

# Street art, heritage and affective atmospheres

*cultural geographies*  
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## Abstract

During the last decade, street art has received increased attention within heritage studies. However, current heritage research has not sufficiently explored street art's crucial relationships with everyday life and change, as well as its performative, sensuous and atmospheric components. In this paper, I apply the notion of affective atmosphere within more-than-representational theory, heritage and urban studies, to conceptualise street art as a sensuous, ephemeral, political and embodied heritage experience of everyday life. My investigation of street art and affective atmospheres is further based on my improvised everyday practices of sensing, feeling, observing, walking and photographing in the streets of Oslo. Engaging with theory and praxis, I explore the compositional and multi-sensual aspects of street art and affective urban atmospheres, including sound, colour, movement, social hybridity and power. My analysis highlights that the experience of street art heritage involves more than simply embodied encounters with artworks, as it also integrates urban atmospheres and smooth and striated worlds. The research thus contributes practical and theoretical knowledge of street art, heritage and affective atmospheres within street art and urban and heritage studies.

## Keywords

affective atmosphere, graffiti, heritage, more-than-representational theory, street art, urban space

## Heritage journey

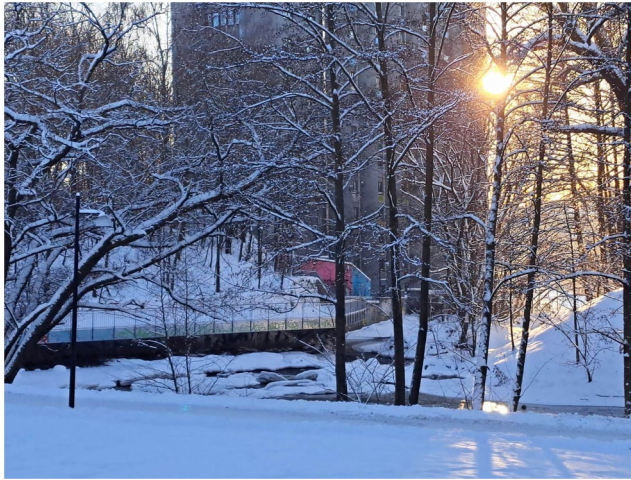
In early March 2020, my daughter was born in a hospital in Oslo, Norway. That morning, the light was peaceful, colouring the yellow bricks of the industrial hospital buildings and lending tranquility to our exhausted bodies. A new life was starting for the three of us, tinged with hope and joy; but we were also entering the uncertain times of COVID-19. Straight after the birth, everything closed and family trips were cancelled. But the three of us had each other, as well as the streets of

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Oslo. Those streets became a place of motherhood, care, recreation and relaxation, as well as an exploration of life, street art, material environments and affective atmospheres. For more than 2 years, I walked along Akerselva (the Aker River) (Figure 1) with the baby carriage. On those walks, I constructed a heritage journey in a rhythmic circle of chaos and harmony, known and unknown, enchantment and disenchantment. My practices of walking, photographing, observing, sensing, being and generally experiencing weather-worlds gave me tools for thinking about and understanding street art and graffiti cultures, as well as urban atmospheres.



**Figure 1.** Pathway along the Akerselva (photo by author).

Heritage scholar David Crouch<sup>1</sup> asserts that ‘heritage is like a journey: more than individual and private, journeys are frequently inter-subjective in absence and presence. Journeys occur in and among instants and moments, but act relationally with time’. My heritage journey with street art and affective atmospheres thus emerged from my improvisational everyday life while moving in the streets of Oslo. The journey was also influenced by my personal and professional background: in particular, my professional background as a physical improviser and a former heritage researcher and urban planner, and my current position as a doctoral scholar researching street art, graffiti, heritage and the urban space. It also occurred within – and in spite of – certain contextual constraints, such as academic norms and structures, neoliberal urbanism, COVID-19 and the conventional heritage field. My research thus represents a form of resistance to ‘moral geographies’<sup>2</sup> and conventional heritage thinking – that is, Cartesian thinking, which divides experts from community members, researchers from research objects, people from objects and present from past.

Despite increased attention to street art and graffiti within the field of heritage studies,<sup>3</sup> value-based and material heritage conservation approaches have not only failed to address street art’s crucial relationship with everyday urban life and its ephemeral aspects, but also proven to be exclusive. The limitations of conventional heritage theories and practices relate to what critical heritage scholar Smith<sup>4</sup> calls ‘authorised heritage discourse’ (AHD). AHD conceives of heritage items as non-renewable, aesthetically pleasing objects, and sites with inherent value that should be preserved for future generations, using official or expert-based practices.<sup>5</sup> AHD takes part of a broader ‘authorised aesthetics’ frame of legal and moral authorities.<sup>6</sup> These authorised aesthetic frameworks are marked by affectively distributed social inequalities: city and heritage authorities and

heritage conservation practitioners tend to prioritise the preservation of mural paintings, legal street artworks and the illegal artworks of famous street artists, while showing little to no consideration of artworks from lesser-known artists and zero tolerance of uncommissioned images.<sup>7</sup>

In support of Smith's<sup>8</sup> assertion that 'heritage is not a thing', but an ongoing 'process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present', I argue here that street art heritage should not assume a division between people and artworks, but understand the street art experience as embodied and relational. This follows the more-than-representational turn in heritage studies,<sup>9</sup> which focuses on the affective, emotional, agential, ephemeral and performative dimensions of heritage experiences. This approach to heritage stresses the importance of human interaction with heritage, through embodied processes and practices within relational, contingent and dynamic spaces in everyday life.<sup>10</sup> It emphasises 'the actual (co-) presence of living, breathing, sensing and doing bodies with the objects and material settings provided'.<sup>11</sup> In this vein, the performative and more-than-representational perspective acknowledges 'actions of vandalism and destruction as valid, meaningful practices, just as we do preservation and conservation actions'.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, it considers heritage 'constantly open to change; always becoming, rather than settled. Such occurrence of change creates the affect, or its potential'.<sup>13</sup> Despite this significant contribution to heritage studies, Wetherell, Smith and Campbell<sup>14</sup> identify that more-than-representational scholarship has only marginally engaged with the political aspects of heritage and the dialectic relations of the representational (i.e. discursive) and non-representational (i.e. felt).

