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And Now For Something Completely Different...

Thinking Through Explorer Subject-Bodies: A Response to Mott and Roberts

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We would like to begin by thanking Mott and Roberts for sparking a valuable conversation regarding issues of social difference within the contemporary urban exploration movement and *Antipode* for offering a platform for the discussion.¹ We read ‘Not everyone has (the) balls: Urban exploration and the persistence of masculinist geography’ (Mott and Roberts 2013) in the midst of co-authoring a book chapter on bodies, technologies, and affect through the production and circulation of urban explorer imagery (Garrett and Hawkins forthcoming). Where these two conversations dovetailed, we found much productive material. In what follows, we take up the

¹ For those not familiar with urban exploration, it is a practice of accessing, and often documenting, off-limits urban spaces (see Garrett 2013a).

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invitation that Mott and Roberts offer to engage with questions of social difference, and their call to consider how feminist scholarship could “significantly enrich scholarship on [urban exploration]” (p.2).²

We want to take this opportunity to open out a politics of urban exploration that, whilst concerned with revisiting the question of body-subjects - as Mott and Roberts urge - suggests we might begin from somewhere other than the particular understanding of socially differentiated bodies that preoccupies their contribution. We take as our guides for such a project feminist scholarship on corporeal materialisms and force relations by Elizabeth Grosz (1994; 2005) and others, and the elaboration of these ideas that Rachel Colls (2012) offers in her affirmative feminist critiques of non-representational theories. By mobilizing these ideas we want, in the same spirit of feminist creative-critique, to revisit the practices and nascent geographical literatures on urban exploration, to mark new directions within them. The politics at stake here, we would suggest, is one that poses the far from new question of ‘how to make a difference’ when we mobilize a politics (and ethics) beyond representational concerns.³ This response is

² While Mott and Roberts use the common contraction “urbex” throughout their paper (as do Craggs *et al.* 2013), we will deploy the term in full - urban exploration - primarily because the contracted form has often been used flippantly, within the community (and beyond), in an attempt to trivialise the practice and certain sub-sections of the community. See also Bennett’s “‘Pepsi Max’ view of urbex as young, funky and counter-cultural” - <http://lukebennett13.wordpress.com/2012/02/22/defensive-enthusiasm-anoraks-bunkers-and-the-erotics-of-knowledge/>

³ This is not to say we do not recognise representational concerns and we fully take Mott and Roberts’ point regarding the aggressive masculinities displayed on some urban exploration blogs and forums. We agree that these should be countermanded. Scholarship by Domosh (1991), Rose (1993), Maddrell (2009) and others on masculinist geographical knowledge and exploration could prove a valuable resource for doing so. We have issues, however, with Mott and Roberts’ particular approach. It seemed that, rather than taking forward the project to make space for feminist thinking in scholarship on urban exploration, their critical focus served to exclude those hidden voices they could have been productively locating and amplifying. On discussing Mott and Roberts’ paper with the community via blogs and Facebook, a series of concerns were raised. For many within the community, the caricature they found within the paper bore little resemblance to their experiences. Explorers did not deny instances of overt masculinisms, and were sensitive to other forms of marginalisation and exclusion. Many told us, however, they saw community as a ‘safe’ tolerant space based on care, generosity, trust and friendship that draws together people with

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necessarily only a beginning, much thinking and empirical work remains to be done on the material and affective politics of the subject and on the affective politics of the image we outline here, not only in terms of urban exploration, but also in broader disciplinary terms. We hope, however, what we present here offers a productive response to Mott and Roberts' piece and raises some questions for future scholars of urban exploration to engage with.

