

ARTICLE

Aesthetic practices of psychogeography and photography

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Abstract

Psychogeographic walking and urban photography as aesthetic practices are intuitive, sensory methods for exploring and capturing diverse facets of the city. Aesthetic practices are more than just sensory methods of exploration—they are also importantly connected to performing and making art. Using examples from a study on the aesthetic implications of zero tolerance policy against graffiti in Oslo, this paper considers what these methods reveal about the city. The paper argues that this methodology has potential for studying varied topics that might benefit from the unanticipated encounters that arise with psychogeography and the visual record produced with photography. Walking brings the researcher into contact with the materialities and rhythms of the city, allowing insight into its spatial and temporal variations. Encounters with these variations and materialities can reveal how urban space is used and by whom. The playful and artistic dimensions of these practices make them inductive and revelatory methods for studying the city. The paper concludes by suggesting that such practices encourage new ways of looking at the city and have potential for exploring the aesthetic politics of cities.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Ball bearings shake against the interiors of aluminium cans; particles of aerosol paint become momentarily suspended and dance through the air before settling wet and tacky against concrete, brick, plastic, metal, and glass of the city. Broad strokes, fine lines, bright colours, quick movements, and practiced designs transforming spaces, sometimes in frenetic moments and other times in longer, contemplated durations. Markers squeak and drip against surfaces.

Stickers stick. Wet wheatpaste sticks too, to fingers and walls, sliding over paper and gluing artworks in situ. Stencil cut-outs with registration marks bow and catch the wind making clumsy paper and plastic symphonies on walks between artistic installations. The visual presence of graffiti and street art ebbs and flows as people move through the city making marks, often anonymously, frequently illegally. Marks are made, they erode, are erased: a visual culture in flux with the rhythms of the city itself. Urban aesthetic politics are played out through these expressions: artists and writers enacting their rights to the city and municipalities and authorities reacting in turn with various policy regimes and measures of control. These moments of creation are often invisible to the public, to the authorities who regulate, and to the many scholars who study their presence in the city, and it is the traces left behind instead that have attracted the attention of so many.

Using graffiti and street art as a lens, this paper explores how aesthetic practices of psychogeography and photography can be effective and elucidating methods for studying urban aesthetics. Graffiti and street art are inherent to the aesthetic landscape of cities. Their visual language, forms, and style are easily recognisable, even when removed from the urban context from which they gain much of their meaning. Arguably, it is graffiti and street art's geography that makes them contentious, particularly when their creation transgresses legal boundaries in the city. Graffiti and tagging have been the subject of fierce debate as "broken windows" theory and the spurring of moral panics in cities like New York City in the 1990s have succeeded in establishing graffiti as a sign of disorder in the public imagination, a visual cue confirming the presence of more serious crime (Cresswell, 1992; Kramer, 2010, 2012; Young, 2010, 2014b). Anti-graffiti policies, like the zero tolerance approaches that arose from these moral panics, are aesthetic in nature. This is because they include and are based on aesthetic judgements about graffiti and other interventions—characterising them not as artistic practices that can be considered beautiful but vandalism that is always ugly—and because they strive to regulate the aesthetics of the city.

Graffiti and street art are compelling topics for scholars. Their placement in the everyday public spaces of the city makes them easily accessible, attracting interest from a wide range of disciplines. Criminologists, especially cultural criminologists interested in the tensions between art and crime, have critically examined legal and policy aspects of graffiti and street art (see Halsey & Young, 2002; Høigård, 2011; Young, 2010, 2014b). Sociologists, anthropologists, and feminist scholars have offered insight into the social substance of the subcultures and their artists (see Dickinson, 2008; Ferrell, 1996; Ferrell & Weide, 2010; Kramer, 2010; Macdonald, 2001; Pabón, 2013; Schacter, 2016; Snyder, 2009). Art historians and those working in visual culture and media studies have examined the historical and cultural significance of urban art movements (see Bengsten, 2016; Kimvall, 2014; Valjakka, 2016; Waclawek, 2011). Philosophers have turned their attentions toward street art in particular, debating the very essence of what street art *is* and what it *does* (see Baldini, 2016; Chackal, 2016; Riggie, 2010, 2016). Geographers have examined more spatial and situational aspects of the practices as well as their political entanglements (see Bloch, 2016; Cresswell, 1992, 1996; Haworth, Bruce, & Iveson, 2013; Iveson, 2009, 2010; McAuliffe, 2012; McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011; Nandrea, 1999). Analytical approaches and ways of studying graffiti and street art depend upon the discipline from which they are studied. Methods include ethnography, quantitative and spatial analysis, policy analysis, discourse analysis, and sometimes a combination of these. Walking and photography are often implicit methods. Some researchers are beginning to refer more explicitly to their use of walking and photography to study these practices,¹ suggesting that some degree of immersion in the city together with visual documentation is important in studying the aesthetic politics of the city. Yet the use of these methods for studying urban aesthetics has not been explored in depth. This paper establishes a theoretical reasoning for the use of aesthetic practices and discusses a distinct methodology for studying the urban aesthetics of graffiti and street art, one which may have applications for studying diverse topics within the city. The paper builds its arguments on the experiences gained during an extensive study carried out between 2013 and 2017 on the aesthetics of zero tolerance policy against graffiti in the Norwegian capital of Oslo. This paper suggests that the pairing of psychogeographic walking with photography has particular advantages for exploring spatial and temporal variations and materialities, may promote new ways of knowing and looking, and hints at the potential of these methods for studying the aesthetic politics of cities.

