

Affective Cities

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I Introduction

Contemporary western cities are full of people engaging in exercise, sport, and fitness related activities. The scope of these activities is broad, and includes such relatively solitary practices as walking, running, and jogging; collective field sports like cricket, football, and softball; and a range of somatic movement-practices such as dance, Tai'Chi, and Yoga. Yet despite their diversity, these activities all share a number of characteristics. Perhaps most obviously, they all work upon and modify the capacities of bodies in some way: to that extent they can each be understood to focus attention on the somatic dimensions of experience. They also all involve the mobilisation and monitoring of effort and exertion: in other words, to engage in them demands some kind of corporeal work and the expenditure of energy, even if the level and intensity of this expenditure varies enormously. Furthermore, most (if not all) foreground *kinaesthetic* experience: that is, each involves and generates the sense of movement through space, even if the range and scope of this movement varies enormously – from the scale of miles to the micro-gestural.

Many of the activities listed above are not distinctively urban. And indeed a great deal of work in physical cultural studies has analysed these activities without stressing their urban-ness. So what does focussing on the urban environment add for those of us interested in physical culture? In the following chapter we aim to highlight four reasons why attending to the urban environment can contribute to physical cultural studies and equally how physical cultural studies might contribute to work within urban studies:

- 1) The link between urbanites' physical activity levels and urbanization is an area of long standing concern among both serious and popular commentators. Writers such as Simmel (1903) and Mumford (1936) argued that urban environments generate a certain somatic passivity, anticipating more recent speculations on the link between the changing organization of cities and the increased incidence of obesity (see, for instance, Sui, 2003). At the same time,

cities have also been understood as the key sites for the development and experiment of a range of techniques for encouraging bodies to become active through different techniques (Schwartz 1992).

2) The relation between physical activity and cities provides a crucial way of understanding how a range of cultural, social and political ideals are articulated, reproduced, and regulated through what bodies do in particular sites and spaces (see Bale, 2001; Markula, 1995). The nature of the activities undertaken at these sites is constrained and facilitated by a range of social, cultural, economic, and political processes, including gender, income, and ethnicity (see, for example Evans, 2006; Fusco, 2006; Hargreaves and Vertinsky, 2007; Leeds Craig and Liberti, 2007; McCormack 1999; Panter, Jones and Hillsdon, 2008). At the same time, exercise, sport and fitness activities have the potential to rework and rearticulate some of these processes (Borden, 2001).

3) The materiality of cities is both relational and processual, in ways that complicate any neat juxtaposition of the ‘material’ and the ‘immaterial’ (Latham and McCormack 2004; Latham 2016). Exercise, sport, and fitness complicate questions of urban materiality because they are profoundly affective: the materiality of the spaces of which they are generative is not just a matter of concrete structures or, indeed, of flesh. It is also about the production and circulation of affective energies and atmospheres whose materiality is distributed, vague, *and* felt.

4) Thinking about exercise, sports, and fitness activities in relation to urban environments provides an opportunity to explore the ways in which physical cultures are entangled with how cities are imagined, engineered, and inhabited through techniques and technologies of experience and public involvement. This can involve critical investigation of how such activities are mobilised as part of collective spectacles – most obviously through mega sporting projects such as the Olympics – designed to revive or boost urban economies (Gratton, Shibli, and Cole, 2005; Howell, 2005; Gold and Gold, 2007), and as part of deliberate strategies of place promotion (Silk and Amis, 2005; L’Etang, 2006). But on a much more mundane level, exercise, sport and fitness provide significant modes of experiencing

urban space – through ways of moving and feeling. Put another way, these activities are important techniques for sensing urban space.