A Problematic Paradox

For us, a pivotal point of Mott and Roberts' article, and where we want to begin our comments, is a paradox they identify:

“...on the one hand [urban exploration] emphasizes embodiment and progressive politics, whilst on the other, there appears to be a reluctance to consider different kinds of bodies and the inclusions/exclusions perpetuated through practices and discourses of exploration and the privileged explorer-subject. As long as this paradox remains unexamined, possibilities for a radical engagement with the city through urbex will inevitably fall short” (p.7).

vastly different motivations and concerns from disparate social backgrounds. One explorer wrote: “I felt that the voice of the female explorer was not present in the article. Also it seemed like the authors only looked at a small slice of UE culture, the part that is presented by mass media.” For others, it was the narrowness of the visual representations chosen by Mott and Roberts that worried them, taking issue with the article's reproduction of what they saw as a by-product of the visual practices of a relatively small, but highly visible (online) sub-set of the community. Mott and Roberts write, “while many women do engage in urbex, they figure often in photographic representations of the practice as minority figures who appear to be going along with an activity that is largely led and defined by the male explorers” (p.12). Amongst the reactions to this statement were responses that pointed toward both exploration never documented and the wealth of images that never made it onto blogs or into the public domain that would have reframed this discussion. Whilst we take their points on a representational level, and agree that the politics of these representations do deserve further critique, we found it unfortunate that the paper did not open out a space in which visual representations and voices (from the web and elsewhere) could challenge those vocal few.

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We certainly agree that the literature on urban exploration would benefit from a more explicit engagement with difference (however it is to be understood), given, as is implicit in the relatively small body of scholarly work that Mott and Roberts engage, geographical analysis of the practice is still incipient.⁴ As both Bennett (2011a) and Garrett (2011c; 2013b: 17-22), have argued, this is a diverse community. It is one where competing and contested identities and relationships to place work alongside attempts to order, control and rationalize places and experiences. Moreover, there is a valorization of certain modes of ‘discovery’, some of which are undoubtedly, as Mott and Roberts forcefully demonstrate, shaped by particular performances of masculinity. As Bennett (2013a) notes, however, they should not be reduced solely to such performances.⁵ Further, and fascinatingly, these identity negotiations take place across a range of sites, the connections and interconnections of which are worthy of further study; whether these be the embodied experiences of exploration, the forums and blogs of the online communities that Mott and Roberts make extensive use of, or the visual regimes and aesthetics produced in the

⁴ We would urge caution in too-soon constituting a “geographic literature” on urban exploration, as this is an emergent topic consisting of a handful of articles by Luke Bennett (2011a; 2011b; 2013a; 2013b) and Bradley Garrett (2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d; 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c) (though also see Craggs *et al.* 2013 and Dobraszczyk 2005 for connected discussions). Mott and Roberts’ is an important intervention precisely because this is a nascent vein of geographic inquiry, but we would worry that in building their argument they have concretised, often through the scaffold of blog posts, a body of scholarly work that is far less voluminous they suggest (see also footnote 6).

⁵ Within academic scholarship, both in and beyond geography, we *do* find important studies being penned that open out some of these questions about identity, discussing, for example, the role gender plays in urban exploration (Prescott 2011; Bennett 2013a), the role of illness and disability (Genosko 2009), potentials for psychoanalytic readings (Veitch 2010, or indeed many pieces from Hell and Schönle’s 2010 edited collection) and considerations of class (High and Lewis 2007). Looking to the online community, there are a number of blogs that clearly celebrate difference within the urban exploration community, for example the Philadelphia Gay and Lesbian Explorer Group (<http://www.meetup.com/PHL-GLUE>), the well-known Futtslutts of Minneapolis (<http://futtslutt.tumblr.com>) and the ‘Girl Explorers’ Flickr group <http://www.flickr.com/groups/girlexplorers>), to name a few.

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course of photographing and videoing urban exploration activities (Prescott 2011; Bennett 2013b; Garrett and Hawkins forthcoming).⁶

Where we depart from Mott and Roberts' perspective, however, is in the tight equation they draw between a failed politics of urban exploration – “one that will *inevitably* fall short” (p. 7, emphasis added) – and what is, in their reading, of a lack of scholarly consideration of bodies/subjects understood primarily through “social categories of age, sex, ethnicity, race and dis/ability” (Jacobs and Nash 2003: 275). In short, while we agree that there is important, indeed critical, work to be done along such lines, there is also, we contend, room for difference, the social, and body-subjects to be understood differently, or at least for understandings of these body-subjects, and their politics, to begin from a different place. We seek to break down the settlement Mott and Roberts calculate between a successful politics for urban exploration and body-subjects sorted into named, known and represented identity categories, however intersectional and performative these might be.