2 | AESTHETIC PRACTICES

Urban walking and photography as aesthetic practices are intuitive, sensory methods for exploring and capturing diverse facets of the city. Yet, what are aesthetic practices? The answer depends upon one's understanding of aesthetics. Aesthetics may be defined in different ways, referring either to sensory experience or to a branch of philosophy concerned with art or a certain understanding of art (Lampert, 2017). Because of the latter association, aesthetics is often used analogously to refer to anything artistic. Both psychogeography and photography can be viewed as aesthetic as they necessitate a sensory engagement in urban space *and* they may be considered aesthetic in the artistic sense as both are connected to performing or making art. Aesthetic practices are then, for the purpose of this paper, ways of doing fieldwork that are bound up in both the sensory and the artistic. It is this combination that differentiates this methodology from other types of sensory research methodologies such as visual or sensory ethnography. Used in connection with urban research, aesthetic practices encourage the researcher to play, to look differently at the city, and to perform or make art. Research becomes not only a study of the city but also a study of the experience of the city.

While photography is more easily understood as aesthetic—in its use of the senses and as a well-established art form—some additional explanation is needed on how walking is aesthetic. Walking has been described as an aesthetic practice by various authors (see Bassett, 2004; Careri, 2017) who refer to different modes of walking through the city. What makes walking aesthetic is both its relationship with the act of looking and with its association with various art movements, including Dadaism, Surrealism, and Situationsim (Careri, 2017). Urban strolls and idle urban walking are often associated with the artistic wandering of the nineteenth century figure, the *flâneur*. It is Walter Benjamin, with inspiration from the work of Baudelaire, who developed the term (Richardson, 2015). The *flâneur* is typically male, an artist lost in the crowd (Elkin, 2016), walking the city in pursuit of leisure, pleasure, and the erotic (Bassett, 2004; Elkin, 2016; Hubbard, 2005). The *flâneur* has been written about as a literary figure (Richardson, 2015), an allegorical figure (Hubbard, 2005), and a discursive figure (Shields, 1994). Benjamin (1997, p. 36) describes the *flâneur's* leisurely strolling through the city as “botanizing on the asphalt,” alluding perhaps to the novelty of strolling through the metropolis rather than more idyllic natural settings but also suggesting new ways of looking at the city. Instead of being drawn by the attractions of plants as a botanist might, the *flâneur* is instead captivated by the diverse sights and spectacles of the city. Though the walking of the *flâneur* may be associated with a leisurely pace and a historically male gaze that seeks out pleasure and the spectacular in the modern city, there are also political currents to these strolls. Benjamin draws connections between these navigations and manifestations of consumerism and capitalism in the city and its exclusionary aspects (Bassett, 2004; Tormey, 2012).

Today's equivalent to the *flâneur* might well be the urban explorer who confronts more contemporary expressions of capitalism in the city, such as increased privatisation and surveillance. While the walking associated with urban exploration (urbex) may not necessarily be idle and leisurely, the practice seeks out pleasure through trespass and exploration of novel, derelict, and abandoned spaces in the city. The motivations behind practices of urban exploration are many (Garrett, 2014), yet its quest for the spectacular is central and evidenced by how the practice is frequently documented through video and photography. Its gaze has also been argued to be masculine and its practice masculinist (Mott & Roberts, 2014). This is in part because the practice tends to valorise masculine traits of strength and virility while not taking into account differences in embodiment (Mott & Roberts, 2014). Though urban explorers are not explicitly connected with an art movement, their performances and visual documentation can very easily be read as artistic. While the *flâneur* and the urban explorer circumnavigate politics in their urban movements, the Situationists melded politics and art more seamlessly in their interventions and experiments in the city. The Situationist International has its origins in the avant-garde movements of the Letterist International and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus. Guy Debord was a key figure in the Letterist International, while the Imaginist Bauhaus arose from the Surrealist and the Cobra art movements (Bassett, 2004). Despite its small membership, the Situationist International was highly influential, frequently cited as being pivotal in the May 1968 uprisings in Paris (Bassett, 2004; Richardson, 2015). As artists and urban theorists, the Situationists developed different