Alison Young argues that street art is part of everyday life experience, 'written on the skin of the city'.<sup>15</sup> The city, she specifies, provides experiences of both enchantment and disenchantment. Although street art is part of the urban atmosphere and the politics and experience of everyday life, there has been no explicit attempt to investigate the atmospheric relations of street art heritage and the material environment within street art and urban and heritage studies. Here, I apply the notion of affective atmosphere to address the immaterial aspects of street art and conceptualise street art as a sensuous, political and embodied heritage experience of human bodies interacting with the street art and its urban and material environment, in everyday life.

In this essay, I stress the importance of both the representational and the non-representational, and the political and the poetic understanding of atmospheric street art heritage experience within the more-than-representational framework. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's<sup>16</sup> conceptions of striated (i.e. optic, static, homogeneous) and smooth (i.e. haptic, moving, felt) space, the concept of atmosphere,<sup>17</sup> and the fields of art aesthetics,<sup>18</sup> street art and urban studies,<sup>19</sup> I develop a hybrid authorised heritage/aesthetics (i.e. striated) and commons heritage/counter aesthetics (i.e. smooth) understanding of the heritage experience of street art and affective atmospheres. Bridging these dialectic poles, I first address the street art heritage experience as both a meteorological phenomenon and a spatial experience of affect and materiality, thereby emphasising the idea of affective atmosphere. Second, I highlight the multi-sensual, personal, collective (i.e. human and non-human), social and political aspects of the heritage experience of street art and urban atmospheres.

My methodological investigation follows the improvisational approach within more-than-representational theory<sup>20</sup> and phenomenology.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, my improvisational heritage research journey emerged as part of my everyday life while moving in the streets of Oslo, and through dialectic practical-theoretical relations: 'between order and disorder, tradition and innovation, security and risk, the individual and the group and the composition'.<sup>22</sup> Moving between theory and praxis, I aim at contributing conceptually and empirically to the literature on street art, heritage and affective atmospheres within street art, urban and heritage studies.

The paper is structured as follows. First, I introduce the concept of affective atmosphere within more-than-representational theory. Second, I develop my affective and atmospheric street art

heritage theoretical approach. Third, I introduce the improvisational methodological approach. Fourth, I discuss five compositional analyses, blending theory and praxis: ‘atmospheric colour’, ‘kinetic sculptures in the air’, ‘soundscape of the underbridge’, ‘crying walls’ and ‘socially hybrid atmosphere’. Finally, I provide concluding remarks.

## **The more-than-representational concept of affective atmosphere**

More-than-representational theory stems from non-representational theory,<sup>23</sup> referring ‘to what people (and indeed animals or things) do and thus squarely engages with practices’.<sup>24</sup> Affect and atmosphere are central elements of more-than-representational theory. In Spinozist and Deleuzian philosophy, affects are considered intensive forces ‘related to the body’s capacity to affect and to be affected by other bodies. Bodies here are understood as “not only the human body but also the bodies of buildings and objects, the fabrics and form of the city”’.<sup>25</sup> Building on this concept, Anderson<sup>26</sup> asserts that an affective atmosphere is a set of collective affects ‘generated by bodies – of multiple types – affecting one another as some form of “envelopment” is produced’.<sup>27</sup> He views the affective atmosphere as a quasi-object comprised of ‘epochs, societies, rooms, landscapes, couples, artworks, and much more’.<sup>28</sup> Lucie<sup>29</sup> explains that, for example, a quasi-object such as a theatrical atmosphere may be understood ‘as a mutually constitutive event produced by and producing entangled agencies’. An atmosphere is thus ‘a phenomenon or event that occurs through actions of the agencies contributing to the intra-action’.<sup>30</sup>

Anderson and other post-Deleuzian scholars view affect, emotion and feeling as distinct elements through which atmospheres are precognitively or precociously felt. Anderson and Holden define ‘affects as impersonal movements that constitute what a body can do, feelings as interpersonal expressions of affects, emotions as personal qualifications of feelings’.<sup>31</sup> However, several scholars<sup>32</sup> criticise this subdivision between affect and emotion. For example, Wetherell argues that affect, emotion and feeling are interchangeable, as, in ‘affective practice, bits of the body . . . get patterned together with feelings and thoughts, interaction patterns and relationships, narratives and interpretative repertoires, social relations, personal histories, and ways of life’.<sup>33</sup> In line with this, the recent more-than-representational studies on affective atmosphere have destabilised this distinction and instead demonstrated ‘the multiplicities of atmosphere as melded between and within the affective and emotional, the individual and collective, and the (trans)personal nature of affect and emotions’.<sup>34</sup>

In this paper, I consider the heritage experience of street art and affective atmospheres to encompass both affect, emotion and feeling. In the following, in line with Deleuze and Guattari’s dialectic space, I integrate a hybrid striated and smooth understanding of the heritage experience of street art and urban atmospheres, to bridge the representational with the non-representational and the political with the poetic.