⁶ The role of the virtual urban exploration community, to both explorers and others, is a fascinating topic (see Bennett 2011a), where there remains much scholarly work to be done, not least about the far from simple position occupied by urban exploration blogs that are both academic sites and points of engagement with the community (e.g. Garrett's 'Place Hacking'). We would urge caution, however, in the sometimes-too-easy conflation of sources that perform different roles. To state the obvious, what a journal article is meant to do, is not what a blog post is meant to do. While a journal article is often written primarily to disseminate results of research to an academic audience, taking clear theoretical stances and advancing knowledge, a blog post may be meant to inspire community gatekeepers to grant access or inspire public interest in a research project. These issues are further exacerbated when using an in-text citation format where these different modes of production are unclear. These different modes of production can themselves lead to a number of issues. As Mott and Roberts' text illustrates, it can be difficult to appropriately ascertain who to credit ideas to. For example, a central citation to their argument about masculinity is the following quote from the website Sleepy City: “[h]is suggestion that we lacked balls confused us greatly, as those who go head to head with the rolling stock in the grimy, dimly lit, alcoveless metro tunnels are usually not short on testicular fortitude, figuratively speaking” (p.11). Extracts from this quote appear several times (p.12, p.13) and are implied in the title and are wrongly attributed to Garrett (the researcher), rather than to the author of the Sleepy City blog, whom Garrett accompanied to Barcelona as part of his fieldwork. Mistakes such as these can lead to problematic and potentially damaging claims.

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In what space remains we want to lay the groundwork for a possible politics that begins from other ideas of body-subjects and difference. Firstly, we return to ethnographic accounts of the ‘doing’ of urban exploration and re-interrogate the ideas of the body-subject we find there. Secondly, we recoup what we believe to be an important (contested) site for a political project of urban exploration: the images created in the course of these activities. We view this through the lens of the urban explorer and artist Miru Kim. We conclude with brief reflections on what it would mean to take forward the version of a politics of urban exploration we present here - *one* version of what a politics of this practice might look and feel like.

Becoming Bodies: Edgework and Meld

Unsurprisingly, debates around politics and the body often settle out as, at root, questions that concern the forms of politics and the ideas of the body-subject upon which our perspectives rest. If Mott and Roberts’ queries concern social difference and the explorer-subject, such as: “Whose bodies?”, “What counts as experience?” and “What constitutes the exchange between body and place?” (p.6). Our particular answer is directed less toward questions of ‘Whose bodies?’, rather we ask, perhaps more basically, “What kinds of bodies?” and “What is meant by the body-subject, and how is such a subject constituted?” (Colls 2012: 437). Further, we ask “What is the relationship of this subject to the world?”. For us, this involves a reorientation from socially sorted subjects, to consider, in the case of the kind of body-subject we find at work in urban exploration literature, the “forces that provide the backdrop to and are active in producing what comes to be understood as ‘a’ subject” (Colls 2012: 439).

In Garrett’s auto-ethnographic accounts and video-ethnographies of the embodied practice of urban exploration, two (developing) ideas - *edgework* and *the meld* - key us in to the terms upon which we could begin to think about the body-subject at work in urban exploration

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(Garrett 2011c; 2012). Edgework is a multi-faceted term adapted from sociology and criminology, often used in discussion of phenomenological experiences of high risk activities but also applicable to more everyday practices where normative behavior and routinised action are engaged with critically.⁷ In Garrett's writing, edgework is a bodily doing that sees individuals and collectives approaching various (material and immaterial) edges and boundaries. Taking form in physical challenges presented by literal features of urban architecture, or mental hurdles particular to the individual, these edges and boundaries may be exceeded and relocated, or, in another theoretical vocabulary deterritorialized and reterritorialized (Garrett 2012; Garrett 2013a).

