationships between people, things, and ideas shift the capacity and potential for mobilities. Just as Kant notes how enthusiasm imparts impetus and momentum to ideas in the mind (1952: 124), it can likewise be seen to propel corporeal and object mobilities. Enthusiastic mobilities are therefore not driven by people alone – that is, travel is not enacted as autonomous choices. Rather, enthusiastic mobilities emerge as moments within enthusiastic relations. Connections between people, objects, spaces, and ideas reveal and inspire potential movements.

The following sections therefore explore three ways that enthusiasm characterizes mobilities: as an atmosphere for mobilities *within* spaces, as a force *pushing* people *through* spaces and as a lure *pulling* people *to* spaces. In each case, enthusiasm exists as a relation between different things. The first approach puts a spatial boundary on enthusiastic relationships, considering how bodies relate to built spaces. It examines how architects and designers try to engineer the “affective atmospheres” (Bissell, 2010) that emerge in relations between built environments, people, and objects. The second section isolates instances where enthusiasm *pushes* people through spaces, emphasizing relationships between people and specific ways of moving. In leisure activities such as parkour, enthusiasm relates to the skills and objects used in motion between point A and point B. Here enthusiasm pushes people to trace more and more journeys, generating new mobilities. Finally, the journey is less important than arrival in the third section, where enthusiasm *pulls* people to spaces. Drawing upon my qualitative study of bird watching, I demonstrate how the enthusiasm that exists between distant objects and people can prompt mobilities.¹

While these three dynamics and the cases used to illustrate them are not mutually exclusive, presenting each in turn highlights different ways that mobilities might be deemed enthusiastic. Distinguishing between enthusiastic relations that are spatially bounded, those that involve a push to travel, and those that pull people to destinations, is an analytic strategy for unpicking some of the complex links between affects of enthusiasm and mobilities. In addition, while this chapter focuses largely upon how enthusiasm shapes people’s mobilities, it also acknowledges the multiple mobilities² that exist, including those of objects and information. Interrogating multiple mobilities in future research will help to reveal additional aspects of enthusiastic relations. The next section, however, makes an initial step towards understanding enthusiastic mobilities by considering how enthusiasm might be engineered within spaces.

Engineering enthusiasm within mobile spaces

One way of understanding enthusiasm as a characteristic of mobilities is to locate it within spaces that are inherently mobile. Tourist places such as beaches, for instance, are performed through “a multiplicity of intersecting mobilities” (Bærenholdt et al., 2004: 2). Even built spaces such as houses can be seen as permeated by routes, conduits and mobilities rather than as stable and static containers (Lefebvre, 1991: 93; Urry, 2000: 20).

In addition to being mobile, social spaces are affective spaces. As Bissell notes, spaces such as trains enable distinct “affective atmospheres” that form a backdrop to everyday mobilities (2010: 272). People bring laptops and mobile phones onto trains, which in conjunction with a quiet carriage and the work practices of other people allow an affective atmosphere conducive to work to emerge (2010: 274). At other times, trains become “therapeutic spaces” with a prevailing atmosphere of grief or joy, as commuters confide in one another during recurrent trips (Jensen, 2011: 5). The shifting of routines and passengers over the course of a week transforms the affective atmosphere of trains, with the enthusiasm of weekend crowds meeting the exhaustion of Friday commuters (Bissell, 2010: 275). Enthusiasm is therefore only one of many affective atmospheres within spaces. Depending on the performances that occur – which depend on who and what is involved – affective atmospheres shift and evolve, enthusiasm perhaps giving way to boredom. In this way, a complex ecology of affects exists – of enthusiasm, hope, fear, desire (Davidson et al., 2011). These ecologies are not fixed systems, but consist of relationships that are in flux and spark unpredictable emergence (Park et al., 2011: 6). At some times, enthusiasm may dominate, while at others it is one of many atmospheres flourishing in different niches. The affective atmospheres of mobile locations emerge and disappear alongside the mobilities that constitute them.