II Practices of affective activity

To begin, we wish to consider exercise, sport and fitness activities in relation to a growing recognition of the *affective* dimensions of urban life: those aspects of urban life characterised by the emergence, circulation, and experience of emotions, moods, feelings, passions, and affect (Thrift, 2008). While the affective dimensions of urban life have been remarked upon by a number of important historical figures, the analysis of these dimensions has been recently been developed in important ways. There is a growing recognition of the need to articulate a differentiated understanding of and vocabulary for affectivity (Massumi, 2002; McCormack, 2013; Thrift, 2008;). There is a greater focus on the specific processes and techniques through which affectivity circulates and is distributed within and across cities (Katz, 1999; Sheller, 2003). And, there is a greater recognition that affectivity is not a kind of experiential or representational veil that obscures the real structures underpinning urban life, but that it is a crucial part of the everyday infra-structural materialities of urban experience. This, in turn, means that the affective life of cities has many different valences: cities are full of fears, traumas, and anxieties, but they are also full of a range of “affective possibilities” offering opportunities for inhabiting cities in manifold ways (Conradson and Latham, 2007).

That exercise, sport, and fitness are affective is all too obvious – their enactment is both motivated by and generative of a range of intensely affective experiences, from anxiety, to hope, to fear, and joy. Beyond this observation however, we can make a number of important claims about the affective dimensions of exercise, sport, and fitness activities, these practices reveal, albeit in different ways, the differentiated quality of urban affectivity. To begin, participation in these activities provides a particularly useful way of foregrounding the pre-personal relations of intensity that form a sensate background to urban life, and from which affective economies of belonging emerge with varying degrees of extensity and duration. This is perhaps most obvious in field sports such as football, in which a set of simple attractors – goals, a ball, players – potentialises a more than personal space of

affective intensity (Massumi 2002). But such fields are never just a matter of affect: their intensities are also registered as feeling in the moving bodies of both participants and spectators – for many people, whether live or via TV, it is impossible to just watch a game. A game that is worthy of the name will be felt – and expressed – as so many shared movements, collective anticipations, and demonstrative frustrations. And both participants and spectators will also express these felt intensities as collectively recognisable emotions.

Then, and second, exercise, sport, and fitness have increasingly become understood and undertaken as deliberate techniques for affective self-monitoring and management within contemporary metropolitan life. An analysis of these activities as techniques of the reflexive self is nothing new (see Mauss, 1979): but whereas earlier work focused on their importance in relation to the expenditure/accumulation of symbolic capital, more recent writing has emphasised their role as techniques of affective embodiment through which emotions, moods and feelings are routinely generated (Monaghan, 2001; Crossley, 2004). The affective ‘effect’ of many kinaesthetic practices has become an integral part of popular discourses about health and fitness, with activities such as walking and running regularly promoted as techniques for combating a range of urban ills including depression, anxiety, and panic attacks.

Such comments obviously need some qualification. There is a real risk of taking at face value the “effects” of these affects (see Kolata, 2003). In many respects the question of how they work is below the onto-epistemological thresholds of the social sciences. Yet this should not mean that they should be dismissed, or written out of socio-culturally inflected accounts of physical activity: indeed, these affects serve as an important reminder of how pre-cognitive and physiological processes are integral to the experience of urban space (Hitchings and Latham 2016).

Third, insofar as physical activities are important techniques for amplifying, modulating and circulating affectivity in cities, these activities are also generative of distinctive spaces whose emergence and organization is determined, at least in part, by the possibilities of generating forms of collective

affective experience at different scales. As Ehrenreich (2007) argues large stadiums are particularly obvious in this regard – they are designed as much to produce affective atmospheres as to conjure a symbolic statement about the meaning of a city on the make. Sport is a machine for generating collective affects. But the amplification, modulation, and circulation of affectivity also take place in spaces of more modest scale. We might think, for instance, of a range of playing fields, parks, and recreational spaces. And we might think here of the streets in which urban marathons and fun runs take place, an example to which we will return later in the paper. In each case, the affective ecology of these sites is not just a by-product of the activity that takes place there. It is part of the felt materiality of the site, part of what gives it its distinctive quality – an atmosphere or background that is not just a way of sugar-coating something that would otherwise seem irrational, or whose significance is reducible to economies of representational meaning (Latham and McCormack 2004).