This territorialization is a process wherein we find the body-subject not just open to forces and sensations in the environment, but composed through a relationship with them. Experimenting with this idea, Garrett deploys the *meld*, a term with a very particular materiality, wherein the identity trappings of the socially-constructed subject fall away as a result of the exploring subject's absorptive focus on their embodied actions and experiences, whatever and wherever these may be. Dramatic descriptions of becoming bodies in the midst of action aside, what these accounts configure is a kind of corporeal morphology; a way of negotiating bodily boundaries that has productive resonances with the body-city relations Grosz proposes:

“A model of relations between bodies and cities which sees them not as megalithic total entities, distinct identities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or

⁷ The term “edgework” was first used by Stephen Lyng, who adapted it from Hunter S. Thompson (1966: 348), to discuss the risk-taking activities of skydivers. Lyng's work was challenged and augmented by feminist scholars and the result is a more comprehensive “body of literature” (see Lyng 1990; Lios 2001; Olstead 2011 for example), though these discussions still have not been engaged through the particular critical lens we offer here.

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microgroupings...a fundamentally disunified series of interconnections, a series of disparate flows, energies, events or entities, and spaces, brought together or drawn apart in more or less temporary alignments” (1992: 248).

Such disunified interconnections and temporary alignments are indeed reached toward in some urban exploration literatures, presenting us with interrogations of body-subjects that are, in Grosz’s terms “less interested in the question of the cultural construction of subjectivity than in the materials out of which such a construction is forged” (1994: 18). These are body-subjects “engage[d] in joint body-practices of becoming” (Thrift 1997: 142); the adrenaline rushes, the pumping endorphins, and the sore, cut and bleeding bodies, and even in the testosterone and intoxicants that fuel some of these activities in more uncomfortable ways, bring to the fore biological and chemical bodies; energy and matter in a constant state of composition. To consider these bodies is to take account of the role of not just the personal, but also the impersonal and interpersonal forces that compose subjects:

“...inhuman forces, forces that are both living and non-living, macroscopic and microscopic, above and below the level of the human are acknowledged and allowed to displace the centrality of both consciousness and unconsciousness” (Grosz 2005: 189-190).

To engage with ethnographic accounts of urban exploration and their emphasis on materialities and corporealities is to attune us to “life that occurs *before* and *alongside* the formation of human subjectivity, *across* human and non-human materialities and *in between* distinctions between body and soul” (Anderson and Harrison 2010: 13). The social in these terms “is a weaving of

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material bodies that can never be cleanly or clearly cleaved into a set of named, known and represented identities” (*ibid.*). In Braidotti’s words:

“The body refers to the materialist but also vitalist groundings of human subjectivity and to the specifically human capacity to be both grounded and to flow and thus to transcend the very variables—class, race, sex, gender, age, disability—which structure us. It rests on a post-identitarian view of what constitutes a subject” (2012: 33).

This is not then to seek recourse to some sort of biological essentialism, or to deny that these forms of body-subject put much at risk when they seek to escape categorical fixes, proposing “a more open, multiple, intangible and affective understanding of subjectivities” (Jacobs and Nash 2003: 235). The risk, articulated by Mott and Roberts, is one of “unintentionally reinstating the unmarked, disembodied, but implicitly masculine subject” (Jacobs and Nash 2003: 235).

Furthermore, any theoretical framework that would enable, for example, aggressive shows of masculinity that, as Mott and Roberts’ demonstrate, *do* exist in the urban exploration community, to go unremarked and unchallenged is clearly not acceptable. That the emphasis on practical, lived experience, and the pre-personal might lead to the centering of a subject “shorn of social difference”, is not a new charge: humanistic geographies and non-representational theories have both faced similar accusations (Anderson and Harrison 2010: 13; also see Nash 2000; Saldahana, 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2006).

