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Architectural enthusiasm: visiting buildings with The Twentieth Century Society

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Abstract

In this article, we put forward the concept of architectural enthusiasm - a collective passion and shared emotional affiliation for buildings and architecture. Through this concept and empirical material based on participation in the architectural tours of The Twentieth Century Society (a UK-based architectural conservation group), we contribute to recent work on the built environment and geographies of architecture in three ways: first, we reinforce the importance of emotion to people's engagements with buildings, emphasizing the shared and practiced nature of these engagements; second, we highlight the role of architectural enthusiasts as agents with the potential to shape and transform the built environment; and third, we make connections between (seemingly) disparate engagements with buildings through a continuum of practice incorporating urban exploration, local history, architectural practice and training, and mass architectural tourism. Unveiling these continuities has important implications for future research into the built environment, highlighting the need to take emotion seriously in all sorts of

professional as well as enthusiastic encounters with buildings, and unsettling the categories of amateur and expert within architectural practices.

Key Words

Architecture – Architectural Agent – Architectural Tourism - Built Environment — Emotional Geographies — Enthusiasm - Urban Exploration

Introduction

In this paper, we consider an important way in which people experience the built environment, namely through a collective passion for architecture. This predilection incorporates an appreciation of the materialities of buildings and a joy for visiting, exploring, understanding and caring for buildings and their architectural histories. We conceptualise this way of being and doing as ‘architectural enthusiasm’. Central to an enthusiasm for any cause or interest is an intense ‘emotional affiliation’ (Geoghegan, 2013). As with many interests that involve the active cultivation of knowledge of, in and about particular subjects, groups and societies have formed around architectural enthusiasm, enabling the communication and circulation of collective passions for the built environment and shared concerns for buildings at risk and the associated policy dimensions of conservation.

In this paper, we seek to understand the shared ways in which enthusiasts as ‘architectural practitioners’ experience buildings and do building work (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011). Framing our argument around the multiple emotions experienced by participants during architectural tours, we introduce the category of enthusiasm as a

particular mode by which people on architectural tours (guides and their followers) engage with architecture. Through our conceptualisation of architectural enthusiasm we attempt to grasp not only the shared ways in which people experience architecture, but also the ways in which enthusiasm circulates within and between groups of architectural practitioners. By making space for emotion in our geographies of architecture, we also draw out what might be dismissed as “the small, the minor and the exceptional in the making of our ‘big’ geographies” (Jacobs, 2006, page 22), highlighting how the action, practice and performance of the architectural tour has a larger political purpose beyond the small interpretive community of the group. The tour and its participants are therefore understood as architectural agents connected to other official networks of care and conservation.

We use the architectural tour, a ‘non-academic’ but nonetheless highly engaged and often very knowledgeable form of architectural experience, to highlight connections between a diverse range of ways of exploring, knowing and valuing the built environment, from urban exploration (urbex), to local history and architectural tourism. Thus the paper makes the case that there is a continuum between these practices which are often understood, both from an academic and popular perspective, as disparate and unrelated. In contradistinction, we argue that it is important to highlight the commonalities between practices. These include an emphasis on visiting sites, emotional engagements that occur within shared interest groups and on an individual basis, and an acknowledgement that often people take part in several of these activities, with each, in different ways, influencing how architecture is understood, valued, and physically or politically remade.

We focus specifically on the volunteer-led tours (on foot, by coach or public transport) of The Twentieth Century Society, a UK-based architectural conservation group, which caters for all those with an interest in the architecture, arts, crafts and design of the period after 1914. This focus on enthusiasm for twentieth century architecture has the added dimension of being a period which includes certain architectural styles (for example Brutalism) which are still contested, making them particularly vulnerable. Saint argued in 1992 that “If the best of these buildings are to be safeguarded for posterity, the reassessment of post-war architectural heritage cannot wait” (page 3; see also Penrose et al., 2007). Since then, there has been a growing interest in this period, for example the UNESCO Programme on Modern Heritage, DOCOMOMO International, and English Heritage’s Twentieth Century Listing programme. In addition to these institutional responses, there has been a popularisation of ‘mid-century’/Scandinavian modern interior design. Despite this, the views of politicians and the general public about the appearance and ‘concrete’ aesthetics of much post-war architecture remain divided.

In the next section of our paper, we conceptualise architectural enthusiasm in relation to recent work on the emotional registers of research about architecture and the notion of the architectural agent. We then move on to show how the architectural enthusiasts discussed here should be understood as part of broad spectrum of visitors to buildings, drawing together research on urbex, local history, professional architectural activities, and mass architectural tourism with the intention of highlighting the continuities between these (seemingly) disparate practices. This is followed by an introduction to The Twentieth Century Society, including their organisation, membership, events and casework. We then discuss the emotional geographies of architectural tours,

focussing specifically on the emotional states of: enjoyment; reverence; anticipation and boredom; and concern and care. We conclude by highlighting the importance of emotion in architectural engagement and the role of the enthusiast as architectural agent, as well as returning to the conceptualisation of a continuum of practices of visiting buildings to show how this relates to broader understandings of how the built environment is understood, experienced and reshaped.