## **Affective and atmospheric street art heritage**

Deleuze and Guattari introduce conceptions of striated and smooth space ‘as a conceptual pair to rethink space as a complex mixture between nomadic forces and sedentary captures’.<sup>35</sup> They define striated space as homogenous and static, produced by the state apparatus; and smooth space as oppositional, heterogenous, haptic and in a constant state of becoming. For these scholars, both spaces exist simultaneously: ‘smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space’.<sup>36</sup> Lyser and Pisters explain that ‘the smooth and the striated directly address processes in (social, political, geographical, biological) life, taken up in philosophy and art’.<sup>37</sup>

In line with Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of striated and smooth space, I conceptualise the heritage experience and heritage meaning-making of street art and urban atmosphere in relation to the oppositional yet interrelated forces of authorised heritage/aesthetics and commons heritage/counter aesthetics.<sup>38</sup> I define authorised heritage/aesthetics as a striated, homogeneous and static space produced by the state apparatus, the law and market neoliberalism. In contrast, I view commons heritage as a counter-aesthetic to authorised heritage/aesthetics, representing a heterogeneous and haptic space in a constant state of becoming, with potential for meaningful relations, enchantment and change. The affective heritage experience of street art and everyday urban life does not depend on a division between authorised heritage/aesthetics and commons heritage/counter aesthetics, but is instead the product of a dynamic, open-ended, conflicting and overlapping heritage process between these aesthetics. I connect this dialectic heritage experience with Young's work on the hybrid city and street art.

Young<sup>39</sup> asserts that social and political engagement and the affective experience of the city and street art occurs in a hybrid of the legislated and the uncommissioned city. She explains that the legislated city is characterised by regularity, order and control, representing a striated space framed within the dominant paradigm of property ownership: 'the legislated city is thus a city of legible spaces and objects with singular owners, licensing some behaviours and criminalising others'.<sup>40</sup> For example, Hansen and Flynn<sup>41</sup> explain that the levelling of the moral and legal terrain is achieved through 'the council's whitewashing of objectionable work; in the protection accorded to work of value; and in the excision of work too valuable to be seen and appreciated "in situ," for conservation and appreciation'.

In contrast to the legislated city, the uncommissioned city is the smooth and affective space of the city commons. Drawing on Bennet's notion of enchantment, Young proposes the concept of the city commons as an alternative space with multiple uses, offering 'enchanting possibilities inherent within contingent and provisional meanings'.<sup>42</sup> In relation to street art, Young explains that enchantment, 'whether accompanied by delight or anger, marks the moment in which the citizen of the legislated city notices the existence of other ways of being in the city indeed, the existence of other cities and their inhabitants'.<sup>43</sup>

Here, I argue that the street art heritage 'commoning' process emerges not only between street art and its viewers, but also within the materialisation of the affective commons and the broader urban atmosphere. To explain this aspect, I integrate Bennett's concept of 'think-power' and the work of Duff, Ingold and Böhme on affective atmosphere.

Bennett explains that the 'commoning' process and political event can be viewed as an unfolding of human and non-human beings or actants with the potential to actively transform the 'stratified' atmosphere. She asserts that objects and artworks have 'thing-power', characterised as 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle'.<sup>44</sup> Thing-power operates in relation, whereby 'each thing is shown to be in relationship with the others, and also with the sunlight and the street, and not simply with me, my vision or my cultural frame'.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, an affective atmosphere may be understood to have thing-power, because, as Duff explains, it has the ability to stimulate affective engagement with a place by capturing 'an emergent force or intensity that is a function of the assembling of bodies, both human and nonhuman, without ever being reducible to these bodies'.<sup>46</sup> Duff specifies that the affective atmosphere that supports this engagement 'provides the principal means by which thin places are converted into thick places'.<sup>47</sup> He elaborates that 'thick places ought to be regarded as an expression of the diverse affective atmospheres generated in the collocations of practice and place'.<sup>48</sup>

Ingold argues that the atmospheric 'commoning' process should be viewed dialectically, as both a meteorological and a spatial experience of affect and materiality. Following Deleuze and Guattari, he suggests that atmospheres may be explored within distinct – yet unseparated – striated and



smooth worlds. Ingold<sup>49</sup> explains that striated space is static, ‘homogeneous and volumetric’, with fixed boundaries; it is created when the optical eye is projected upon a fixed target – ‘the surface of the mind’.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, smooth space has no boundaries and is constantly becoming. It is created by the haptic eye, which glances and senses, rather than fixes on material objects: ‘it is the engagement of a mindful body at work with materials and with the land, “sewing itself in” to the textures of the land along the pathways of sensory involvement’.<sup>51</sup> For Ingold, smooth space is ‘an atmospheric space of movement and flux, stirred up by wind and weather, and suffused with light, sound and feeling’.<sup>52</sup> He emphasises that the experience of the affective atmosphere is never static, but haptic; though it is part of striated experience, the experience is always relational, sensual, ephemeral and in a constant stage of becoming.