III Techniques and technologies of kinaesthetic involvement

In addition to the affective qualities of their spaces, sport, exercise, and fitness activities also provide an important way of thinking through the materiality of distinctive kinds of kinaesthetic ‘movement-spaces’ (Thrift, 2008) within cities. We can think of kinaesthesia as a kind of background proprioception that “translates the exertions and ease of the body’s encounters with objects into a muscular memory of relationality” (Massumi, 2002: 59). While all forms of somatic experience involve this kinaesthetic sense, certain kinds of physical activity – such as running, jogging, and walking – place primacy on this element of somatic practice, albeit with different degrees of intensity, and with different degrees of mediation through apparel, technology, and technique.

As we noted in the introduction, working upon and foregrounding the kinaesthetic experience of cities through techniques and technologies is not necessarily new. For instance, Hillel Schwartz has identified the emergence at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, of a set of cultural and corporeal tendencies organised around the relationship between movement and emotional expression: “from nursery school play and grammar school penmanship on through organized sports to adult gymnastics and beyond, to the design of prosthetic devices. The training of large- and small-

muscle movements was regularly if not always allied to the new kinaesthetic in both its expressive and operative aspects, with which technology was often concordant” (1992: 106).

This urban kinaesthetic has developed in various ways, not least through various kinds of technical enhancement. One of the more obvious of these is the running shoe, which has evolved into one of the key interfaces through which urban space is imagined, engineered, and experienced (Tenner, 2003; Lash and Lury, 2007). At the same time, practices like running and walking have been reinvented in deliberate ways, often with the aid of specific technical devices (see Shove and Pantzer, 2005; Latham 2015; also Ingold, 2004). Consider, for instance, the case of Nordic Walking, around which has developed a distinctive material-kinaesthetic culture. Originating in Finland, Nordic-walking has become increasingly popular throughout Europe and North America. The key characteristic of Nordic Walking is the cultivation of a distinctive walking technique with the aid of two poles. Compared with unaided walking, the advantages of using these poles are, apparently, a more relaxed walking rhythm, a longer (and more regular) stride, with an increased level of calorie burn.

As Shove and Pantzer (2005: 43) have argued, the growth of Nordic walking can be understood as a series of “successive, but necessarily localized (re)invention” in different sites. What is also remarkable about this process is the degree to which it involves re-imagining and re-inhabiting urban space – one no longer needs to go out into the country to walk seriously – and how it generates its own forms of associations and collective events.

What-is-more the process of activating bodies in cities is being facilitated by new alignments between kinaesthetic techniques and a range of other technologies. The most obvious in this regard is the use of a range of bio-data and geo-data technologies such as pulse monitors and GPS devices in order to record physiological activity and physical location, in addition to providing motivation (See Buttussi et al, 2006). At the same time, there is an emerging synchrony between techniques for mapping and managing the routes and rates of exercise, and technologies of affective modulation, most notably music. A perhaps more surprising example is provided by video games. Where once it was seen as one

of the key factors in encouraging a more sedentary lifestyle the video game has now emerged as possible solution for generating modes of physical/virtual interactivity in cities (see van Borries, Waltz, and Böttger, 2007).

Of these ‘exergames’, Konami’s *Dance Dance Revolution* (DDR) TM, is one of the most famous. Developed in the late 1990s DDR involves a dance pad on the floor, on which players need to move in time with the rhythm of an accompanying track. Tremendously popular, DDR has also generated its own online user groups, and there is some evidence that it and other exergames do allow players to increase the intensity of effort and exertion (Tan et al 2002; see also Mokka et al., 2003; Warburton et al, 2007). A slightly more recent variation on this is Nintendo’s Wii FitTM. According to Nintendo, the Wii Fit “combines fun and fitness in one product” and “can change how you exercise, how you balance, and even how you move”, using an interactive “balance board” (cf. Francombe-Webb 2015)