Conceptualising architectural enthusiasm

Geography, architecture, emotion and practice

Following Lees' (2001) call for a critical geography of architecture, a growing number of studies have engaged with how geographers and others might usefully study the built environment in a manner that acknowledges, but also surpasses representational readings of historic content and symbolism in architectural forms (see Jacobs, 2006). Researchers have moved to investigate the intricate lived experiences of architecture and architectural practitioners across time, from those involved in the original design to those who inhabit these buildings today (Bell, 2011; Kraftl, 2009). Architecture has thus been recast as an "experiential, perspectival, sensual, locational and sociological phenomena" (McNeill, 2005, page 41), shifting attention from merely writing *about* architecture towards questions of engaging *with* and being *in* architecture (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011). There is now significant interest in the 'material matter' of architecture, the physical basis of a building, and 'human mattering' which pertains to the meaning, judgements, emotions and ambiances that become ascribed to, associated with – and also 'do' things with – buildings (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011, page 212-213).

Our conceptualisation of architectural enthusiasm advances debates around emotion in architectural engagement by illustrating passionate and shared ways of engaging with buildings. Understanding enthusiasm as “an emotional affiliation that influences our passions, performances and actions in space” (Geoghegan, 2013, page 45), we are able to unravel the emotional relations between people, buildings and place. Shared emotion and enthusiasm generate “a mutual ‘closeness’, exclusivity of knowledgeability and sociability among the participants” (Geoghegan, 2013, page 45). In this way, buildings are made to ‘matter’, something particularly important when talking about twentieth century architecture. We deploy these ideas in our examination of the emotional geographies of architectural tours which enable members of The Twentieth Century Society to collectively explore and experience the built environment, bringing the architectural significance of the building into being, even if only temporarily during the course of a two hour tour. During the course of the tour, enthusiasts inhabit buildings and architectural spaces through “active and embodied practices” (Lees, 2001, page 55) and emotions associated with the built environment are enacted across “different scales of feeling” which are laden with emotional charge, manifest in and through architecture (Lees and Baxter, 2011, page 108).

Thinking in terms of the architectural enthusiast also extends the category of architectural practitioners referred to by Jacobs and Merriman (2011) by identifying these enthusiasts (guide and followers) as agents who, in addition to architects, builders and occupants, are implicated in “practising architecture”. The tour reinforces the ways in which architecture continues to occur after its initial construction, forming one of the “diverse relations that hold [a] building together over time and space” (Jacobs, 2006,

page 11). Jacobs argues that “a building is always being ‘made’ or ‘unmade’”; the tour is another practice through which engagement and attachment to buildings are produced, small changes to the built environment are wrought, and as a result of the campaigning and lobbying of those involved with the tours, buildings stand or fall.

Visiting buildings: A continuum of practice

We argue that the architectural enthusiasts discussed here should be understood as engaging with buildings in ways that are part of a much broader spectrum of practices. We draw on four distinctive yet connected areas, namely urbex (and its situationist roots), the figure of the landscape historian, the professional architect, and architectural tourism, in order to highlight this continuum of engagements.

Whilst there has been a surge in research investigating the enthusiastic, embodied and mobile practices people employ to experience urban space, for example graffiti and tagging, skateboarding, BMXing and parkour (see Borden, 2001; Cresswell, 1992; Mould, 2009; Saville, 2008), little effort has been made to bring these practices, and the increasingly popular cultures of ‘urban exploration’ into dialogue with other modes of professional, historical and touristic engagement with the built environment. We show here that this is an important move in order to unveil the commonalities of these practices, and the consequences of acknowledging these continuities.

One of the most high profile engagements with buildings attracting attention in both academic and popular circles – and indeed the pages of this journal (Bennett 2011a; 2011b; Garrett 2011a; 2011b) – is urban exploration or urbex. Concerned with the exploration of hidden and forgotten parts of the built environment, focussing on ruins and

derelict sites in particular, urbex is differentiated from a broad suite of other ways of exploring the built environment by a motivation “to locate and explore disordered, marginal, interstitial and infrastructural space through recreational trespass” (Garrett, 2011b, unpaginated). In light of this, urbex is often cast as political – in action if not assertion – based around “the politics of radical freedom” (Garrett 2011a, page 1060). Within the context of the neoliberal global city, it is set against landscapes which are increasingly shut down, smoothed out, commodified and surveilled (Pinder 2005). This mode of urban exploration seeks to challenge the privatisation of public space through ‘tactical’ exploration, opening up the hidden spaces of the city.

Urbex is often constructed around a lineage which draws on political affiliations with situationism, culture jamming and other avant-garde urban tactics (Garrett, 2011a; Bennett, 2011a). In order to subvert rather than simply oppose what can be regarded as the ‘spectacle’ of modern life with its constraining values and roles (Bonnett, 1989), groups such as Situationist International advocated the *dérive* as a type of “politically purposeful ‘drifting’”, which unlike the architectural tours encountered in this paper, involved “a transgressive wandering around and through the many barriers and forbidden zones and distinct atmospheres of the city” (Bonnett, 2009, page 47). In this vein, participants “exploit opportunities for play and subversion as they interact with the city’s spaces” (Pinder, 2005, page 385). Despite the highly structured nature of the tours we focus on later, this sense of playfulness and the joy of being in close proximity to architecture and buildings highlights continuities between urbex and its situationist roots, and other forms of enthusiastic engagement with the built environment.

The emphasis placed on the emotional register of urbex and psychogeography echoes other commentators who discuss “the immediate visceral exploring moment” (DeSilvey, cited in Garrett, 2010, page 1454). In the case of urbex, these powerful emotions are repeatedly linked to marginal sites oft loved by such explorers; as Edensor argues, “more powerful sensations may be sought in places on the urban margins” (2007, page 230). This focus on intensity and bodily sensations, as well as marginal encounters, suggests that these particular forms of urban exploration provide a more authentic and/or deeply felt emotional response to place than is available to others exploring the city. This hierarchy of authentic urban experience extends to the physical practice of urban exploration itself. The thrill of urbex is in accessing places usually off-limits to most people, as well as claiming and experiencing a place first. Even if glimpses of the urban landscape are shared in “invisible networks of association” (Edensor, 2005, page 30) through websites, blogs, photography and encouraging a sense of freedom in a broader population, the praxis of urbex as recreational trespass and academic endeavour, relies on this exclusivity and is threatened by publicity and popularity (Garrett, 2012). Even the language used to describe this conquest or capture of place is often of individual reverie and revelation with the city or individual endeavour tied back to ideas about the self. At least initially then, it is about a personal experience of place; it is not about sharing place with others.