Böhme<sup>53</sup> adds that an atmosphere should be viewed as a *social aesthetics of everyday life*. He refers the social to embodied and sensual engagement, and argues that the atmosphere is ‘something that has to be sensed in order to understand what is really at stake when we talk about atmosphere. The atmosphere of a city is precisely the way life unfolds within the city’. Böhme specifies that life unfolds within the city, in different forms (e.g. poetic, social, political, cultural, economic). For instance: ‘the city as nature, the city of sounds, the city of a landscape, the day’s veils (fog, air, rain, dusk), the street as a living being, people as nature’.<sup>54</sup>

Building on the above mentioned theory, the following sections present my unfolding practical-theoretical improvisational heritage journey.

## Improvisational heritage practice

Crouch argues that heritage is part of everyday life: ‘we participate in making our own heritage in acts and feelings of everyday living. The character of heritage occurs relationally, multiply, fluidly and so on; its spaces likewise’.<sup>55</sup> My heritage research journey and acts of knowing street art, heritage and affective atmosphere emerged as part of my improvisational everyday life in the streets of Oslo, conditioned by the improvisational approach of more-than-representational theory and phenomenology.

More-than-representational theory views improvisation through the lens of performativity, which ‘underlines the broader relevance of concerted actions – or “events” – in our mundane existence and their fragility and – at times – inscrutability’.<sup>56</sup> It understands everyday improvisation through the metaphor of ‘life as a performance’, viewing improvisation as an act in which humans and non-humans participate as ‘mutual improvisers’, each with equal importance. Non- and more-than-representational scholars emphasise the pure (i.e. affective, unintentional, precognitive, processual, unpredictable) improvisational aspects of everyday life.

However, improvisation scholar Montouri argues that, from a phenomenological perspective, improvisation never exists in a pure state, but only dialectically. He adds that there is always a background to the improvisational everyday performance:

Life is participation and participation is creation and improvisation, because life does not occur in a vacuum, it occurs always in a network of inter-retro-actions and of organization, in a constant play of order, disorder, and organization and ongoing learning.<sup>57</sup>

My heritage improvisational research and knowing journey thus emerged between dialectic elements. Following Deleuze and Guattari, my journey was, on the one hand, striated (i.e. constrained by academic rules, order, structure, repetition and constrained thinking) and, on the other hand, smooth (i.e. following ‘lines of flight’, spontaneity, poetics, risk and experimentation). My improvisational heritage practices, including walking, were also conditioned by my background and

context. First, my academic background in street art and graffiti influenced my practice of walking, making me more attentive to certain artworks and directing my route towards particular artworks and areas. For instance, I often passed by the Hausmania, Brenneriveien and Blå street art and graffiti areas alongside the Akerselva, in my Grunerløkka residential district. These areas can be considered a sort of gallery for non-commercial artworks in the public space, offering a dense display of street art and graffiti. Other contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the birth of my daughter in 2020, also influenced my walking practice, giving me more time to explore the streets. My walks were also conditioned by my daughter's body rhythms: I would often stop or change my planned route because she was hungry or crying or I would slow down when she slept, making me more open and attentive to my surroundings.

However, my heritage journey and acts of knowing were more than individual – they were also informed by collective relational assemblages of human and non-human bodies. McFarlane explains that moving knowledge is 'always spatially situated and in constant and reciprocal relationship with human and non-human networks thus creating different types of assemblages'.<sup>58</sup> My heritage experiences and knowledge of the artworks, affective atmospheres and urban surroundings were thus 'an emergent outcome of strategic joint-action for which it acts as a guidance function, monitoring and interpreting the situation as found'.<sup>59</sup> My heritage meaning-making process and social engagement with street art and graffiti emerged thus in the relational space between the artworks, my body and the material surroundings, via socio-spatial practices and sensory-sensual experiences. My research further evolved through my encounters with theory and practice, touching on colour, multi-sensuality, sound, movement, social hybridity, politics and power. I present these compositions from my heritage journey below.

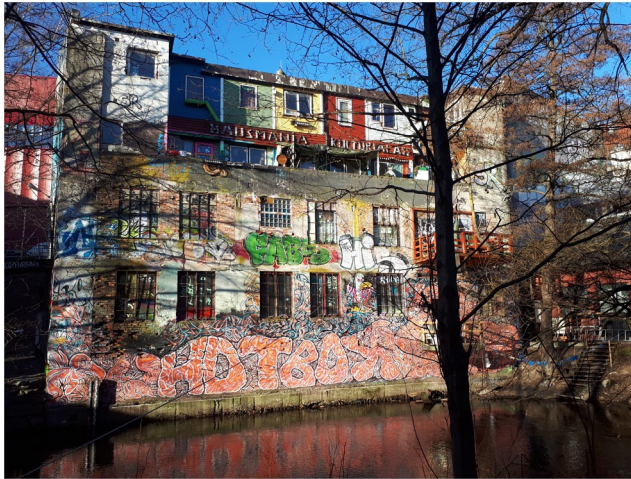
## **The heritage experience of street art and the atmospheric 'skin' of the city**

### *Atmospheric colour*

Architectural scholar Pallasmaa identifies that there 'is an entire painterly approach, as exemplified by William Turner and Claude Monet, which can be called "atmospheric painting"'.<sup>60</sup> However, he asserts that even the imaginary of the painting may evoke a full sense of lived reality, 'integrated by an overall atmosphere or feeling; the most important unifying factor in paintings is usually their specific feel of illumination and colour, more than their conceptual or narrative contents'.<sup>61</sup>