As urban exploration literatures inevitably mature, one of the key questions should surely be not to disregard collective inscriptions such as gender, but rather to look to how feminists, post-colonial scholars and queer theorists have sought to query how it is that the durabilities of orderings, such as race or gender emerge from the heterogeneous elements that compose them.

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How sexed difference, for example, becomes a question of exploring “the complex yet concrete materialities immersed in social relations of power” (Braidotti 2012: 21), these obdurate categories coming to be understood as assemblages “formed from within heterogeneous materialities of bodies, technologies and places” (Anderson and Harrison 2010: 18). To engage with this idea further, and find a footing, albeit tentatively, for a politics and an ethics that would propagate from this understanding of the body-subjects of urban exploration we want to turn to consider some of the images that urban explorers create.

Affective Politics of the Visual: Miru Kim

Urban explorer and artist Miru Kim a high-profile interlocutor between urban exploration and theorists of the aesthetics and critical social theorization of ruins (Hawkins 2010a; Hell and Schönle 2010).⁸ Kim’s photography pivots around her deployment of her female form, often nude, within the lexicon of sites favored by urban explorers in cities around the world - from New York’s subways to London sewers to the ruins of Istanbul. We do not have the space here to conduct a full analysis of Kim’s photographic work, and fully agree with Mott and Roberts’ observation of the need for a “sustained critical treatment of the range of visual images produced by urban explorers” (p.4), not least because of the need to appreciate these images as rather more complex than Mott and Roberts’ reductive description of them as “invariably in a conquering or heroic mode” (p.11) would allow. While such posturing is common, we would assert that there are varied visualities of urban exploration that can act as important sites for the production of urban exploration politics.

⁸ See Kim’s TED talk: http://www.ted.com/talks/miru_kim_s_underground_art.html (last accessed 19 September 2013). See also her website for examples of her images: <http://www.mirukim.com/statementNakedCitySpleen.php> (last accessed 19 September 2013).

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Kim's compositions frame both the formal properties and teeming organic and inorganic materialities of her sites. Through her particular aesthetic sensibilities, especially in her use and manipulation of chiaroscuro - the play of (natural and imported) light and dark at the sites - her work resonates with the visual regimes consciously or unconsciously adopted by many other urban explorers.⁹ In Kim's case her body becomes the physical means through which the exploration of the materialities of the site are enabled, as with most (clothed) explorer-bodies, but it is also the device by which these materialities are framed for the viewer.¹⁰

Not unproblematically, the artist's folded, perched, extended and crouching body explores a corporeal morphology that situates the body as a form amongst forms, a composition of matter amidst matter. For those quick to dismiss Kim's portraiture as a rather literal example of the centuries old genre of "ruin porn" (Leary 2011), the complexities of Kim's deployment of her nude form is also an artistic device that frames body-subject/place relations. In a characteristically lyrical passage, Kim articulates her approach to body-city relations thus:

"Exploring industrial ruins and structures made me look at the city as one living organism. I started to feel not only the skin of the city, but also to penetrate the inner layers of its intestines and veins, which swarm with miniscule life forms. These spaces—abandoned subway stations,

⁹ Urban exploration is a variegated field of visual practitioners, some like Kim are professional artists, others are very skilled amateur photographers, while a large number take images for informational survey or evidentiary purposes: "pics or it didn't happen" is a common phrase (see Garrett and Hawkins forthcoming).

¹⁰ As survey collections such as Jones and Warr (2012) make clear, female artists use of their nude form – whether as image-makers or as performance practitioners – has a long legacy and one that has been used to a number of different critical ends. Most relevant here are investigations of identity and materiality in relation to questions of landscape and environment and in the context of ideas around urban space and the 'proper' occupation of that space (Best 2011; Jones 2012; see Hawkins 2010b; 2013 for discussions in relation to geography).

