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HERITAGE RESEARCH AS IMPROVISATION

An exploration of urban space

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Improvisation enters heritage research

It is May 2018, and we are celebrating the birthday of my friend Luanda in the backyard space 'Hotel Havana' on Thorvald Meyers Street in the Grünerløkka district of Oslo, Norway. The weather is generous, offering us sunshine and warmth. I guess it is about 25 degrees. Guests are circulating, conversing, listening to music, drinking and eating. It's cosy and comfortable in the space. It feels like we could be somewhere in the south. It's a Brazilian atmosphere, with Brazilian food, music, rhythms and expressions. Conversations in Portuguese mixes and mingles with English and Norwegian. Maybe the mural before my eyes elicits my associations with the south, or maybe it is the Hotel Havana food catering stand, which is also the colloquial name for the backyard space. I do not know much about the place, including how old the building is or the mural; nor do I know why the catering stand is here. Some of the other guests I know, some I am about to know.

I approach the bench where Luanda and two men are sitting. One man is Munch Malo – a visual artist who lives here. The other man is Ørjan Anmo Moen – also a visual artist and a friend of Munch Malo. I introduce myself as a heritage researcher who is currently researching street art as heritage. We discover that we share an interest in street art, but also much more. My friendship with Malo and Ørjan

> begins, as does my exploration of the Hotel Havana urban space. Since that day, my conversations with and observations of Munch Malo's artistic practices and Hotel Havana have continued. I have gone with the flow, and the flow has provided me with unexpected discoveries. One of these discoveries is the subject of this essay.

Since May 2018, I have periodically visited my friend Malo at the Hotel Havana urban space. Each time, my activities – including sensing, being, photographing, observing and conversing with Munch Malo – have been unplanned, spontaneous and random. These improvisations have responded to the flow of my personal, everyday life. However, this does not mean that my actions were entirely spontaneous and random; rather, in addition to comprising an improvisational art performance, they evolved through the dialectic practical-theoretical relationship and 'between order and disorder, tradition and innovation, security and risk, the individual and the group and the composition' (Montuori 2003:246). Philosopher Alessandro Bertinetto (2011:96) further expresses:

> there is always a background upon which improvisation will take place ... Explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious rules, conventions, instructions, abilities, habits, styles, patterns guide the improvisational performing process, which anyway occurs not only in virtue of these contextual constraints, but also against and in spite of them.

This research is influenced by my personal background and interests. Professionally, it is coloured by my current research into heritage, street art and urban space. More personally, it interfaces with my background as a physical improviser, expressing my instinct to challenge myself and advance my theoretical knowledge about the improvisation of everyday life. Beyond this, my chance meeting with Munch Malo at Hotel Havana could also be said to have guided my choices for my chapter in this book – consciously or unconsciously. The research has also appeared within certain contextual constraints, such as academic norms, neo-liberal systems and conventional heritage field forces. It has occurred against these constraints, but also in spite of them. This research thus represents a form of resistance to conventional heritage research, which is underpinned by object-led and problem-orientated scientific thinking – that is, thinking that is detached from the researcher's everyday life.

Over the past few decades, the field of heritage has rapidly expanded from the focus on the restoration and conservation of artefacts and sites towards the interdisciplinary study fields of heritage and social media (Giaccardi 2012), heritage as a cultural practice (Smith 2006); cultural landscape, identity and

memory (Whelan 2016), heritage tourism (Timothy and Boyd 2003), gender studies (Reading 2015), performance and affect studies (Haldrup and Bœrenholdt 2015, Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson 2016). Despite the significant innovation in heritage studies, critical heritage scholars Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (2016) identify that heritage research and practice are still laden by conventional problem solving and object-led scientific thinking. They express that 'conventional heritage research reflects both the diversity of its objects and the range of its disciplinary bases. There can be little doubt, however, that it simultaneously reflects the residual positivism that lies at the heart of what we still call the social "sciences"' (Waterton and Watson 2016:99). Paul Harrison (2000:499) further specifies that the limitations of such research include 'the inability of knowledge in social analysis to do anything other than hold onto, produce, represent, the fixed and the dead; a failure to apprehend the lived present as an open-ended and generative process; as practice'. Concerning heritage research, Duncan Grewcock expresses 'what is often lacking in research about performance is the liveliness, smell, thrill, or even plain boredom of the actual event itself' (Grewcock 2014:768).

In relation to the street art field, the limitation of conventional heritage research and practice is that they fail to address street art's crucial relationships with everyday urban life, as well as its ephemeral, performative and affective components. They also tend to create dichotomous representations between objects and people, experts and street art community, and the divide between researcher and research object (Nomeikaite 2019). For example, in the case of street art preservation, unequal social environments are emphasised: the actors with a dominant position tend to prioritize the preservation of mural paintings, legal street artworks and sometimes the illegal works of famous street artists while demonstrating little to no consideration of artworks from lesser-known artists (see Burdick and Vicencio 2015, MacDowall 2006, Nomeikaite, 2020).

The present research supports the argument posed by Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (2016), Connie Svabo (2016) and non-representational theory, more generally, that research projects and methods in heritage studies do not necessarily need to be problem-solving and object-oriented. Instead, I suggest that we view heritage research as a lively, poetic and improvisational performance of the everyday. According to Alan Latham (2003:1994)

> ... reframing research as creative, performative practice allows the researcher to address some novel questions about the cultures of everyday urban experience that more conventional, representationally oriented, methods fail to address adequately.