Street art, as a hybrid art form, can be experienced in a gallery or on a street, in physical or in virtual space. However, street art in its natural context is profoundly different from art showcased in a gallery, as it is continuously affected by the changing urban environment, with respect to time (i.e. day vs night), sound, season, colour, light and the movement of humans and non-humans. Graffiti or street artists have no need to think about how to paint a proportional landscape or create an atmosphere with a particular colour. They are more interested in how the colour in their artwork will merge with the city's materiality, architecture, nature and landscape. However, the atmosphere or material environment of a street artwork is not created and recreated by only the painter or writer, but also by the entire urban landscape: by the earth, the sky, light, shadow, sound, movement and weather, in continuous formation. The landscape both mediates and facilitates the affective, emotional and sensual heritage experience of the artwork in the viewer. In this regard, the street art atmosphere arises from both a 'meteorological phenomenon and a spatial experience of affect and materiality'.<sup>62</sup>

While moving or standing near an artwork, I inhabit not only the colourful images, signs and symbols of the artwork, but also the artwork's open world. I am 'immersed in the fluxes of the



**Figure 2.** Atmospheric colour (photo by author).



**Figure 3.** Atmospheric colour: Shadow and light, earth and sky (photo by author).

medium: in sunshine, rain, and wind. This immersion, in turn, underwrites our capacities respectively – to see, hear, and touch'.<sup>63</sup> My perception of street art and graffiti takes into account the weather, the air, the light and the season. In turn, the weather, the time of day, the season and other elements contribute to creating and recreating the artwork, enabling new expressions and experiences: the night and snow may temporarily hide the artwork, the surface colours may become a background for a new painting, and the material surface may function as a frame. Light and shadow (see Figures 2 and 3) may eliminate the material expression of the image and its surroundings, in an interplay that connects architecture and natural and weather worlds. Shadow may counteract the light and lend tranquillity, while light may enrich the shadow and add vitality. These elements all contribute to the vibrancy of the colourful landscape (Figure 3).

Street art and graffiti are more than simply colourful images; they are also affective and agential artworks. The atmospheric colours of street art and graffiti radiate the surroundings and merge with



other natural colours (see Figures 2 and 3) – those of trees, snow, materials, water, sky and earth. The ground becomes coloured by shadow, while the sun lightens; trees stripe the surface of the images and melt into them; clouds and the blue sky wash them out, while also becoming part of them; images merge with the water, turning it red, green or brown. Hence, the colourful landscape becomes a quasi-object with atmosphere, which possesses the perceivers. For me, the atmosphere of the images has ‘thing-power’,<sup>64</sup> enriching and enchanting the images through its vibrant colours, which evoke memories dreams, and associations. It contributes meaningful relations in meaningless times (i.e. those of COVID-19).

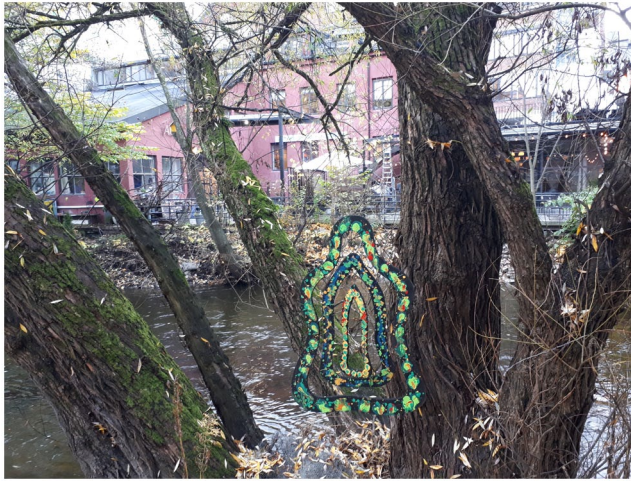
In my heritage journey, the images I encountered became not only my friends, but also a hobby, an experiment and an occupation. I visited them and the surrounding areas of Hausmania, Brenneriveien and Blå almost every day with the baby carriage during the pandemic, constructing a heritage meaning in their constantly changing materiality. Their temporary transformations gave me a sensual experience and knowledge of their material change. Additionally, my socio-spatial practices of walking, sensing and photographing transformed me by bestowing place identity and belonging to the street artworks and their material surroundings. This affective heritage process of place-making was not static, but evolutive through my movement along life’s path, my socio-spatial practices and my ‘relational experience of a thinking, feeling body/subject’.<sup>65</sup>

In relation to Hausmania, Brenneriveien and Blå, the atmospheric colourful landscape has ‘thing-power’. It connects humans and non-humans, drawing them into the formation of atmosphere and ‘thickness’ through ‘affective engagement which captures an emergent force or intensity that is a function of the assembling of bodies, both human and nonhuman, without ever being reducible to these bodies’.<sup>66</sup> Atmospheric colour thus contributes to the formation of a ‘thick’ place through its affective expression and collocation of practice and intra-action. Through its colourful assemblage, an artwork (and its material environment) ‘organizes space in its entirety, that is, enters into constellations with other things or centers the space by the superior power of its color and tones or tinctures at the same time all other things’.<sup>67</sup> In other words, the colourful assemblage operates in conjunction with other affective atmospheres and surrounding entities and activities: the Blå music venue and bar, the Hausmania culture house, the Strykejernet art school, the Ingensteds club, the Sunday market and Akerselva and the surrounding green area. All of the atmospheric components create ‘an assembled stage for engagement and situations producing meaning through interaction and use’<sup>68</sup>; they produce a ‘thick’ meaningful place, contributing various forms (e.g. bodily, sensory, enchanting, entertaining, economic) of social engagement. Atmospheric colour and heritage meaning is thus produced in the multi-sensorial, affective, agential and social interactions and relations between the collective human and non-human.