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tunnels, sewers, catacombs, factories, hospitals, and shipyards—form the subconscious of the city, where collective memories and dreams reside.”¹¹

There are clear resonances here between the possibilities of the psychoanalytic discussions that Mott and Roberts signal, the metabolic urbanisms common to contemporary Marxist urban ecologies, and the urban body-politic of Grosz and others discussed above. What we can find in the visual regimes of Kim’s images is, we would argue, a set of productive subject-environmental relations with a politics rather different than those of the “hero shot”, the overview image, or the body-marking-place landscape image, all of which can be traced from earlier modes of colonial exploration into contemporary urban exploration imagery (Domosh 1991; Pratt 1992; Yusoff 2005; Garrett 2013a).

The body-environment relations of Kim’s visual regimes stand, we would argue, in productive contrast to, indeed are perhaps even disruptive of, other visual regimes of the urban that would locate Kim’s body rather differently. We are thinking principally here of the casting of the modern surveillance city as another omniscient and omnipresent incidence of the masculine gaze or the god’s eye view (Putnam 1990; Kwon 2002; Paglen 2010; Graham 2011; Weizman 2012). As such, Kim’s work can be situated in the context of a range of scholarship and aesthetic practices that often implicitly mobilize feminist body-place projects to intervene within, and sometimes to transform, the spaces and practices of the surveilled city. For Kim, the relationship between her chosen sites and her mode of entry to them – by subverting the surveillance systems (what Garrett terms place hacking) is key to her practice. She elaborates:

¹¹ <http://www.mirukim.com/statementNakedCitySpleen.php> (last accessed 19 September 2013).

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“Experiencing feelings of alienation and anxiety in the city – a city that has increasingly become more surveilled and commodified – I began to understand how many artists and authors suffered from severe bouts of depression, inertia, and isolation...One of the ways I escaped such feelings was to visit desolate and hidden places in the city. Every time I stepped out of the ordinary aboveground spaces that were filled with anonymous crowds, I felt regenerated and unrestrained.”¹²

In finding spaces within the city that free her from particular forms of surveillance, modes of practice and bodily consciousnesses, Kim echoes sentiments common to the explorer community and to a raft of feminist scholars who have sought to complicate the city as a space of danger and fear (Wilson 1993; England and Simon 2010). Kim also finds resonance with ruin scholars such as Edensor, for whom such spaces are locations where people can “escape the straitjacket of self-consciousness, where no evident rules pertain about what can be done and there are opportunities to engage in playful, creative and sensual practices” (2006: 234). This is not unproblematic, for we should not, as Mott and Roberts’ make clear, overlook the degree to which what might be creative spaces and spaces of free-play for some, are for others spaces to which access is challenging or comes at a greater cost. We would agree that future research on urban exploration would do well to open out these questions, but suggest that one way of doing so is to begin from situated studies of those heterogeneous assemblages of bodies, technologies and places – Grosz’s collections of parts – constituted within the social relations of power.

In asserting Kim’s artistically produced images, as indeed we would do myriad forms of urban exploration imagery, as a site for the potential production of a politics of urban exploration, we urge an examination of both the representational and the affective force of these

¹² <http://www.mirukim.com/statementNakedCitySpleen.php> (last accessed 19 September 2013).

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images. In Prescott's (2011) paper, referenced by Mott and Roberts, we find an interesting re-appropriation of urban exploration imagery of ruined (often now demolished) hospitals that works along these lines. Prescott, linking the medicalization of the birthing process with theories of ruination, explores how urban exploration imagery offers a source of alternative subject positions for women whose birthing experiences in these spaces had been traumatic or even left in 'ruins' by the institutionalized birthing practices. We would suggest Prescott's analysis, like Kim's images, form stepping stones toward a politics of urban exploration imagery that is based not in actually being there, on doing exploration, but in the imaginative spaces these images open out.