aesthetic practices and artistic techniques of urban experimentation, including *détournements*, the creation of situations, psychogeography, and the *dérive*. The *dérive* or drift is one of the most widely adopted of the Situationist practices (Smith, 2010). It is defined by Debord (2006, p. 62) as “a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances.” It is a walk that is playful and political, an attempt to get lost in the city and create awareness of “psychogeographical effects” (Debord, 2006, p. 62). The Situationists “saw getting lost in the city as a concrete expressive possibility of anti-art, adopting it as an aesthetic-political means by which to undermine the postwar capitalist system” (Careri, 2017, p. 86). Psychogeography is a frequent theme within political and artistic milieus and “circulate to the point of cliché” (Shukaitis & Figiel, 2013, p. 2). Yet Pinder (2009, p. 149) argues for the continued relevance of the Situationists' practices, writing that “not only are their critiques of the spectacle remarkably prescient in current image-saturated times, as battles rage over control of the image realm, but they also continue to offer provocative insights and critical impetus for exploring cities and the politics of urban space.”

3 | AESTHETIC PRACTICES AS METHODOLOGY

The use of the *dérive* or psychogeographic walking as a specific research methodology is not as robustly explored in the literature as its political, artistic, and historical significance. Tying the *dérive* to a specific research question may seem counter-intuitive to the radical and historical politics and to the ludic, subjective, and unpredictable qualities of the practice. The Situationists were artists and urban theorists with clear political intent and motivations, and their experimental practices were not devised as scientific research methods, and to treat them as such can be problematic. The Situationists “never made claims as to how to do psychogeographical work; they did not wish to take expert roles because this would then reflect the hierarchical assumptions of capitalism” (Bridger, 2013, p. 290). Yet using experimental practices such as psychogeography to explore urban space may “play a vital role in the development of critical approaches to the cultural geographies of cities” (Pinder, 2005, p. 383). Researchers in different disciplines are beginning to explore its potential as a method, particularly when embedded within a broader research methodology, and note that walking in this way lends itself well to explorations of difference and embodiment in the city (Bridger, 2013; Murali, 2016). Bridger (2013) considers psychogeography to be potentially useful as a feminist methodology for this reason, Murali (2016) explores this in her own reflexive *dérives* that she undertakes as part of urban ethnographies, while Pyyry (2018) writes on the usefulness of the *dérive* for conducting nonrepresentational urban research.

There are different ways to approach these aesthetic practices as a methodology, depending on the research questions asked, the objectives of the study, what data is sought and how it is analysed, and how the researcher has chosen to interpret the experimental and experiential aspects of the methods. The flexibility of the methodology can make its use particularly challenging. It is often difficult to parse out the different stages of the research process. Sarah Pink (2015, p. 141) considers this challenge with respect to multisensory ethnography, writing that “interpretative understandings cannot be separated from the ethnographic encounter from which they emerge.” Analysis can be thought of then as “a way of knowing” (Pink, 2015, p. 142), and Pink (2015, p. 143) argues that “analysis is situated in the research process” with “analysis being an implicit element of ethnographic fieldwork.” As a method for studying the city, the psychogeographic *dérive* has some methodological commonalities with variants of ethnography including urban ethnography, urban autoethnography, and sensory and visual ethnography. Similarities with autoethnography arise when focussing on the reflexive aspects of the methods or the psychogeographical effects felt during walking. This is because autoethnography is concerned with studying the self, whether it is because the researcher is studying a group that they are part of or because the researcher chooses to incorporate autobiographical writing and personal reflections in their analyses (Reed-Danahay, 1997). The attention to emotion and reflexivity that arises with psychogeography is also in tune with trends in autoethnographic research (Anderson, 2006). When pairing the *dérive* with photography, as many researchers do (see Bridger, 2013; Murali, 2016; Pyyry, 2018), similarities arise with visual and sensory ethnography. Though such methods are often more

collaborative and participatory in nature, walking and photography are common practices in urban visual and sensory ethnography (Pink, 2008a, 2008b).