However, urban exploration is for the most part practiced in groups. Despite this, companions on these excursions often remain on the margins of the narratives produced by participants. Much like earlier forms of exploration (see Driver and Jones, 2009; Pinder, 2005), people are hidden from view, resulting in the production of images and

accounts of ‘cities without people’ (Dodge and Kitchin, 2006), ruins, derelict or deserted buildings, silent tube lines and empty streets. Notwithstanding the desolate and derelict representational aesthetics or the secret and transgressive nature of urbex, other people are integral to this mode of exploring the urban. This is true of other forms of urban exploration such as the literary psychogeography of Iain Sinclair whose books are not about solitary travels, but “accounts of journeys made with friends” (Bonnett, 2009, page 58). Urban exploration of various forms then, rely on communities of interest and shared experience, even if this is not clear from the ways in which they are narrated in the popular press.

The politics of urban exploration can also be called into question, or at least placed into context alongside the political aims and claims of others engaging with the built environment. Whilst the subversive nature of situationism has been regarded as “too romantic and too rational a philosophy to be politically plausible” (Bonnett, 1989, page 143) and the urbex appreciation of ruins has been regarded by some as part of a wider appreciation of ruins and dereliction which is often passive, nostalgic or politically regressive, the architectural tours we discuss here incorporate a type of architectural appreciation that is not only emotionally charged, but also politically activated (DeSilvey and Edensor, 2012; High and Lewis, 2007; Steinmetz, 2010). As we highlight in the following sections, the emotional affiliation to architecture encountered through our work with members of The Twentieth Century Society is no less powerful or productive because they incorporate buildings that are sometimes highly regarded, treasured and inhabited, or exploration practices that are unadventurous, conventional, popular, touristic and legal.

Broadening the study of enthusiastic engagement with the built environment, Bennett's account of 'bunkerology' – the infiltration of Cold War Bunkers – also places urban exploration (and its claim to a radical politics) within the context of a wider set of practices. He argues that "the survey and veneration of place ... may be a more significant motivation for urban exploration as practised than psychogeographical reverie and/or transgressive incursion into space and place" (Bennett, 2011a, page 421). Furthermore, the practice of surveying place has its own politics, with the "proliferation of architectural and historical walking tours" by groups like The Twentieth Century Society, "focussing on lost townscapes and highlighting buildings and environments at risk" (Samuel, 1994, page 186). In accounts of both bunkerology and urbex where "places are experienced, enjoyed, recorded, loved, and appreciated" (Garrett, 2011a, page 1050), emotions relating to the joy of, and care for, the built environment are an important part of the practice.

We propose that the architectural tours we discuss should be understood in relation to these practices of urban exploration, but also in the context of a different lineage of exploring place, as embodied and enacted by the figures of the landscape historian, amateur industrial archaeologist and bunkerologist (see Stebbins, 1992, on various figures taking part in these 'serious leisure' activities). Lorimer explains: "In many respects what I see these people [involved with urbex] as are slightly glorified and slightly funkier by their own design, versions of the classic landscape historian or local historian ... I see them as the current generation or a continuation of that much longer tradition" (cited in Garrett, 2010, page 1454). We can link Lorimer's suggestion to a set of practices of seeing, doing and being in the landscape that came into view from the

1950s onwards (Samuel, 1994). In this vein, urban exploration can be seen to merge with, and emerge from, what Samuel refers to as, the historical walk – “retracing the footsteps of the past, or using them as a vantage point to read the landscape” (Samuel, 1994, page 181). These practices, often coordinated through and originating from heritage activist organisations, were often part of broader campaigns to raise consciousness of particular threatened sites, buildings and histories. The architectural enthusiasm featured in this paper is then, part of a broad genealogy of engagements with the built environment.

In his work on country house visiting, Tinniswood (1998) examines the historical development of visiting buildings as tourism, highlighting the connections between the elite practices of the grand tour and more contemporary appreciation of stately home architecture in the UK. Country houses were themselves the focus of early heritage activist campaigns as they came to be threatened in the post-war period (Wright 2009) and Tinniswood thus draws connections between heritage protection, buildings at risk, visiting buildings for leisure, and the broader heritage and tourism industry, highlighting the need to connect these practices to the other sorts of architectural visiting described above.

Whilst our focus is on small group tourism, often to slightly unusual or less well-known sites, these practices are clearly related to what has recently been termed architourism (Ockman and Saloman, 2005). This has been defined as mass tourism to famous architectural sites such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao and is seen to be “the latest tourism trend complete with specialized tour companies and tour guides” (Lasansky, 2004, page 10; see also Edensor 1998; Ockman, 2004; Willson

and McIntosh 2007). Research into this phenomena has raised questions over how and whether architourism encourages a mass public engagement with architecture, what kinds of understandings of the built environment it generates, how it could be used to energise architectural culture, and how it might encourage a return to the sensuality of buildings in an increasingly virtual world (Schwarzer, 2005 page 33).