As the examples above illustrate, techniques and technologies of popular kinaesthetic activity are highly commodified. In itself this claim is rather unremarkable: such activity has always been commodified (see Smith Maguire, 2008). But what has changed has the extent to which the experience of movement promised by kinaesthetic techniques and technologies has become part of complex processes of branding urban space. While some analyses focus on the representational dimensions of this branding (Duncan, 1994; Eskes, Duncan and Miller, 1998), there is a growing recognition that the brand has become more than a representational phenomenon. As Celia Lury has argued, the brand “is a platform for the patterning of activity, a mode of organizing activities in time and space, [...] a site – or diagram of interactivity, not of interaction”(2004: 1). There is a close association between the brand and the kinaesthetic and affective aspects of sport and fitness practices and the brand, given that it “is in and of movement” (ibid: 15).

V Exercising publics

If exercise, sport, and fitness provide important techniques for working on the affective and kinaesthetic registers of urban space, they are also important insofar as they are generative of

distinctive kinds of collective events and experiences. Think here of the myriad marathons, half-marathons, 10K runs, and fun runs of all kinds that take place in cities. Of these, the urban marathon is perhaps the most interesting. Why? For one reason, it is one of the most distinctively urban of mass participation events (Berking and Neckel, 1993), literally requiring the commandeering of city streets for an activity that inconveniences many other urban inhabitants. Furthermore, it is an event that genuinely transcends the categories of exercise, sport, and fitness, involving many participants who do not even describe themselves as ‘runners’.

Take for, example, the annual Berlin city marathon. Every year 40,000 runners, in-line skaters, walkers, wheelchair and pedal-chair riders, assemble in Berlin to compete in this event. Witnessed by close to a million spectators, the Berlin marathon is broadcast live not only by the local television station Radio Brandenburg and Berlin (RBB), but also by the national television channel ZDF. In terms of its sheer operational logistics, the Berlin Marathon is a significant event in the life of this city, requiring the registration and regulation of tens of thousands of contestants, the marshalling the crowds of viewers, and the organisation of the necessary road closures.

How then to make sense of this kind of event? One way is to understand participation in the urban marathon through the lens of post-modern critiques of sport. In this vein, Helmuth Berking and Sighard Neckel argue that the marathon offers itself “directly for the symptomatic reading of the relationship between urbanity and individualization” (1993: 67). In these terms, the marathon recasts “the personal experience of the city as a test of character, a challenge and existential struggle in dramatic form” (ibid., 76). And, as Berking and Neckel, drawing upon Bourdieu (1978) observe, the demands marathon participation places on the individual means that it tends to be the pursuit of the urban middle classes seeking self-transformation (see also Reischer, 2001). The marathon runner may well be the embodiment of the modern pursuit of an urban ethic of individuality through the discipline and training of the body: yet the urban marathon is also an event through which individual participation becomes articulated through collective economies of charity and generosity.

Commenting on this, Nettleton and Hardey (2006) suggest that the urban marathon reproduces certain problematic relations between 'fit' and 'needy' bodies in urban space.

Clearly these comments do provide some purchase on the phenomenon of the urban marathon. Yet to read urban marathons solely in these terms is rather limited, not least because the kinaesthetic and affective elements of participation in these events become factors that need to be explained through an appeal to broader sociological structures. But the kinaesthetic and affective dimensions of these events are not a kind of veneer that needs to be stripped away in order to explain the phenomena of urban marathons: they are crucial to its experiential and organizational consistency. In the marathon there is a very real sense in which this affective atmosphere is co-produced by both spectators and participants. This is not just a matter of the runners and their audience/supporters transforming ordinary streets into a kind of mobile carnival. It is also about the establishment of relational affective economy in which there is a mutual and resonant feedback loop between the affects and emotions of the participants and those of the spectators. The spectators respond to the visible signs of affective intensity – sweat, grimace, smile – with their own gestures – waves, cheers, applause (Latham and McCormack 2012).