How then can affective atmospheres and the wider ecologies they create be shaped, changed and even engineered? The things people do in spaces undoubtedly play a role in shaping enthusiastic spaces. Train stations, for example, can be filled with enthusiasm due to passengers’ impending vacations, long-awaited reunifications or the sheer love of trains. When they were first constructed, however, they were sites of nervousness, with shifts between “anxiety and exhilaration, longing and dread” (Löfgren, 2008: 348). In part, changing these affective atmospheres involved promoting new skills of social interaction. Passengers learned how to keep distances, how to approach new people, and how to mark out territory, and today these skills are so widespread that they form a banal part of train commuting (Löfgren, 2008: 342, 31; Watts, 2008). By doing different things in spaces, people transform affects.

Changing affective atmospheres, however, also involves changing built spaces. Architects play a key role in the formation of affective ecologies because enthusiasm, nervousness and boredom exist in relation to material spaces. Attempts can therefore be made to exert “affective control” by engineering spaces that promote and facilitate specific affects (Adey, 2008: 445). In the early twentieth century, the architect for Copenhagen’s Grand Central Station aimed to minimize nervousness and anxiety in his design (Löfgren, 2008: 338). Similarly, contemporary airport architects anticipate and attempt to facilitate desirable patterns of affective mobility, such as the flow of people past retail outlets (Adey, 2008: 444).

How then might enthusiastic atmospheres be engineered within mobile spaces? A consideration of tourism offers one set of possibilities. From the production of themed environments such as the playscapes of Dubai’s man-made islands (Junemo, 2004) to proposals for “creative enclaves” that engage people’s creative potentials (Richards & Wilson, 2006), tourism has long involved spaces in which passions and inspirations can flourish. While such spaces involve a degree of control, notably in terms of the capital required for entrance (Junemo, 2004: 190), they also facilitate freedom. Having space in

which to direct their own activities, whether at rented summer homes or sports entertainment zones, leads people to experience significant “enthusiasm, energy, and action” (Haldrup, 2004; Sherry et al., 2007: 30). The open-ended nature of built spaces is therefore important because it opens up opportunities for unpredictable relationships, mobilities and performances.

Engineering enthusiasm then is less about affective control and more about affective opportunities. While some airport architects try to create “an automatic response” from people by building obstacles and “limiting the possible movements” (Adey, 2008: 444), this approach engineers atmospheres of efficiency and commercialism rather than enthusiasm. Fentress Architects, who designed the Seoul Incheon Airport, conversely suggest: “timeless design is built on intangible factors such as dreams and inspiration” (Fentress Architects, 2012). On arrival in Seoul, guests can visit the Korean Culture Museum or one of the Traditional Korean Cultural Experience Zones where they can watch performances or learn to make traditional handicrafts for free (Incheon International Airport Corporation, 2011). Rather than herding passengers through the airport, these areas provide opportunities to stop and engage – to become infected by a creative urge and an enthusiasm for Korean culture. Engineering enthusiasm is in this way about creating opportunities for affective contagion – creating opportunities for inspiration to be encountered and communicated.

There is a different architectural approach then to affective control than to engineering enthusiasm. The former corresponds with a tradition of making “predictable and boring boxes,” while the latter is exemplified by Danish architects BIG’s aim to produce “pragmatic utopian architecture” and embrace the slogan “yes is more” (BIG, 2009: 12). The former tries to limit and homogenize affective ecologies while the latter encourages inspirational and potentially unpredictable enthusiastic atmospheres. While lofty architectural ideals drive marketing as much as design, the possibilities of utopian mobilities need to be taken seriously (Jensen & Freudendal-Pedersen, forthcoming). Letting the imagination run free, giving in to enthusiasm’s “taste for the infinite” (Hynes, 2011: 65; Kant, 1952), might therefore be an appropriate strategy for encouraging and engineering enthusiasm within mobile spaces.

While enthusiasm can emerge within the affective ecologies of mobile spaces, there is also an extent to which mobilities exceed these spaces. As even architects acknowledge, people find ways around the affective intentions of built spaces (Adey, 2008: 445). In addition to exceeding the expectations of designers, mobilities also extend beyond bounded spaces, etching paths that cross many spaces. The next section therefore considers how an enthusiasm for movement can generate new pathways that in some cases ignore planners’ intentions.

An enthusiastic push

Sometimes enthusiastic relations are not about being in a space, but about moving through spaces. Passion and inspiration becomes a proverbial wind at one’s back, pushing the body to travel through spaces in a particular way. Here enthusiasm is not about atmospheres in space, but about generating new pathways and exploring new ways of moving.