### *Kinetic sculptures in the air*

In early autumn 2021, two kinetic, abstract, hanging sculptures (Figures 4 and 5) appeared in the Blå cultural area. Blå is located in the middle of Oslo, near Akerselva, where east meets west. In Blå, a diverse array of unconventional art is constantly arising – including the two kinetic sculptures mentioned above – with no prior permission. The kinetic artworks particularly captured my attention due to their expressive form and moving intensity. The affective heritage space between me and the figures emerged accidentally, as a result of my own and their own movement.

The movement of the sculptures was partly meteorological – not in the sense of physical movement from point A to point B, but through attunement to the temporary rhythms of the place. It changed according to daily and seasonal rhythms. At times, the sculptures disappeared into streams of wind, climate and water, before returning, deformed, back to life. The temporal aesthetic heritage experience of the sculptures and place was not aligned with rational clock time, but ‘rather about the “ongoingness” of time: it is a process that emerges alongside the activities of dwelling’.<sup>69</sup>



**Figure 4.** Kinetic sculpture 'Green' (photo by author).



**Figure 5.** Kinetic sculpture 'Cosmos' (photo by author).

Time thus emerged through the unfolding of (my) life – in my actions of walking, sensing, photographing and interacting with the sculptures and the entire urban and material atmosphere.

The sculptures were enacted not only through the movements of (and between) me and them, but also through the material surroundings. Movement in a particular space, or 'spacetime is the product of neither subject nor object: an atmosphere is a floating in between, something between things and the perceiving subject'.<sup>70</sup> Following Deleuze and Guattari, the kinetic sculptures can be understood as refrains that acted like natural animals: they inhabited the territory and transformed it, but they were also transformed by the territory – 'the eternal return as cycle or circulation, as being-similar and being-equal – in short, as natural animal certitude and as sensible law of nature'.<sup>71</sup> The artworks were connected to the Blå territory, and they also contributed to assembling this territory: they intertwined with the surrounding area and the uncommissioned street art

landscape, and they mixed with the trickling water of Akerselva and the willow trees growing around it. The sculptures had a distinct atmospheric feel, because Blå provided them with a ‘natural environment’. The entire Blå landscape, including its river, light, darkness, wind, weather and ground, contributed to the sculptures’ movements and the sensual and affective heritage experiences they elicited.

### *Soundscape of the underbridge*

For almost 3 years, I passed an underbridge (Figures 6 and 7) daily with the baby carriage. Each time I passed it, it surprised me with its contrasting and intense atmospheric elements. From a distance, the underbridge appeared as an arch with elegant, rounded lines and colourful calligraphic paintings – an atmospheric envelopment.



**Figure 6.** Passage to the underbridge (photo by author).

This arch was dynamic and constantly changing. Its graffiti gallery space looked different each time I passed it. Some of the graffiti paintings lasted a long time, while others remained for only a few days. Some disappeared without being remembered, while others left a lasting impression. In particular, the entrance pieces – VOES and the calligraphic painting with the abstract red colour on the electric box – called my attention. I cannot explain why I found these two paintings so attractive. Perhaps it was due to their position in the light and the shifting natural materials that enriched them. Perhaps. But these paintings were not divided along the lines of my sensory pathways. They integrated smell, sound and the entire environment, engaging all my senses.

The underbridge was loaded with an intensity of sensations – a strong smell of urine, flooding on rainy days, reflections in the water and a reverberation of light and sound waves. Different sounds penetrated the space – those of the river, ducks, cars and voices – all of which were vibrations of materiality. These sounds were not always recognisable, because ‘sound (as well as vision and smell) and space mutually reinforce one another in our perception’.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the sonic layers of the underbridge did not dance alone, but with the materiality of the space and the humans and non-humans that moved through it:





**Figure 7.** The arc (photo by author).

It acts contagiously to modulate a dance floor, to repel bodies from alarms and sirens, or to innervate a wave of response during a vivid filmic scene. The affective aspect of sound comes precisely from the relations, exchanges and movements between bodies and environments.<sup>73</sup>

My perception of the underbridge's sounds (and images) was not neutral, but affected by the entire atmospheric space. The characteristics of the underbridge, which included graffiti, reflections, the river, odours, seasonality/time and light/darkness, influenced my perception of the sounds, and the sounds affected my perception of the visual images and the atmosphere.

### *Crying walls and socially hybrid atmospheres*

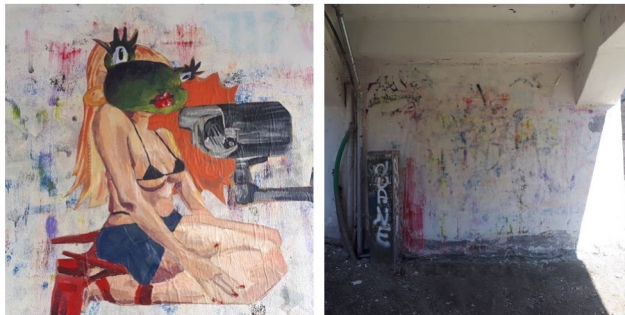
My heritage experience of street art and urban atmospheres was not only poetic, but also connected to the authorised heritage (i.e. striated) experience. This authorised heritage encourages the conservation, beautification and gentrification of legal art (including street and graffiti artwork), while showing zero tolerance for illegal art (in particular, tags). Zero-tolerance policies against 'graffiti make strong aesthetic judgements on what is beautiful and what is ugly, what is acceptable and what is not in public space'.<sup>74</sup>