As Lasansky argues, this type of mass tourism to architectural sites is also related to professional practices of architectural visiting, thus “scholarly and tourist topographies overlap and feed off of one another” (2004 page 5). In the architectural profession, “architectural ‘gazing’ is also a central feature of peer recognition, in terms of the role of the critic. Visiting buildings is thus central to the process of evaluation” (McNeill 2009 page 73). This ‘looking’ is part of professional training, but architects carry with them these ways of looking and evaluating even when at leisure (Ockman, 2005). Importantly, this “active consumption of places has a direct or indirect link to future production” (Ockman, 2005 page 161) and thus connects to the active maintenance and reconstruction of the built environment through architectural design and practice (see Bacon 2001 on the effects of Le Corbusier’s travels on his architecture).

What we can draw from these literatures is that urbex, local history groups, mass tourism, and the architect’s site visit, whilst sometimes differing in their motivations, logics and activities, share many commonalities which we argue forms a continuum in experience and practice. At a basic level they are united because they are all about visiting buildings, but they are also about emotional engagements with the built environment, shared communities of interest, and all, in different ways, influence how

architecture is understood, valued, and physically or politically repositioned into something worth investing in or preserving. We do not claim that urbex is the same as mass tourism, or that a local history society will have the same engagement as an architectural student. Nevertheless, being on site, experiencing first hand, and being moved or motivated by this experience, is a common thread through these diverse interest groups. Moreover, these diverse practices often overlap: architects are members of heritage organisations and visit buildings on holiday; urbexers often show a distinct interest in local history; and the special interest tour morphs into mass tourism when particular architectural styles become commodities. The Twentieth Century Society members and tours should therefore be understood as one particular sort of architectural enthusiast within this broader continuum of enthusiastic and professional engagements with buildings.

Researching Architectural Enthusiasm

We now provide an introduction to The Twentieth Century Society, their wider work in heritage and conservation and our research methodology. In addition to formal institutions charged with preserving the past such as English Heritage and the National Trust, the UK has a strong tradition of architectural enthusiasm and conservation in the form of societies, such as The Victorian Society and The Georgian Group, as well as recent additions, such as the Manchester Modernist Society. The Twentieth Century Society, was founded in 1979 as The Thirties Society, because at this time art deco architecture was particularly vulnerable. It subsequently broadened its remit and is now regarded as the most significant organisation for the safeguarding of the architectural and

design heritage of Britain from 1914 onwards. Encompassing art deco, revival style, Modernism, Brutalism and, most recently, post-modern buildings, some famous examples include London's South Bank, Battersea Power Station, and the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill. The Society's aims are two-fold: first, "conservation, to protect the buildings and design that characterise the twentieth century in Britain," through campaigns for the protection of threatened buildings and comments on statutory listed building applications (with support from English Heritage), as well as an official role in the planning system recognised in government guidance, and second, "education, to extend our knowledge and appreciation" of buildings and design through the publication of a regular magazine and annual scholarly journal, as well as a programme of conferences and lectures and architectural tours (further details can be found here: www.c20society.org.uk).

The Society has a national office in London, as well as semi-autonomous regional groups located in the North West, South West and North East. It currently employs two full-time and two part-time staff. At the end of 2012, the Society's membership stood at 1984, made up of architects (retired and in practice), architecture students, builders, civil servants involved in planning, as well as other interested publics. The majority of members pay their subscription of £40 per year and receive the magazines and journals, but do not participate in the various scheduled events or volunteer for the Society. There is an active core of volunteers and 'regulars' who run and attend events including the architectural tours, contribute to the Society's casework (for example commenting on listing applications or suggesting buildings to be considered for listing) and support the Society's other initiatives. Despite the range of architectural enthusiasts who support the Society, its membership is biased towards white, middle class, male and often older

individuals. Broadening membership by carrying out events such as the architectural tours is seen as an important aspect of the Society's educational programme.

The architectural tours are developed by the Events Committee which accept suggestions from volunteer guides and finalise the dates and timings of each tour. The volunteer guides – a mixture of working and retired architects, planners, architectural historians (and those in allied professions), students, and enthusiasts with no relevant formal training – are then free to plan their tours. Whilst popular tours are sometimes repeated, they are usually designed from scratch or based upon the guides' interests, with motivations ranging from architectural periods and styles, an appreciation of design, and commonly, a strong desire to share, educate and excite others about twentieth century architecture (authors' interviews). There are a small group of active members who often attend the tours alongside a similar number who attend one or two a year. Their interest and training in architecture broadly mirrors that seen in the tour guides. The group size varies depending upon the nature of the tour, for example a walk for new members with two guides might have 40 participants, whilst a half-day tour with one guide in a residential area might be limited to 25, and a coach tour would usually involve ensuring the coach was fully booked. In return for their booking fee, approximately £10, or more for a coach trip, participants are given a copy of the 'notes' which offer detailed descriptions of the buildings to be visited, sometimes accompanied by photographs. The booking fee is a source of income and used to support the Society's activities, in particular its casework. Some participants will bring along a camera to capture interesting buildings and architectural styles, as well as a notepad and pen for further documentation, whilst others will simply enjoy the tour. This emphasis on documentation, photography

and records of being on site, as well as the varied forms of engagement within visiting groups, echo accounts of other types of building visits (Edensor, 1998; Lasansky, 2004).