Matthew Tiessen, for example, is a self-avowed enthusiast of mountain biking. As he notes, mountain bikers:

seek out challenging trails that enable them to achieve maximum ‘flow,’ that enable them to respond and interact with the earth’s offerings. They thereby become a sort of bio-techno-human-hybrid—the Mountain Biker—that generates euphoria, thrills, and adrenaline.

(Tiessen, 2011: 129)

Though this interaction involves space, it is not about being in specific spaces. Rather, an enthusiasm for mountain biking – for reproducing these relationships between body and bike and earth – pushes body-machine hybrids into new spaces, generating new mobilities.

This creative energy re-writes spaces and exceeds common expectations. Mountain bikers create what Tiessen calls “desire lines”. The term, which is used by architects to refer to the footpaths people create when wandering off sidewalks and other planned routes, often carries a negative connotation – one of deviance and a need for standardization (Tiessen, 2011: 129). Tiessen, however, suggests these traces of mobility are interactions; interactions between spaces that present possible trajectories and people who respond in expressions of efficiency, playfulness or, I might add, even enthusiasm (2007). The push and pull relationship of affect therefore becomes central to the mountain biker’s movements: “The desire path . . . is a product of a relationship, a reciprocal relationship of offering (by the topographical context) and acceptance (by you or me)” (Tiessen, 2011). Working together, the space, the bike, and its capable rider enact enthusiastic mobilities, cleaving out paths that didn’t exist before.

An enthusiasm for moving similarly pushes people to generate new paths in parkour. Also known as freerunning, parkour involves jumping, climbing and running as efficiently as possible over built structures in the urban landscape. While walls and railings are for most people barriers that must be walked around, in parkour they are invitations to enact new desire lines. This language of invitation fits the practice well because, as Saville notes, parkour “does not give any particular clear or finished blueprint for action . . . but constantly seeks new ways to move playfully *with* places” (2008: 892). A passion for parkour, for learning to move differently through the city, therefore pushes people to generate new mobilities, considering new routes and opportunities to creatively extend the boundaries of how bodies interact with urban forms.

Though enthusiasm may push people to carve out new paths, it does not ensure the process will be easy. Saville tells the story of parkour founder David Belle who fell, in front of people and video cameras, during a 2006 attempt to pull himself over a solid wall (2008: 891). While falling is routinely associated with disappointment and shame in Western cultures, and the public nature of this demonstration would normally enhance these affects, Saville notes that Belle “was pleased and excited. After the ‘fakeness’ of Californian media-appeasing performances, the Frenchman said he felt more ‘real’” (2008: 891). Belle’s enthusiasm for parkour, as a way of moving about the city, was fed and urged on by his failure. This is because responding to the push of enthusiasm and creatively carving out new desire lines is more important as a

practitioner than seamlessly flowing along any one path. Trying new mobilities is more important than perfecting them. As a result, affects such as risk and fear have a complex role within this practice. While fear can counteract the push of enthusiasm and stop people from attempting new movements, it can also push them to revisit and obsess over spaces and certain ways of moving (Saville, 2008: 901-3). The push of enthusiasm becomes intermingled with fear, excitement, anger, and enjoyment as practitioners repeatedly move.

In mountain biking and parkour, an intense interest and passion for specific ways of moving generates new mobilities. The same could be said for automobile enthusiasts such as hot rodders (Moorhouse, 1991), or even everyday drivers who find cars “too comfortable, enjoyable, exciting, even enthralling” to give them up (Sheller, 2004: 236). In each instance, affects like fear can redirect or reinvigorate paths, while enthusiasm pushes people through space, attached to different technologies, seeking out different spaces for performing creative desire lines.

While in these cases the process of moving is itself inspiring and the subject of passion, sometimes enthusiasm isn't apparent during the journey. Travelling sometimes seems a prelude to passion – a way of facilitating enthusiastic performances. The next section therefore considers how enthusiasm can pull people to destinations that are the focus of inspiration.

The pull of enthusiastic performances

I don't really *enjoy* the long drives, but I enjoy the drive back if we've been successful.