Atmospheres of authorised aesthetics, marked by a sense of violence and control, can be strongly felt in the streets of Oslo. During my walks through the city, I noted buffering marks on walls, indicating the erasure of (mostly illegal) artworks. Sometimes I saw the buffering in process, and sometimes I saw only its residual trace. Oslo's zero-tolerance policy is applied most strictly to tags, but it is also applied more generally to any illegal art, including posters, 'paste-ups' and stencils. For example, Figure 8 show the paste-up 'Du er ikke alene' ('You are not alone'), which appeared on International Women's Day on 8th March 2021, in support of the transgender movement. The artwork was removed a few days later. Similarly, the paste-up 'Frog Woman' appeared around 18th March 2021, and was removed around 1st April 2021 (Figure 9).

The buffering of illegal art in Oslo proceeds according to the '*va banque*' principal, which holds that all illegal artwork should be removed, without consideration of the harm this might cause to a building or environment. Thus, buffering often leaves behind 'crying walls', with



**Figure 8.** Paste-up 'Du er ikke alene' getting buffed (photo by author).



**Figure 9.** 'Frog woman', before and after buffering (photo by author).

building materials crumbling and chemicals running into the ground and river. Paradoxically, the buffering chemical streams may cause more harm to the architecture than spray paint, and buffed areas can become new colourful backgrounds for other uncommissioned artworks (Figure 10).

Sometimes, the zero-tolerance policy is even applied to legal artworks, in the context of aesthetic confusion or moral opposition to a particular colour. At times, neoliberal urbanism has resulted in the destruction of an entire graffiti wall, as in the case of the legal graffiti wall at Brenneriveien 11 in Oslo (Figure 11). The 30-year-old graffiti wall was removed together with the historic industrial building in August 2022, to free up the site for student housing. Only two abandoned and lonely works of art remain: 'Crocodile', painted in 2012 by the Welsh artist Phlegm (which has become a branding image for the area), and a work by Norwegian graffiti legend SEAN 66, which is over 20 years old and one of the oldest artworks in the area. The destruction took place despite the graffiti wall's socially engaging atmospheric qualities and cultural and historical significance (Figure 12).





**Figure 10.** Crying walls: Consequences of the zero-tolerance policy towards graffiti (photo by author).



**Figure 11.** Graffiti and street art in Brenneriveien, before the destruction (photo by author).

For more than 30 years, Brenneriveien has been the heart of the graffiti scene in Oslo, providing a free and unconventional space for graffiti artists to paint, practice and gather. Throughout these years, the graffiti wall, together with other cultural activities and attractions around Blå and Hausmania, has formed the epicentre of an especially attractive, alternative and lively area of Oslo. The artistic axis that extends along Brenneriveien, Hausmania and Blå was created improvisationally and naturally, and it benefits many. Thousands of locals and tourists have photographed themselves in front of its colourful walls. However, the area has been broken up and functionally transformed from its smooth spheres of common heritage to striated spheres of authorised aesthetics. Böhme explains that ‘the sharing of an atmosphere is something like a collective enchantment’.<sup>75</sup> He elaborates that the ruination or destruction of atmosphere can lead to the corruption of meaning, as indicated by the fact that ‘the collapse of meaning is also called a disenchantment’.<sup>76</sup> The destruction of Brenneriveien 11 affected not only the graffiti community who painted there, but also the broader Oslo population, by removing opportunities for social and collective atmospheric engagement. For me personally, the destruction of Brenneriveien 11 removed possibilities for enchantment and provisional meaning.



**Figure 12.** Graffiti and street art in Brenneriveien after the destruction (photo by author).

While moving in the streets, I not only experienced authorised aesthetics (i.e. striated worlds) and commons heritage (i.e. smooth worlds), but I also entered into a multi-layered heritage experience with street art and graffiti. I traversed hybrid spheres of the physical and virtual, legal and illegal, striated and smooth. Indeed, the affective heritage experience of street art and graffiti can be characterised by a tension between subgroups – between muralists and taggers, and between city authorities and the local population. For example, Figure 13 illustrates the tension and synergy between a legal street mural (used to advertise the Norwegian mayonnaise company Mills) and illegal tags (covering the base of the mural). The mural and tags represent different values: the former represents commodification and property ownership while the latter assert Lefebvre’s ‘rights to the city’.<sup>77</sup> There is also synergy between the two: the bottom of the mural allows tags to appear, and it gets painted over with yellow once a year, enabling a renewed dialogue.

My affective heritage experience of these artworks was not neutral, since I had theoretical knowledge about subcultures and could identify these particularities. However, the particularities of artworks may not be obvious to most passers-by. Aesthetic judgement is not neutral, but shaped by the discursive practices of authorised aesthetics – which is often considered the mural beautiful and the tags terrible. As Young explains, ‘such illicit images are often viewed through a prism which foregrounds the artwork’s spatial illegitimacy and its associated threat to the law’s valorisation of property ownership and authorship’.<sup>78</sup> However, the affective heritage experiences of the mural and the tags, respectively, do not constellate oppositional poles of legal/illegal art, positive/negative emotions, commercial/uncommercial art and striated/smooth worlds, but integrate both poles simultaneously. In my moving heritage journey, these differing affective heritage experiences of street art melted into each other, even as they stood in opposition. This heritage experience of street artwork was never static, but haptic, even though it was part of a striated experience: ‘the opposition between the optical and the haptic cross-cuts that between eye and hand: besides optical vision and haptic touch we can have optical touch as well as haptic vision’.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, the street art heritage experience is always informed by the season, materiality, weather, optical and haptic eye, earth and sky, and it is always relational, sensual, ephemeral and in a stage of becoming (Figure 13).