Researchers who approach psychogeography from a methodological standpoint often make use of complementary methods to document and capture their experience. Diaries and field notes as one might write in an ethnographic study are often used, allowing the researcher to record the psychogeographical effects and subjective impressions that walking in this way necessarily conjures. Photography is another often used adjunct to psychogeographic walking. The *dérive* is ultimately caught up in the visual. Psychogeography “depends upon the walker ‘seeing’ and being drawn into events, situations and images by an abandonment to wholly unanticipated attraction” (Jenks & Neves, 2000, p. 7). Murali (2016) refers to her use of the *dérive* as a form of urban autoethnography, which she pairs with walking diaries, photography, and video, while Bridger (2013) considers his use of the *dérive* as a feminist methodology, which he combines with the production of narrative, photography, and artistic maps. There is a strong connection between psychogeography and photography when the *dérive* is used as a research method. Pyry (2018) uses the term “photo-walk” to describe her multisensory experiments with the *dérive*. Pairing her walks with photography while also paying attention to sound, she considers these methods to be a form of nonrepresentational urban research. In her use of photography with the *dérive*, she views the photograph not as an end-product document but rather an integral part of the sensorial experience of exploring urban space (Pyry, 2018). The use of nonrepresentational methods together with photography is becoming more prominent within urban geography (see Latham & McCormack, 2009; Pyry, 2018). This consideration of the nonrepresentational hints at the connections with artistic practice, for art is not only about representation but also about evocation.

Rose (2014) suggests three approaches to urban photography typically taken by scholars: representing, performing, and evoking the urban. Approaches that attempt to evoke the urban reflect emerging interests within urban theory on the embodied experiential and sensory dimensions of the city (Rose, 2014). Though these interests may be somewhat peripheral in urban research, they necessitate a need for methods that move beyond documentation and representation and toward those able to capture nontangible aspects of space and place including texture and affect (see Hunt, 2014). Affect is distinct from emotion, writes Young (2014a, p. 162), who explains that “affect denotes an intensity that connects individuals to the social world in a relation that pre-exists the emotional states to which we give names.” Photographs may capture and (re)produce encounter and moments of affect, thereby evoking the urban. Photographs that serve to capture texture, affect, experiential qualities, and sense of place may assist the researcher to convey visually what might be more difficult to express in writing. Tim Edensor’s (2005) photography from walking through urban ruins is a notable example of this (Rose, 2006). Mia Hunt’s photography is another. Her photography explores how the materiality and “ad hoc-ness” of corner shops in London meet with “forces of the city” (Hunt, 2016). Her photographs show how these forces, which include “the dynamism of urban matter, the currents of neighbourhood change, the fluid manifestations of the urban brand, and the translocalism of the shopkeepers and precarity of their lives,” are embedded in the very materiality of the shops themselves (Hunt, 2016, p. 255). Hunt (2014) suggests that more recent approaches to image making in the city “chimes with contemporary enquiries that highlight feelings, textures, and experience of place and draw on more-than-representational approaches.” These shifts in theory and photography have implications for exploring the “multi-sensory nature of experiences of urban aesthetics” (Latham & McCormack, 2009, p. 261). In capturing and expressing these diverse aesthetics, photography may contribute to different ways of thinking and rethinking the city (Tormey, 2012). Capturing these affective and sensory aspects of the city is important for “understanding the lively and enchanted materialities of urban place” and does so when words are not sufficient (Rose, 2014).

4 | AESTHETIC PRACTICES AS METHOD

Oslo has had a strong anti-graffiti discourse that began in the mid-1990s, with zero tolerance being adopted officially as policy in 2000. Over the course of the past 4 years, I have endeavoured to uncover how this policy impacts the aesthetics of the city. Does the legacy of such policy linger and impact how the city of Oslo looks and how the public

enact their rights to the city and express themselves creatively in public space? In order to answer these questions, I developed a methodology that brought me into close contact with the materiality and spaces of the city. Using the psychogeographic *dérive*, I walked over 200 km in Oslo. Psychogeographic walking is a particularly interesting way of exploring graffiti and street art precisely for how it mirrors the ways in which graffiti writers and street artists themselves navigate the city, in inherently geographical ways. Graffiti writers have “intimate knowledge of back alleys, freeway interchanges, interconnecting rooftops, patterns of light and human movement, neighbourhood policing tendencies, lines of visibility, major routes of commuter travel, and phases of urban development and decay” (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, p. 49). Graffiti writers move through these spaces in “liquid” rather than fixed ways, remapping the city in ways which recall the strolls of the *flâneur* and the drifts of the psychogeographer (Ferrell & Weide, 2010, p. 49). Graffiti writers and street artists are also keen on photography and frequently take photographs during or shortly after completing a piece or later retrace their steps to revisit interventions and document their work (Figure 1). While I do not purport to replicate the methods of the Situationists, my methodology is inspired by their actions in the city. The Situationists were highly critical of the commodification of art and public space, and for this reason, their methods have particular relevance for studying graffiti and street art.