(Mike, birder)

The ambivalence Mike demonstrates for car travel seems miles away from the notion of enthusiasm as passion. Yet each year Mike travels 30,000 – 40,000 miles to pursue his passion for bird watching. Several times each day, Mike checks his bird pager and several specialized bird websites, which report rare birds that have been spotted across the UK. Then, if he notices a bird he wants to see, perhaps one he hasn't seen yet this year, Mike quickly arranges transportation in the hopes of being able to reach and see the bird before it departs.³ An unenjoyable ride to the destination will, if he manages to spot the bird, be rewarded with a satisfying return voyage.

Could this mobility be deemed enthusiastic? If one were concentrating on particular spaces then the answer would be a qualified no. After all, the spatial pattern of Mike's trips is widely varying – birds show up all over the place, and so Mike ends up travelling all over the place. Though he is part of temporary atmospheres of enthusiasm in the locations he visits, his enthusiasm is not for these spaces, and he makes few return trips to them. To concentrate instead upon Mike's way of moving doesn't help either. His enthusiasm is not linked to the journeys he takes, and he is not interested in responding to spaces by carving desire lines. Instead, he wants to get to the *right* space – the one in which the bird resides.

Though Mike's long car rides are not enthusiastic in these ways, they do demonstrate considerable enthusiasm for birds and bird watching. Indeed, this enthusiasm is

enhanced, rather than diminished, by his ambivalence for the journeys. Enduring long, unsatisfying rides demonstrates Mike's intense interest in watching birds. It also separates him from people like Jon, who doesn't want "to spend four hours sat in a car to get out for twenty minutes to see a bird, . . . when I could actually spend *eight* hours out and about [watching birds]". Mike's enthusiastic mobilities must therefore be understood differently.

For Mike, enthusiasm exists in his relationship to the unpredictable and widely dispersed distribution of birds. Having seen many rare birds, he is inspired to see many more – to be witness to the unexpected presence of birds that are normally found elsewhere. Enthusiasm pulls Mike towards these rare birds, entices him to travel long distances in order to be near them. The birds, like Plato's stone, have a kind of magnetic attraction.

Before Mike can give in to this attraction, however, he needs to discover and locate the birds. He is not willing to travel across the country to see a common garden bird, and therefore searching and finding information about *rare* birds plays an important role in feeding and directing his enthusiasm. One of his sources of information is the Bird Guides website (2012). This website features a constantly updated "BirdMap" of the UK, with squares indicating the location of bird reports. The relative importance of reports is indicated by squares of different sizes – the most common birds being marked by very small ones and extremely uncommon "Mega" finds by large ones. While small squares are unlikely to have a strong enough pull to draw Mike's attention, the large squares indicate both rarity and, within the community of rare-bird twitchers, an enthusiasm to travel. In order to see rare birds, Mike is impelled along certain trajectories, pulled by the promise of birds he knows to be irregularities.

To speak of his being *pulled by enthusiasm* towards destinations is not to reject the materiality of his body. It is not, as Solnit suggests, to take a postmodern perspective on frictionless flows where: "the body is nothing more than a parcel in transit, a chess piece dropped on another square, it does not move but is moved" (2001: 28). As an affect, enthusiasm speaks to the capacities of Mike's body. In order to respond to this pull, his body must be engaged, even if only in enduring the embodied constraints of long hours as a passenger in cars or planes. Depending on the state of his body, and competing forces in his life, Mike may not be able to give in to the allure of birds, his embodied enthusiasm giving way to longing or regret.

The key is that Mike's travel cannot be separated from his rare bird watching. The capacity to move to these spaces is contingent on enthusiastic relations between his body and the birds, his knowledge of bird behaviors and the information that travels to him through websites and pagers. Travelling long distances is not a free choice – indeed, he doesn't particularly like the long drives. But he is enthusiastic about seeing rare birds, and in order to do so, he is pulled to enact new mobilities.