In order to account for the emotional geographies of the Society's tours, we adopted a multi-method approach incorporating in-depth interviews with volunteer guides prior to the tour during a site 'recce', followed by interviews with guides and participants after the tour. During the tours, we gathered fieldnotes from observations, informal discussions with guides and participants and attended to our own emotions. Members of the Society were invited to take part in the research through word of mouth within the Society. Participants were therefore self-selecting. Though not representative of the Society as a whole, this method nevertheless successfully captured a good proportion of the active membership. In addition to interviews, which are quoted here verbatim (anonymised), the bulk of the material drawn on below is derived from first-hand observation of three tours in March and April 2012. Two tours were organised by the national Society focussing on London, namely 'Westminster Car Parks' and 'Civic Plunge Revisited', and the third tour was organised by the North West regional group in conjunction with the Manchester Modernist Society, entitled 'Manchester's Post War Chapels, Churches and Chaplaincies'. In the next section, we use the example of the architectural tour to highlight one form of architectural enthusiasm as part of a broader continuum of visiting buildings. In doing so, we reveal the importance of emotion to experiences of the built environment, the relevance of shared encounters to the construction of these emotions, and the role of the tour in producing participants as architectural agents, actively reshaping the built environment through their care and campaigning.

Emotional Geographies of The Twentieth Century Society's Architectural Tours

Useful to our discussion of shared emotions within the architectural tour is the idea that The Twentieth Century Society is as an 'interpretive community' (Fish 1980), whereby emotion is shared through a collective espousal of the customs, values and concerns of the Society. As Reed suggests in his discussion of walking tour guides, "by paying attention to specific interpretative acts one can begin to appreciate the realities they shape and the subjects they constitute. Members of a single interpretive community are distinguished by what they agree to see" (2008, page 1392). This 'agreement' hints at the sociability of emotion, often placing us in the company of kindred spirits (Geoghegan, 2013). As a result the tour produces a sense of belonging wherein there is "a dynamic emotional attachment that relates individuals to the material and social worlds that they inhabit and experience" (Wood and Waite, 2011, page 201). Whilst it would be inaccurate to claim that the participants featured in what follows were a coherent group, indeed the majority only meet on the occasional tour, what binds them is their collective interest and enthusiasm for twentieth century architecture. In what follows, we reveal the ways in which shared emotions between people and place not only underpin, alter and sustain the architectural tour, but also rely upon mutual feelings of enjoyment, reverence, anticipation and boredom, and concern and care to produce community identity, engage with architecture and share concern for buildings at risk.

Sharing enjoyment: legal fun in multi-storey car parks in Westminster

According to one volunteer guide, people join The Twentieth Century Society and take part in its events first and foremost because they “want to *enjoy* buildings”. Enjoyment is at the heart of the Society and is linked to its remit to educate and conserve twentieth century architecture. During a meeting with a volunteer guide to discuss tour plans, he remarked that organising an event has “generally been stimulated by ‘I would like to see that...Why don’t I bring people with me?’”. Elaborating on this point, he highlighted the communal nature of experiencing and knowing architecture. This discussion went on to illustrate the value in utilising the architectural knowledge of tour participants in order to create a better understanding of the buildings. More specifically, he noted that it was beneficial to the experience of the tour when participants contributed their own knowledge of place, either through historical anecdote, lay or expert opinion, thereby adding their own voices. In the guide’s words: “that’s all part of the story-telling”. This communal expertise was complemented by shared feelings about buildings. He said: “It’s about sharing, isn’t it? I think this is, for me, the bits I enjoy about events [are that it is] about sharing, you share your enjoyment of a building”.

Enjoyment is an emotion that recurs throughout the tours themselves, reflected in this example from our fieldnotes on a walking tour of Westminster Car Parks, which has resonances with certain urbex themes (the unknown, the unexpected, the hidden):

We diverge from the main itinerary to go through an interesting looking archway into a beautifully tiled courtyard. Someone says to me: ‘this is the thing with the Society, you go round the back’. There is lots of ‘oohing’ and ‘aahing’ and the cameras come out. Some people just stand still and admire, others scurry closer to

examine individual details and record them. There are exclamations: ‘it’s better inside than out!’ and lots of joyful laughter at the unexpected discovery of a beautiful building hidden away.

In this account, the emotional response to the building, which is neither famous, nor on the itinerary, is clearly expressed. The pleasure in this unexpected experience was obvious, particularly for the tour participant who asked whether we might investigate what was through the archway. For the group, this encounter became a palpable form of exploration, seeking out hidden gems collectively. The communal nature of the ‘discovery’ and the simultaneous unveiling of the tiled courtyard to the group heightened the emotional response. Unlike many of the other buildings visited on the tours featured here, this site had not been encountered before, even by the volunteer guide. It is possible to argue that being in an unexpected place and learning about it anew with others who share the same interest is part of “the process of emotional engagement with places” (Bendiner-Viania 2005, page 460). Indeed, for members of the Society experiencing this joy in a group of like-minded individuals heightens the value and meaning of their enthusiasm.

This shared experience of joy was highlighted in discussions with tour participants. They often noted sociability as an important aspect of the events that augmented their own enjoyment of the urban landscape: “It’s about the conviviality, that’s what works”. Yet, as one respondent remarked: “the price of conviviality on these trips is that everything is soured if there is a falling out”. These less positive emotional encounters can arise if one tour participant pointedly challenges the knowledge of others

in the group, or disrupts the rhythm of the tour to explore ‘on their own’. Geoghegan argues that “whilst enthusiasm as an emotional affiliation gives rise to [positive] senses of self and feelings of belonging and attachment, it also has the potential to disrupt, challenge and alter social relations in space” (2013, page 45).