While the Situationist *dérive* is certainly an inspiration, I have not strived to reproduce their techniques precisely. It is, after all, difficult to replicate practices that are by their very nature experimental. Though my walks have not been entirely void of purpose, during fieldwork, I walked alone without a predetermined route, from varying starting points, rarely knowing beforehand where I might walk and what I might encounter. Choosing a random starting point and without a map, I walked the city. The duration of my walks varied: lasting from 1 hour to several, ranging from 1 to 15 km. Sometimes my point of departure was my home, other times my place of work, but more frequently, it was where I randomly disembarked from public transportation. I attempted to immerse myself in the urban landscape and was very often disoriented, not knowing my precise location. As a foreigner living in Oslo, this comes with relative ease as I have an unfamiliarity with the geography of the city and at the beginning of research, only a rudimentary command of the Norwegian language. The feeling of being lost brings on a hyperawareness of my surroundings. I used graffiti and street art as means to navigate. They became like stars, and I followed their presence through space. I was pulled by these attractions, down streets and through parking lots, through alleyways, halted



FIGURE 1 A graffiti writer stands back and takes a photograph of a piece at the legal wall at Gamlebyen Skatepark (2017)

and turned round at cul-de-sacs, alongside railway tracks, through cemeteries, along the Oslo fjord and the River Akerseiva, which divides and demarcates the city socio-economically between east and west.

Using graffiti and street art as a propellant, I walked the city in my quest to gain understandings of how different spaces in the city look and feel. I took thousands of digital photographs documenting what I encountered, amassing a large quantity of visual data. My choice to use a combination of aesthetic or artistic practices in my research affected the ways in which I looked at the city and the types of photographs that I began to take, moving further from pure documentary and into other territories as my project progressed. This led me to reflect on the potential and significance of aesthetic practices for conducting urban research. In particular, my research has shown these methods to be empirically useful in exploring spatial and temporal variations in the city and permits a unique engagement with material aspects of the city. The following discussion explores these aspects in greater depth, augmented by photographic examples and reflections based upon my research on graffiti and street art in Oslo.

4.1 | Spatial and temporal variation

Cities are in constant flux. There are the daily rhythmic changes that Henri Lefebvre (2013) writes about: the rhythms of the city as seen from a window in Paris, of people passing by, cars stopping and going, crowds gathering and dispersing, noise rising and falling, lights being turned on and off. There are also the rhythmic changes of graffiti and street art that change the urban landscape, often introduced at night, appearing as fresh additions to the city in the morning (Cresswell, 1998). Rhythmic removal of these interventions also occur at the behest of authorities, with policy documents sometimes including time limits for removal. In Oslo, tags are removed within 48 hours of being reported for those subscribing to the municipality's paid graffiti removal scheme (Oslo City Council, 2011). Interventions are taken down or painted over, pressure washed off or chemically removed. Legal works tend to remain in place far longer, are more static, but illegal works appear and disappear with regularity. These spatial and temporal variations become especially obvious through walking and revisiting certain spaces over time.

There are different ways to capture spatial and temporal variations with photography, yet they tend to involve some sort of repeat or longitudinal study. Though spatial analysis is useful for examining changes through time (Haworth et al., 2013), photography may better communicate what these changes look like. Researchers have begun using longitudinal photography—revisiting the same site repeatedly over an extended period of time and taking photographs—to explore these changes. Hansen and Flynn (2015, p. 26) recommend “a methodological approach to the study of street art and graffiti that is based on the documentation of single sites over time.” While my methods do not constitute longitudinal photography in the way that Hansen and Flynn advocate for, my psychogeographic walking does frequently bring me into repeated contact with certain spaces allowing insight into how spaces change with time. An example of this can be seen in Figures 2 and 3. In October 2014, I took a photograph of an electrical box in Tøyen on the eastern side of Oslo, which featured a stencil work made by French artist C215 (Figure 2). The site-specific piece makes use of colours that complement and connect with the painted wall behind. Passing by this same space in April 2017, the photograph in Figure 3 shows how the site has changed. The wall in the background has since been painted over, the ghosted images of several tags still scarcely visible. Some of the same tags from the original image remain, but the stencil art by C215 has since been pasted over with a poster that has been partially ripped off and subsequently superimposed with graffiti. Only C215's signature and some of his characteristic background spray paint is currently still visible.