Just as the religious enthusiasm of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was positioned in opposition to reason, there is something about this enthusiastic mobility that goes beyond notions of choice. Mike's travel patterns are not about distinct choices made in relation to minimizing travel time or cost. Rather, his travel results from the interaction of personal circumstances and collectively reproduced mobilities. Mike's

mobilities are not only about his body, or his desires. They also draw upon collectively reproduced mobilities. The circulation of objects such as rare bird pagers helps to reinforce a widely shared motivation to see rare birds, and also facilitates travel by connecting this motivation to particular destinations. The evolving virtual mobilities of the BirdMap website connect past bird sightings and future ones, giving specific destinations to the pull of enthusiasm. Together, these overlapping mobilities reproduce a pre-personal enthusiasm that establishes patterns of travel. With their help, mobilities that would seem abnormal to many thus become quite normal:

Convention dictates to any teenager, in fact, to most normal people that you don't simply set off to drive through the night for 550 miles . . . Twitching shatters those restraints. It tells you that you can actually go anywhere at any time. More important, perhaps, is the fact that, on most occasions, when you get there you'll meet scores of others who have made exactly the same journey, reinforcing a communal notion that it's all perfectly normal.

(Cocker, 2001: 60)

The enthusiastic mobilities of objects, information and people all work together to direct corporeal travel and make seeing rare birds possible and, moreover, normal.

This case highlights that enthusiasm is not just a quality of human mobilities. Rather, as Mike's bird watching illustrates, the enthusiasm inherent in flows of rare bird information precede and in some sense pull Mike to enact his own corporeal mobilities: mobilities undertaken in order to meet up with moving birds that are themselves pulled along by winds and migration patterns. Enthusiasm is not often something Mike experiences for travelling itself, but it is intimately connected to where and why he travels.

Conclusion

As this brief discussion has shown, there are many ways in which enthusiasm can be deemed a quality of mobilities. Though enthusiasm has seldom been a central unit of study, it offers opportunities to reconsider the relationships and momentum behind patterns of contemporary mobility. As Letherby and Reynolds suggest, "it is not just that travel/mobility shapes emotions but also that the emotions shape mobilities" (2009: 3). The same can be said of affect, and starting from a consideration of affect offers new ways of understanding how mobilities take various forms.

As this chapter has illustrated, different frames can be used for understanding how the passion of enthusiasm sparks mobilities. Enthusiastic mobilities can be engineered in mobile spaces, and enthusiasm can also be seen to push and pull people and objects through and to spaces. Highlighting these different dimensions of affective relationships provides insight into the ecologies of affect that emerge and evolve, as well as how multiple mobilities work together to lure bodies into movement. Recognizing the enthusiastic nature of mobilities also requires acknowledging that personal choice is not the main driver of people's travel. Built spaces contribute to affects and mobilities, as do the affordances and travel of ideas and objects. Mobilities, like the enthusiasm that characterizes them, are not merely subject-centered – they emerge out of relations.

This discussion has also revealed the productive and creative tendency of enthusiasm. Rather than closing down or controlling mobilities and performances, the passion, possession, and inspiration of enthusiasm has been shown to push and pull people onwards – to explore unexpected opportunities in spaces, to generate more ways of moving through the city, to visit more birds. While it is important to recognize the barriers, closures, and power articulated during attempts to affectively control built spaces, investigating enthusiasm has pointed towards the importance of also considering openings and excited explorations. As the cases in this chapter have demonstrated, enthusiasm has a propensity to overflow, instigating new mobilities of ideas, objects, and people. This creative extending of enthusiasm into new spaces is of significant interest when trying to understand the opportunities and limitations of established and future mobility systems.

To recognize enthusiasm's communicable and creative impulse, however, is not to dismiss its potentially dangerous and destructive side. Just as natural ecologies fare poorly when dominated by one species, letting enthusiasm run wild could be similarly disastrous. Mike, for instance, continues to travel widely in order to see rare birds, despite his admission that this travel has a significant environmental cost. This mismatch between the momentum of enthusiastic mobilities and wider social concerns about the environment highlights the potential for enthusiasm to once again become dangerous, as it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Though, as Emerson suggests, great things can be done with enthusiasm, abandoning oneself to enthusiasm can also be costly. Studying how the push and pull of enthusiasm shapes mobilities therefore remains a crucial topic for future research.

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Notes

¹ Participant observation and semi-structured interviews with ten bird watchers were undertaken as part of a wider study of leisure mobilities.

² As Sheller and Urry argue, mobilities are not about people alone, and also include movements of people and ideas (2006). Urry, for instance, discusses five types of travel: people's corporeal travel, the travel of objects, imaginative travel, virtual travel, and communicative travel (2000: 49; 2007: 47).

³ This type of travel covering extreme distances to see rare birds, which appear for short periods of time, is known, often pejoratively, as twitching.

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