Reverence: Appreciating Asphalters in St Anselm’s Hall Chapel, Manchester

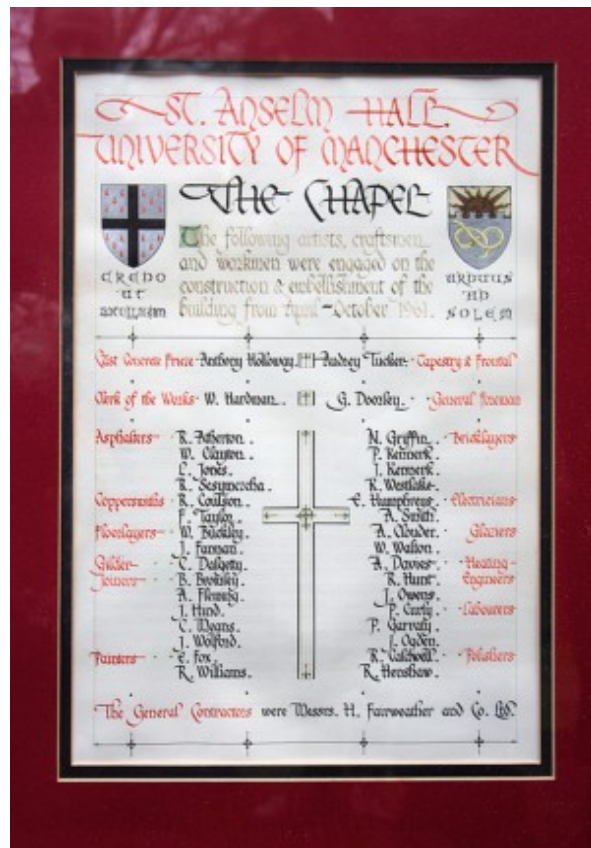


Figure 1: Commemorative plaque in St Anselm’s Hall Chapel.

(Image courtesy of Shirley Searle)

The photograph in Figure 1 shows a mounted calligraphy that was produced to commemorate the opening of St Anselm’s Hall Chapel which is part of the University of Manchester estates. The inscription reads:

“The following artists, craftsmen and workmen were engaged on the construction and embellishment of the building from April – October 1961.”

A list of the following craftsmen is then cited:

“Clerk of the Works, General Foreman, Asphalters, Bricklayers, Coppersmiths, Electricians, Floorlayers, Glaziers, Gilder-Joiners, Heating Engineers, Painters, Labourers, Polishers”.

During the day-long tour which focused specifically on post-war churches and chapels in Manchester, the frame was noticed on the floor of the entrance hall to St Anselm’s Hall Chapel. Upon its discovery by one of the tour members, there was an air of delight and surprise. The group gathered around the frame to get a closer look. There was a sense that something had been uncovered that could have very easily been missed, specifically an opportunity to encounter an additional means of understanding and appreciating the building being visited. The entrance hall was poorly lit and the frame was carried outside to be examined more closely and photographed and therefore documented more effectively.

The unusual content of the frame was of particular significance. This was not a date stone indicating when the chapel had been opened and by whom. Instead what had been found was a hand-drawn record of the labour that had been invested in its production. It was an acknowledgement of all the works – each craft being named

individually – from bricklayers to coppersmiths to asphalters. As one tour member commented: “How often do you see asphalters being acknowledged?” This rare glimpse of the kinds of behind the scenes and often overlooked skills that go into ‘practising architecture’ (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011) highlights, not only the collective joy experienced via the unexpected discovery, but also the reverence in the act of acknowledgement, in appreciating a job well done. Jacobs and Merriman have commented on the different registers in which architectural engagements and encounters manifest themselves, showing how “these varying practices entail different kinds of embodied engagement, generating complex emotional attachments and experiences of inhabitation” (2011, page 13). For these enthusiastic architectural practitioners, namely the members of the tour who paid attention to the frame (not all did), it became a means of expressing an emotional affiliation that went beyond appreciating architectural design and form, becoming more akin to a memorialisation and celebration of a lived history by providing an insight into the biography of the building, one where named craftsmen were remembered.

The savouring of the object and setting was tinged with feelings of frustration by some tour members. To appreciate the detail of the frame involved bending down to the floor to get a closer look: “It’s such a shame it’s on the floor, it really should be hung on the wall so that people can see it.” When it was time to move on to the next stop on the tour, the frame was respectfully returned to the entrance hall of the chapel, although in a slightly more obvious place than the site where it was first discovered. Here, in a small way, tour participants became active agents, themselves doing building work, connecting meaning-making, emotion and practice (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011). Considered by

many tour members as deserving of greater attention, the excitement, surprise and reverence that coalesced around this piece of hidden history goes some way to showing how the material presence of this unusual record of ‘practised architecture’ played an important role in making this stop on the tour more historically, architecturally, socially, and indeed, emotionally significant. The interest, intrigue and joy that was shared around this object suggests an active engagement with the surroundings during the course of the tours, which might involve careful inspection of premises to look for interesting and exciting design features or ephemera. Reverence, however, did not preclude tour members peeping behind curtains, looking behind closed doors and searching for light switches to aid photography. Indeed, understood as architectural practitioners and experts, able to reconstruct (albeit on a small scale) the buildings visited, tour participants could legitimate their explorations behind closed doors.

Anticipation and boredom: “Just wait until we get to Dagenham!”

A common emotion experienced prior to and during the tours was the feeling of anticipation. Participants often book tours weeks or months in advance. Some tours are more popular than others depending on the reputation of the tour guide, tour locations or the potential to access private houses. During the tours, anticipation for specific locations, described by one volunteer guide as “jewel in the crown” sites, helps to maintain the momentum of the tour and participants’ passionate engagement with the buildings. Anticipation is particularly useful when energy levels are low in the group and tour fatigue is setting in. For example, on a coach tour of North London town halls, by mid-

afternoon and with nine sites already visited, energy levels began to wane and grumbles began on some sections of the coach.