The ephemerality of graffiti and street art in the city is one reason why photography is so closely connected to the art cultures. Documentary photographs have been “a necessary adjunct to the work itself” (Austin, 2001, p. 251) since the 1980s given the temporary nature of works. An aesthetic dialogue or aesthetic dialectics unfolds in the city through the repeated cycle of graffiti making and graffiti erasure. Graffiti removal is the attempted erasure of graffiti from urban space using a variety of techniques and is a key feature of zero tolerance policy. Graffiti removal is rarely completely effective, often leaving some trace or echo behind and may be understood as a visual and political reminder that such expressions are unwanted and not tolerated (Figure 4). These fluctuations are emblematic of



FIGURE 2 Stencil by French artist C215 on electrical box in Tøyen (2014)



FIGURE 3 Stencil by French artist C215 obscured on electrical box in Tøyen (2017)



FIGURE 4 Visual trace of graffiti removal along a wall in Bislett (2014)

the aesthetic politics of the city. Encountering and capturing these variations contributes to a deeper understanding of these aesthetic dialectics that play out between artists and authorities in the city. Even without both images to compare, the second image (Figure 3) communicates this dialectic. For in Figure 3, we can see evidence of prior graffiti. On the wall behind, the ghosted tag beneath the repainted red wall is still visible. This shows, in just one photograph, evidence that this space has changed over time, even if that period of time cannot be precisely gleaned from the photograph. Looking at this image, we can understand that graffiti was present and subsequently painted over and (mostly) removed. This trace suggests to the spectator that the graffiti was not wanted and inferences can be made as to why based on one's knowledge of public discourses on illegal graffiti. This is also seen more overtly in Figure 4, which shows how graffiti removal changes the aesthetics of a space and also visually communicates what is or is not tolerated. The expressions on the electrical box, on the other hand, are clearly more tolerated, and we can see evidence of a long duration of layered expressions. This is also evident in a single photograph, in either Figure 2 or Figure 3, and does not necessarily need a second for comparison. A richness of information can be obtained from a single photograph, and a longitudinal study is therefore not always necessary to understand how spaces change. On this very small scale, we can see both temporal and spatial variations. Spatial variation is also evident on larger scales when comparing photographs from different parts of the city. Graffiti, for example, is found in saturated spaces around railway lines on the eastern side of Oslo and less so in the residential and the more socio-economically privileged western part of the city. While these larger scale spatial variations can be linked to the governance and budgeting priorities of different neighbourhoods in the city, they are also related to material aspects of the city, as materials present themselves differently and are more conducive to intervention depending on the space.

4.2 | Materiality

Photography can help document spatial and temporal variation but can also show variation between different artists and diversity between the works of the same artist. This allows for understanding the portfolio of different artists and better contextualising their work. Photography can also demonstrate how different spaces within the city are used. The surfaces and textures where different pieces of work might be found differ greatly as do the pieces of art themselves, and the work of the same artist may vary accordingly. Substrates include the smooth glass of abandoned storefront windows and doorways, the coarse mottle of concrete walls and barriers, crumbling brick, weathered wooden fences, the curved surface of metal or wood poles, the thick plastics of bus shelters, the painted metal of



FIGURE 5 Marker on glass and graffiti surrealism in Grünerløkka (2014)

electrical boxes and post boxes, and the pavement underfoot. The marker tag by TND in Figure 5 illustrates how marker is used and how it looks upon a glass window. The marker streaks against the smooth surface of glass. Marker as medium would not work as well on all surfaces, for example, against a textured wall. The image of trees and the city space and the rhythms of the city are reflected in the window's surface while also allowing for a view into the storefront, curiously containing two plastic flamingos. This reveals something of the site specificity of graffiti, for the same tag against another surface would be quite different, its meaning and aesthetic changing. This photograph suggests how material matters. This materiality can influence how work is encountered. Walking in the city allows for encounter with "the haphazard as well as the curated" (Young, 2016, p. 119). The "streetness of a commissioned mural is not the same as that of a piece painted by a graffiti writer on the side of a train carriage or an image drawn on paper that is then pasted up by an artist who has chosen the site because it will form a material aspect of the artwork" (Young, 2016, p. 119). Walking and experiencing the city can uncover this "streetness" and the diversity of graffiti and street art and allow for an appreciation of its context and scale, even allowing the researcher to touch and interact with pieces when possible (Young, 2016).