To what extent can these kinds of collective involvements be considered as forms of publicness? Recent work across the social sciences suggests that our definitions of publicness, and of the kinds of practices of involvement of which they consist, need some revising (Amin 2012). At the very least, publics are understood increasingly to be differentiated, distributed, and of varying duration, and certainly not coterminous with the classical model of public space as an area within which citizens gather to articulate their political involvement. Yet, on one level exercise, sport, and fitness events remind us of the continued importance of providing particular sites of publicness in the city – streets, playgrounds, parks, and recreational spaces of different kinds, and of varying degrees of porosity (see Ryan, 2006; Roth, 2006; Iverson 2007). At the same time they also push us to think about the materiality of spaces of publicness as more ephemeral and less obviously structural. Importantly, the kind of publicness of which these practices are generative is not only a matter of participating in a

communicative democracy (Habermas, 1989). It works on a more affective register, in the sense that it engages, amplifies and circulates the affects, felt qualities and intensities of experience. This publicness is also enactive, depending on the capacity of a multiplicity of practices to produce particular forms of association. And the space of this kind of publicness is event-full: it is a form of public-spacing rather than public space.

VI Conclusion

In this chapter we have considered the relation between exercise, sport, and fitness activities and urban life, with a particular emphasis on how these activities can be traced through the affective, kinaesthetic, and collective registers of urban space. Our argument is that there is much physical cultural studies can gain from attending to the urban environment, just as there is much urban studies might gain from thinking more critically about cities' various and varied physical cultures. In the process, our tone has been reasonably affirmative: without ignoring some of the problems associated with these activities, we have nevertheless sought to avoid the common academic tendency to incorporate them within a narrative of critical disenchantment, as evidence of how contemporary urban life and the bodies that inhabit them are becoming alternately; too fast, too slow, too sedentary, too active, too individualized, too competitive, or too unthinking.

Rather than vehicles for this kind of diagnosis, we see the ongoing enactment and evolution of forms of physical activity in cities as providing reasons to be hopeful about the life of cities. Part of the reason for this hopefulness is that fact that they continued to affectively animate cities in all kinds of ways. Part of the reason is that they are continuing to evolve, particularly through the alignment of different techniques and technologies, in ways that are giving rise to new landscapes of encounter and experiment. And part of the reason for such hopefulness is the fact that, like Spinoza and Deleuze (1990), *we still do not know what a body can do*. It is perhaps easier to make this claim in relation to more obviously creative practices such as skateboarding or the more spectacular *le Parkour*, both of which can be understood to actively work and rework space in novel ways – as well as being incorporated into a range of commodified circuits of value generation (see Borden, 2001; Thomson, D. 2008). But

this claim can also be made in relation to more prosaic activities such as running, and walking, in which it is also possible to experience a kind of “focused intensity”, a state which “encompasses not just the ability to exclude a multiplicity of potential distractions but also a concentrated openness for something unexpected to happen. Something whose coming is not under our control and will therefore always appear to be sudden” (Gumbrecht, 2006: 52). It is because of their potential to generate the unforeseen in this way that exercise, sport and fitness need to be situated on an ethico-political cartography of affective relations, and not on the plane of critical judgement, especially when thinking about how they participate in urban life. Equally, this is an ethos might be carried into physical cultural studies. The bodies are not simply surfaces upon which power writes upon, they also expressive, caught up in the making of worlds.

To end, we would like to reaffirm the importance of a variation on the Spinozist question. Not only do we not know what bodies can do: we also do not know of what kinds of spaces they are generative. Or put another way, we might say we *still don't know what a city can do*. This is more than a matter of the physical sites in and at which exercise, sport and fitness activities take place: it refers also to the kinds of affective, material, and public spaces of which they are generative. Thinking through these spaces, and the forms of being and becoming urban is one of the most important aspects of understanding contemporary urban life. And furthering that claim, it suggests that physical cultural studies too needs to be attuned to the making collective that is so often at the centre of physical cultures. Physical cultural studies needs to be as much about the environments and spaces it helps perform, as the somatic practices through which such spaces are called forth.

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