Some members, including me, were a little fatigued. The guides were keen to highlight what was coming up “we’ve got a real treat for you coming up later ... just wait until we get to Dagenham!” Although for an inexperienced member like me this seemed a slightly strange sentiment, members who had visited Dagenham Civic Centre on previous trips echoed the guide’s words, “Oh, it’s brilliant, you’ll love it”, “I wonder how it’s surviving”, “Will it be in a better state than last time?”, “How will the restoration have worked?” (From fieldnotes)

Whilst Dagenham is residential, it is also a well-known industrial area, home to the Ford Dagenham plant. On the tour, anticipation worked to both motivate bored (and tired) tour participants and to excite those who had visited before. It also stimulated discussion amongst participants, raising questions such as who had visited before? Would it fulfil expectations? Would it be a disappointment?



Figure 2. Twentieth Century Society tour participants explore Dagenham Civic Centre.

Photograph taken by the author.

Driving through Dagenham, passing depressed housing estates with few facilities, the “treat” of Dagenham seemed somewhat unlikely. But suddenly we saw the Civic Centre [Figure 3]. Large, set in large, rather sparse, open area. Beautiful and beautifully illuminated in the late afternoon sunshine. Everybody disembarked the coach, stirred out of their lethargy and keen once again. Inside I was particularly taken with the ceiling in the main hall, but others poured into the semi-circular council chamber. “A real gem” according to one contributing guide. Excitement

sated. Concerns averted. We could all enjoy the building. Taking in all its details. Unlike other buildings visited that day, this one did not prompt anxiety. (From fieldnotes)

This sense of anticipation also highlighted the impermanence of the materials of architecture, such as concrete, bricks and mortar. Buildings last visited by members a decade ago could be significantly changed over the years. It was noted that maintenance work could have had an impact: small changes could have made a vast improvement or destroyed a perfect finish, effecting how the building held together as an architectural “gem” (Jacobs and Merriman, 2011; Strebel, 2011). Not all valued buildings are listed, and many of those in everyday use are under constant wear and tear. Concern and anxiety about buildings, as well as excitement at being able to visit them and view interiors, both account for the collective sense of anticipation on the tour.

Concern and Care: Conversations around conservation

Emotions are about being moved. They move us away from and towards things we like and dislike. Emotions moved tour participants towards potential buildings ‘at risk’, providing an impetus for action. In this section, we highlight the less highly charged, and frequently more sombre, responses encountered on architectural tours. Going back to the architectural tour of ‘Manchester’s Post War Chapels, Churches and Chaplaincies’, we consider the precarious nature of twentieth century buildings and architecture within the wider urban landscape.

Entering into the chapel [Hulme Hall Chapel, Manchester] I became very aware of how cold and damp it was. There seemed to be a general appreciation of the space. A Scandinavian influenced design, with high-set windows that provided glimpses of surrounding trees. One person commented, “I feel as if I should be in the middle of a forest in Sweden”. Some took the opportunity to sit on available seats to read notes provided on the hand-outs, others continued with intense photographing of certain features that were deemed to be particularly interesting. I couldn’t always fathom what these were. A number paid attention to the tour commentary, others didn’t. Eyes began to look towards the feature window in the main room of the chapel. (From fieldnotes)

The attention to the chapel’s features prompted comments from tour members about the conservation and maintenance of twentieth century buildings. There was evidence of a leaky roof and miscoloured ceiling tiles. Despite its state of disrepair, the chapel is still used on a regular basis.

I found it actually quite uncomfortable to be in the building because it was so damp and cold. Others, like me, drifted outside and commented on the atmosphere, relaying how it was almost oppressive. Some said, it “got you in the chest”. This was all conveyed in a subdued tone. (From fieldnotes)

Care and concern for the building and a distinct state of sadness became apparent.

A small number of participants were taking a good look at the exterior of the building. They paused to point out how buddleia and other foliage had begun to grow out of the roof. “That’s never a good sign.” “Isn’t it a shame there isn’t the money for maintenance.” “This is quite typical of buildings of this age.” (From fieldnotes)

This visit to Hulme Hall Chapel was tinged with an air of sadness and concern, both for the future of this particular building and more widely in terms of a sense of ‘period’. It reiterated how hard it is to raise or maintain funding for this type of built heritage from the near recent past. As twentieth century architecture is increasingly framed as ‘heritage’ the difficulties associated with promoting it as something that has inherent architectural merit was often expressed during tours through a voiced concern for buildings that are perceived to be neglected. This is particularly powerful when other architectural periods, for example the Georgian and Victorian, are more easily identified by the general public as ‘worth saving’. Yet as the following example highlights, architectural tours can also be an occasion when the emotions of care and concern can be used for political purpose, tour participants becoming architectural agents in the recording and highlighting of buildings under threat, and the subsequent lobbying for their protection and conservation.

Anticipation and concern intertwined on another stop on the ‘Civic Plunge Revisted’ coach tour of North London town halls. This time it was Wembley Municipal Offices – a pared down modern brick building – described by architectural historian Pevsner as “neither fanciful nor drab” (1951, page 170, cited in tour notes). Carrying with it the architectural capital of the expert Pevsner, this building captured the imagination of

the group, with beautiful fixtures and fittings still in situ, partly as a result of limited council funding for modernization. It delivered excitement and enthusiasm in abundance. During the tour, it was revealed that the council will be moving to a new building within the Wembley complex in 2013. This led to concern amongst the group regarding the building's listed status and any potential future use. On a reconnaissance visit to Wembley with the tour leader a few weeks before, he said: "It's important to come here because it will soon be casework". As mentioned earlier, casework is central to the Society's activities: "to provide support and advice to architects and planning authorities to protect the best twentieth century architecture and design, whether through listing or sympathetic development and management" (www.c20society.org.uk/casework-campaigns). On the tour itself, the group were shown around the building by a planning representative for Brent Council.