Combining photography together with psychogeography also allows for a deeper understanding of the materiality that is a crucial dimension of graffiti and street art. Engaging with the materiality of the city is how graffiti writers and street artists intervene in the everyday. It is the physical and material spaces and surfaces of the city that are utilised, transgressed, contested, and subverted. Graffiti writers and street artists interact with these spaces in different ways, with diverse media, and upon a range of materials in the city. A graffiti writer most often uses spray paint and markers to intervene in the city, making their marks on walls and urban infrastructure of various kinds and qualities. Street artists work similarly to graffiti writers when working illegally but use a broader spectrum of media and tools. A street artist who works with wheatpaste, for example, uses a glue made from boiling a mixture of water and flour to affix printed or painted artworks on paper to smooth surfaces. These artists engage very directly and intimately with the materiality of the city, touching spaces and investigating textures and the moisture of substrates being requisite for installing pieces. Understanding these art practices requires an understanding of urban materiality for materials of the city become, as Young (2016) attests, part of the aesthetic and meaning of these transient art works.

Patterns of materiality present themselves through the amalgamation of many photographs. During the course of my walks in the city, I became increasingly interested in Norwegian electrical boxes (Figure 6). Also called pillar boxes—in Norwegian *el-skap*—the small metallic urban cabinets are one of the most common elements of urban infrastructure spatially distributed throughout the city. Their flat top surfaces are often on the receiving end of bits of trash, and it is customary to see banana peels, disposable coffee cups, and beverage containers discarded on top. They



FIGURE 6 A Norwegian electrical box in Grünerløkka with ceramic tile by artist OHOY, remnants of several tags, and other anonymous interventions. Writing on the wall reads “Thanks for tonight, copfucks” (2014)

are not just a receptacle for garbage, and their flat smooth front surfaces and sides make for an excellent canvas for graffiti and street art, as seen in the previous examples in Figures 2 and 3 and in Figure 6. These patterns of materiality are important because they show how spaces are used and give ideas on how urban infrastructure could be used differently.

The frequency with which these surfaces are used in the Norwegian city of Bergen led the municipality to curate these spaces through a trial project in collaboration with *Bergenshalvøens Kommunale Kraftselskap*, Bergen's municipal electricity provider. Those wishing to participate were instructed to send a text message to the municipality asking for permission and providing the identity number of the electrical box that they wished to “decorate” (Bergen City Council, 2015). While Bergen has curated² many of these spaces, Oslo's electrical boxes are used for posters, tagging, and very small street art installations. Such differences reveal much about the underlying policies of these cities with regard to graffiti and street art and indicate how different publics engage with the materiality of the city. The writing on the wall behind the electrical box in Figure 6 is additionally interesting. The text translates crudely as “Thanks for tonight, copfucks.” Its style is consistent with graffiti writing and is made using a marker (or “mop”), discernible by the distinctive drip on the first letter and the escalating streaks. The fading tone of the letters demonstrates how marker reacts differently on the wall as compared to glass as shown in Figure 5. The text is interesting too, and its taunting message directed derogatorily at the police suggests an earlier altercation on a particular evening. The message also



FIGURE 7 A detailed view of accumulated layers of spray painted murals from the legal wall at Gamlebyen Skatepark (2016)



FIGURE 8 A graffiti artist at Gamlebyen Skatepark paints over thousands of layers of accumulated spray paint that collapsed a wall (2016)

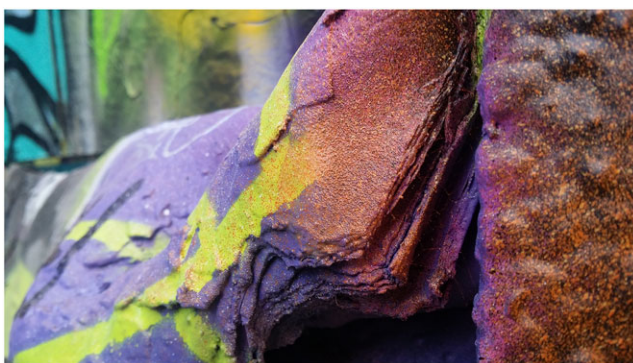


FIGURE 9 Layers of spray paint, distorted and cascading at Gamlebyen Skatepark (2018)

evokes the tense relationship that habitually exists between graffiti writers and authorities, especially under strict anti-graffiti regimes.

The materiality of space and how it is used—and how much it is used—became especially apparent in an encounter that I had one afternoon with a graffiti writer at one of Oslo's three legal graffiti walls.³ As I stood contemplating

an unusual heap of colour and chaos (Figure 7) at the entrance to Gamlebyen Skatepark, a graffiti writer approached. Noting my confusion, the artist explained that this multicolour pile was actually layers of accumulated spray paint, built up progressively in layer upon layer, piece upon piece. It was what remained of one of the outer structures of the legal graffiti wall. The sheer weight of this paint evidently collapsed the underlying structure. Taking a piece home and studying it, he counted over 2,000 layers. This materiality demonstrates how this legal space is used and indicates that this is a space valued by its users, so much so that their successive creative expressions cumulatively collapsed, moved, and changed structures in the city. The devoted use of this space suggests that legal graffiti walls are important sites in cities, particularly so where punitive regulations prohibit the use of more informal spaces in the city for making graffiti. After relating the story, with quick even motions, the writer spray-painted my name in red upon these layers, adding a small heart, the sickly sweet xylene smell of the spray paint lingering in the humid air afterwards (Figure 8). This encounter has encouraged a different way of looking at certain spaces, and in subsequent visits to legal walls, I frequently look for these material displays of use whether it is in layers of paint, piles of empty spray cans, or discarded caps (Figure 9).