This is a politics of urban exploration that lies in both what these images picture, but also how they picture, how they do 'work' as images after the shutter click. We are interested in what Latham and McCormack (2009: 253) describe as "an affective intensity: they [images] make sense not just because we take time to figure out what they signify, but also because their pre-signifying affective materiality is felt in bodies". Elaborating, they suggest images have the capacity to "...produc[e] a certain affective resonance between somatic, visual, sonic and semantic rhythms, without necessarily reducing these to the terms of an interpretive narrative" (2009: 260). Such dimensions are important we believe for understanding the politics of the imaginative space that these photographs open up; as much everyday as it is spectacular. This is a politics based less in the proposition of spatial and social prescriptions for exploration, but rather one based in how these images demonstrate possibilities for rejigging the given, how they both picture and are "spaces that provide lures to feeling, new powers to force thinking and invention" (Thrift 2010: 139). There is the potential here for a 'picturing' of relationships between body and environment that, often working beyond the intentionality of the photographer, asserts less the

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particularities and more the very possibility of inhabiting, or occupying urban space beyond, beside and within forms presented to us for ‘appropriate’ use.

Conclusion: Towards an Affirmative Critique of Urban Exploration

We would like once more to reiterate our thanks to Mott and Roberts for opening out an important set of questions around the politics of urban exploration. This is valuable work that raises crucial issues at a time when the nascent geographical work on urban exploration is gathering pace. While we take a number of their points, we are perhaps not in total agreement on how to approach a critical engagement with the practice. We would argue, as we have hopefully demonstrated, that there are multiple ways in which one might be able to think through a politics for urban exploration that attends to difference.

Through a re-visiting of ethnographic accounts of urban exploration and a discussion of the possibilities and affective capacities of the imagery that urban explorers produce, we have sought to acknowledge other routes by which questions of difference in exploration might be pursued. In doing so, we identify two sites of politics that, whilst they might be based in a different understanding of difference than these engaged with by Mott and Roberts, we nevertheless believe do offer productive points from which to move forward with thinking about urban exploration as a political practice. Making room for a fruitful feminist critique that begins less from questions of “cultural construction of subjectivity than in the materials out of which such a construction is forged” (Grosz 1994: 18) we are required to return to the question of what constitutes a body. By thinking through body-subjects and spaces in terms of forces and matter that are both constitutive and excessive of representational thresholds, we want to encourage a politics and ethics that propagates from the diverse sensibilities of embodiment that are brought about when we acknowledge the human subject as emergent from a “connective multiplicity of

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non-human and in-human forces and processes that exceed this corporeality in extensive, intensive, temporal and ontogenetic ways” (McCormack 2003: 489).

Our argument is not, we wish to reiterate, one that seeks to sap, overlook or bypass questions of social difference, nor is it one that would enable aggressive masculinities and exclusionary behaviors of any form to go critically unremarked. Instead, we suggest an important future direction for urban exploration research is one that follows the lead of feminists, queer theorists, and non-representational scholars, who engage the corporeal material project of Grosz, Irigaray and others (as well as the related molecular imaginaries of Deleuze and Guattari) to ask how it is that these heterogeneous matters and forces come to compose durabilities of orderings such as race and gender. This, we believe, is a crucial question if the ideas of matter, force, affective circulations and the body-subject we present here, are to realize their possible politics. So, where Mott and Roberts suggest that the “supposedly progressive politics founded on embodied experiential encounters with hidden urban spaces founders [*sic*] on its failure to recognize difference” (p. 6), we agree, but argue that within the particular project of social difference they outline there is room to be made for different forms of difference.

In sum, if the crux of Mott and Robert’s paper is that the political potentialities of urban exploration are disarmed by instances of masculinism in the community and a failure of commentators to take this seriously, then we take half that point. We are grateful for this intervention because we also acknowledge the importance of making space for difference (however it is understood). Indeed, the conversations their paper sparked between us, and within the community, proved a useful prompt to reflect collectively on what work has been done and could be done to combat marginalisation and alienation. We depart, however, in the assumption made that a politics of urban exploration will necessarily fall short if it does not begin from subjects cleaved into social categories. Their paper prompted us to return to ethnographic

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materials, and to academic and popular accounts of urban exploration to interrogate, with perhaps greater vigilance than before, what forms of body-subject are found there. The results were hopefully illuminating, raising what we believe are critical concerns for how it is we understand urban exploration and connected political interventions into space.

October 2013

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