The issue of the building's future is raised again. "What will happen to it?" one member demands, to which the Head of Planning answers optimistically: "we're confident it will find a good use". Though he looks a bit sheepish. One of the guides adds: "This is one we'll have to keep an eye on". (From fieldnotes)

This exchange reveals how an emotional response is used as a call for action. Architectural tours are predominantly for enjoyment and to raise much needed funds to support the Society's work, but they are also used to secure a response in order to motivate action for current and future campaigns and casework. This was discussed openly with participants on a number of the tours as part of this research. Indeed, as the

former chairman of The Twentieth Century Society, Alan Powers, recently noted: “Conservation is history in action, drawing on the emotions aroused by the potential loss of a piece of evidence that may also be a work of art and a practical contribution to society” (2012, page 43).

Conclusion: championing twentieth century architecture

Through our concept of architectural enthusiasm, we have examined the emotional geographies of the architectural tour to highlight the passionate ways in which people experience the built environment. Furthermore, we have illuminated the effect of emotions in shaping people’s engagements with buildings and how this links to a wider politics of conservation. We argue that architectural enthusiasm provides new directions for research into the built environment in three ways.

First, the tours discussed here illustrate the role of the architectural enthusiast as agent. Our focus on an architectural conservation society, such as The Twentieth Century Society, highlights the value of engaging with the lived experience of ‘architectural practitioners’ – not only those dwelling in buildings, but also caring for them in other ways. Alongside the figures of the architect, planner, politician, tenant and conservation officer, the architectural enthusiast needs to be incorporated into wider discussions of architectural agency, including strategies surrounding conservation and management.

Second, a focus on architectural enthusiasm highlights the potential of these practices to shape and transform the built environment at a number of scales. The volunteer-led architectural tours featured here incorporate practices of studying, interpreting and ways of seeing, feeling and experiencing that in turn produce and shape architectural

environments (Adey 2008; Merriman, 2010). As seen in some of the small interventions in buildings on the Society's tours, architectural enthusiasts are involved in the on-going building work of architecture. In addition, architectural enthusiasm is strongly embedded within a politics of conservation at not only a local, but also a national and international level. Put to work in the realm of politics and planning, enthusiasm can contribute to a re-evaluation of buildings and architectural spaces that may otherwise be dismissed out of hand. This culture of care surrounding the future of buildings from the recent past is fuelled, we argue, by the ways in which these buildings emotionally move architectural enthusiasts, something which is often actively harnessed by conservation lobbyists and groups. Care and enthusiasm are directed towards positive action in order to campaign for and save buildings. Our research demonstrates how architectural tours are about providing gratification to the participants, as well as a very real link to the broader work of the Society in protecting an architectural period/style.

Third, and finally, a focus on architectural enthusiasm highlights commonalities between the tours examined here and other ways of visiting buildings, and thus illuminates a continuum of engagements with the built environment. Theorising visits to buildings as part of a continuum is productive, showing how existing literatures have underplayed some aspects of engagements with the built environment. For example, contemporary accounts of urbex often highlight individual emotional experiences rather than the *shared* emotion that drives such engagements (Bennett, 2011a; Garrett 2011a). Moreover in describing the heightened emotional registers available in ruins and other marginal spaces, this research has perhaps occluded similar emotional engagements in other spaces. Whilst we would never dispute the meaningful nature of and emotional

registers experienced by urban explorers, our research reveals comparable emotions can be found in practices often considered by a general audience to be more mundane, namely spaces that are conserved, protected and to which access is sanctioned. We argue that architectural tourism and architectural enthusiasm as organised, legal group activities can be just as exhilarating and meaningful for participants as other forms of more transgressive and subversive urban exploration. Indeed, within a wide continuum of practices of visiting buildings, people encounter the built environment “with [varying degrees of] excitement *and* enthusiasm” (Bennett, 2011a, page 424).

Theorising encounters and visits to buildings as part of a continuum is productive because it draws attention to the overlaps between seemingly diverse roles and identities. As we have seen here, those involved with The Twentieth Century Society tours as architectural enthusiasts leading or participating in walks were often also involved with planning and architecture in their professional lives, or with other amateur engagements with the built environment, in the form of membership of other groups, involvement in urbex, and/or local history. Furthermore, conceptualising these practices as part of a continuum helps to move away from precisely this type of bracketing of enthusiasts and other agents in terms of dualisms between amateur and professional, objective and emotional.

Whilst in case work and the listing process, a manner and style of objectivity is preferred for formal reports and documentation, the embodied position adopted on tours reveals a love for architecture, buildings, styles, materials and finishes, even concrete. Society volunteers act as experts on the casework committee and by leading tours, providing information about threatened, exciting, or as yet unconsidered twentieth

century buildings. Architectural enthusiasm should not be regarded as oppositional to official knowledges or practices, rather enthusiasm offers an important means of broadening what counts as expertise in relation to cultures of conservation and rethinking architectural space more generally. In sum, through the strong focus on emotional engagement and the overlaps between many of the practices described in the first part of this paper, we have highlighted the need to attend to emotion not only as meaning making but also the practiced and practical applications of what such engagements with buildings can do. This applies to all realms of architectural engagement– including professional planning and architectural discourse and practice.

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