5 | CONCLUSIONS

While the psychogeographic *dérive* has been written about and used extensively by artists and activists, it has been used less as a specific research method for collecting data and information on the city and for answering research questions. This is likely because psychogeography was never intended as a scientific research method. In Debord's words: "We have not aspired to receive grants for scientific research, nor the praise of the intellectuals. We have brought oil to where there was fire" (Debord, 1994 in Careri, 2017). As an artistic and aesthetic practice, it is thus flexible in how it is interpreted and how it might be applied within scientific research. This flexibility can be beneficial to the researcher. Psychogeographic walking involves unanticipated encounter, allowing for an immersive and embodied exploration of the urban and may help the researcher connect with the city in new ways. Walking in this way brings the researcher in contact with the unknowns of the city. Doing so may contribute to developing critiques of the city and a more embodied knowledge of how the city is organised, designed, and used. Coupling this method of navigation with urban photography allows the researcher to produce a robust visual record. As suggested through my own research, these methods are particularly adept at capturing aspects of spatial and temporal variation and materiality.

Photography also enables an embodied and sensory experience and capturing of space. While walking allows one to experience and interact with the physical, material, and the ephemeral, photography allows us to "preserve" it. While being in the moment itself, the researcher can experience graffiti and street art from a multitude of vantage points and may also touch and feel interventions if possible (Young, 2016). The context too can be experienced in an embodied way and with the senses the researcher can take in the environment in which work is situated. This allows opportunity to reflect on how the work might have been created and under what conditions. Artistic approaches to urban photography have merit for exploring the cultural geographies and politics of the city, capturing and conveying that which is "unknowable" or at least that which is not always so easily communicated in writing. Hunt (2016, p. 271) writes that "*doing* cultural geography through photography, in a spirit of collaboration with place, might help describe the feeling, textures, and experiences of places while also revealing them as unknowable." Photography of everyday practices can contribute to "developing critiques of space and place" and be used to develop "critical spatialities" (Hawkins, 2010). Pyyry (2018, p. 2) characterises this type of urban research as nonrepresentational, writing that in such work, "the influence of words, photographs or other representations is not ignored, but they are understood as performative; not as evidence of a separate world 'out there.'"

Aesthetic practices encourage different and creative ways of looking at the city, enabling spontaneous and playful encounters that are concurrent with artistic practices. Researchers experimenting with the use of such methods may nurture their artistic eye, picking up on subtleties of the surrounding space, becoming attentive to variation,

colour, texture, materials, more keenly noticing how the city appears and is made and remade. Transformation and materiality are key to performing and making art, and so it follows that the use of aesthetic practices is adept at revealing these aspects. Aesthetic practices such as psychogeographic walking and urban photography are well suited for studying the aesthetics of cities, as this paper demonstrates. In combining the aesthetic practices of psychogeography and photography, I have been able to explore the aesthetic displays of policy in the city whether it be through the visual evidence of graffiti removal, a revelation on how space and infrastructure are used, messages written on walls, or insight into the value of spaces used. Cultivating new ways of looking and of producing geographical knowledge is fundamental to exploring the creative and political possibilities of the city. These methods have been revelatory in exploring how aspects of policy manifest in the urban space, hinting at the potential of these methods for exploring the aesthetic politics of cities.

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NOTES

1. It is important to acknowledge that these methods are not suitable for all. Limited mobility may prohibit urban walking of this kind, and ability may impact how photography and visual methods can be used. Differences in embodiment are important to note as well, given that we do not all move through the city with ease. Race, gender, class, sexuality, and other dimensions may influence how such work might be carried out.
2. Any translations made are my own unless otherwise stated.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Alison Young's (2016) recent book *Street Art World* is an excellent example of this shift.
- ² While it may seem counter-intuitive to curate art forms that are, by their very nature, resistant to order, the municipality of Oslo has also picked up on the idea of curating such spaces. This is reflected in the newly enacted "Street Art Action Plan for Oslo 2016–2020," which is currently being implemented (Oslo City Council, 2016).
- ³ See Bloch (2016, p. 445) for important discussions on the spatiality of legal graffiti walls.

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