**Figure 13.** Mills mural and tagging (photo by author).

### Ongoing heritage journey

In this essay, I have argued that street art heritage is not dependent on a subdivision between people and artwork, but an embodied, political and relational experience. Accordingly, I have applied the notion of affective atmosphere to address the immaterial aspects of street art and to conceptualise street art as a sensuous, political and embodied heritage experience, involving human bodies interacting with street art and its urban and material environment, in everyday life. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's conceptions of striated and smooth space, the concept of atmosphere, and the fields of art aesthetics, street art and urban studies, I have developed a hybrid authorised heritage/aesthetics (i.e. striated) and commons heritage/counter aesthetics (i.e. smooth) understanding of the heritage experience of street art and affective atmospheres.

Bridging these dialectic poles and drawing on my experience and photographs of the urban space, first, I have demonstrated that the heritage experience of street art occurs not solely in the relationship between the human body and artworks, but in a dialectical relationship between meteorological phenomena and spatial experiences of affect and materiality. Thus, the street art heritage experience is situated within the atmospheric 'skin' of materiality, shadow, light, seasonality, sound, movement, architecture, sky, earth, material texture, nature and weather-worlds. In this regard, the construction of heritage meaning with street art and graffiti emerges not solely through the artwork's ephemeral rhythms (e.g.), but also through the perceiver's unfolding life,

weather-worlds, actions (e.g. walking) and sensing and interacting with the artwork, as well as the entire urban and material atmosphere.

Second, I have demonstrated that social heritage engagement with street art in urban atmospheres is complex and multi-layered, traversing authorised heritage/aesthetics (i.e. striated worlds) and commons heritage/counter aesthetics (i.e. smooth worlds). I have highlighted the multi-sensual, personal and collective (i.e. human and non-human) and the social and political aspects of the heritage experience of street art and urban atmospheres. I have also revealed two sides of street art heritage change: on the one hand, the ephemerality of artworks is part of the commons heritage (i.e. smooth space) and the heritage meaning-making process; while on the other hand, the destruction and removal of artworks by authorised aesthetics is part of the striated space of exclusion and the corruption of meaning.

As presented in this paper, street art is part of the urban atmosphere, and the atmospheric colour of street art operates in conjunction with other atmospheres and urban assemblages. Lack of knowledge about this dynamic relationship can lead to the removal of artworks and, with them, the social, affective and atmospheric value they provide to a graffiti community, neighbourhood or place. The destruction of colourful atmospheres may also lead to a collapse of meaning or 'thickness', as emphasised by Böhme.<sup>80</sup> However, the protection of the rights of common citizens and the prevention of the removal of certain street artworks depend not on material preservation, but on oppositional movements that resist and interrupt the authorised aesthetics. For this reason, we should shift focus from the perfect preservation of (certain) artworks, to a consideration of how we might change negative perceptions towards illicit images, resist authorised aesthetics, and engage in more just, sensible, sensitive and comprehensive analyses and practices with graffiti and street artworks, and their urban and material atmospheres.

Scholars of street art heritage and affective atmospheres need to change their ways of doing and thinking about practical street art and heritage research. However, it is not my aim to discourage traditional academic research. The traditional academic writing can be useful, but it is also highly limited, 'since it leaves out so much of who we are, originating as it did in a time when for science to be science'<sup>81</sup>; it is not capable of coping with the complexities of everyday life, the constantly changing street art environment and affective atmospheres. As presented in this article, street art heritage concerns everyday life – atmospheres, public spaces and 'everyday' sensory, ephemeral, affective, political and embodied experiences. Thus, processes of knowing, experimenting with and exploring street art occur naturally, as part of improvisational everyday life in the streets and/or on social media or in the gallery.

The hybrid improvisational approach of phenomenology and non-representational theory adopted in this research suggests that everyday practice, in itself, is performative and full of possibilities for discovery. It allows us to accommodate creativity in academic research and to explore the dialectic relations between the poetic and the political and the representational and the non-representational – offering 'an inquiry into the dialogical and recursive relationship between subject and object, self and other, head and heart, an ongoing invitation to, and navigation of, the paradoxical nature of the creative process'.<sup>82</sup> Improvisational scholar Montuori explains that 'creativity and improvisation . . . allow us to adapt in our own way to complex environments, and they allow us to express our own (inner) complexity through the performance of our interaction with the world'.<sup>83</sup> He also stresses that it is challenging to balance science and art (or the personal). However, I believe that a creative heritage research journey with graffiti and street art cultures and urban atmospheres can only be achieved through openness to life and the world around us, and through a balance of scientific and creative, mindful and soulful, planned and spontaneous, political and poetic everyday practice. My heritage journey is not finished with this text; rather, I continue to search for an ideal balance in my daily life:



Since my child's birth, many things have changed. My daughter is now 3 years old and goes to kindergarten. I started my PhD journey, which is about to be terminated. The intensity of COVID-19 has waned, but war in Ukraine reverberates strongly in the daily news and the world remains filled with insecurities. I am still walking with the baby carriage along the Akerselva, but not as often as I did during the pandemic and I am continuing to construct my heritage journey, but not along quite the same route.


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## Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

## Notes

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