In this research, the notion of improvisation is defined in relation to non-representational theory and my improvised everyday practices in the Hotel Havana in the backyard space 'Hotel Havana' on Thorvald Meyers Street in the Grünerløkka district of Oslo, Norway. Non-representational research 'renders the liveliness of everyday interaction through methodological strategies that animate, rather than deaden, the qualities of the relation among people, objects, organic matter, animals, and their natural and built environments' (Vannini 2015a:320). It 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' (ibid.:321). In more detail, it 'emphasizes the importance of ritualized performances, habitual and non-habitual behaviors, play, and the various scripted and unscripted, uncertain, and unsuccessful doings of which everyday life is made' (ibid.:320).

In the following sections, I will first introduce the modes of improvisational research within non-representational theory, as well as its key concepts, such as 'improvised performative practice', movement, affect and atmosphere. Following this, drawing on non-representational theory – and the messiness of improvisational everyday practice – I will decode my conversations with Munch Malo and the urban space, pertaining to not only Malo's artistic practices but also movement, change, affective atmospheres, materiality and encounters, more generally. Furthermore, set against the backdrop of my personal experience of Hotel Havana, I will illustrate that improvised everyday practice can, in itself, function as a performative method. In the present research case, indeed, this methodology provided me with creativity, experimentation and new theoretical and practical knowledge of mundane life. Underpinning the performative heritage methodology is the idea that everyday improvisational practices may generate a stronger understanding of urban cultures, everyday life, and the social world.

Improvisation of non-representational research – diverse ways of knowing

Non-representational theory emerged in the mid-1990s in human geography, in part as a criticism of traditional forms of the social sciences, wherein 'events are drained for the sake of orders, mechanisms, structures and processes' (Dewsbury, Harrison, Rose and Wylie 2002:438). Nigel Thrift (2008:21), one of the founders of non-representational theory, expresses that what was missing in social and cultural studies 'was a sense of mutability; of the moments of inspired improvisation,

conflicting but still fertile mimesis, rivalrous desires, creative forms of symbiosis, and simple transcription errors which make each moment a new starting point'. Thrift (2008:19) asserts that of 'greatest methodological importance is to acknowledge that this is a world which we can only partially understand'. Thus, instead of trying to determine the ultimate academic answers, non-representational theory focuses on the improvisation of everyday life – 'a poetics of mundane space and time which can teach us to ourselves in better ways, that is ways which will allow peoples to survive their own environing by creating more rather than fewer worlds' (ibid.).

Non-representational theory has opened the door for 'failure' and improvisation within theoretical and methodological work by providing 'new kinds of practice which are compelled by their own demonstrations and therefore leave room for values like messiness and operators like the mistake, the stumble and the stutter' (Thrift 2008:18). Here, the emphasis lies on 'a poetics of the spaces of dreams and improvisations that arise out of a deep respect for situations and which manifests itself in continually attempting to go beyond them' (ibid.:18). In turn, 'this improvisatory virtuality provides an opportunity for an unsettled politics of advocacy which "watch[es] the world, listening for what escapes explanation by science, law, and other established discourses. Accounting for what established systems discounted as noise"' (Fortun 2001:351, cited by Thrift 2008:20). Underneath this is an assumption 'that there are other and diverse ways of knowing, and especially of knowing ethnographically' (ibid.). Some of the modes of researching and exploring this improvised world hinge on *improvised performative practice, relations, change, movements, affect and atmosphere*.

Non-representational research is concerned with *improvised performative practice*. This approach, which encapsulates practices 'from the most mundane and routine to the most ritualized—stands in sharp contrast to other perspectives' preoccupation with "internal" states of mind like thoughts, ideas, motivations, drives, values, beliefs, traits, and attitudes' (Vannini 2015b:8). Practices are considered 'material bodies of work or styles that have gained enough stability over time, through, for example, the establishment of corporeal routines and specialized devices, to reproduce themselves' (Thrift 2008:8). Everyday practice refers to the ways in which people routinely interact in everyday life and physically interact with their material settings. Within non-representational theory, performativity is rooted in everyday practices that understand the 'social world' as continually reproduced through performances of doing and acting. This understanding differs from the classical definition of improvisation, in which humans are the main actors. In contrast, the non-representational dramaturgy 'is instead as interested in the vitality

of the stage itself—intended as a negotiated time space—and the props themselves, which are endowed with material agency and transformative power' (Vannini 2015a:321). Non-representational theory views everyday improvisation through the metaphor of 'life as a performance' – referring to the idea that improvisational performance is an action in which both humans and non-humans participate as 'mutual improvisers', each with equal importance. It acknowledges that the human body and the material world (consisting of technologies, material objects and nature) are interrelated and both 'actants' or actors with agency. It is concerned with the world's hybrid aspects: 'hybrid assemblages of knowledges, instruments, persons, systems of judgement, buildings and spaces, underpinned at the programmatic level by certain presuppositions about, and objectives for, human beings' (Thrift 1997:130). Although everyday practices typically involve habitual and repetitive actions, non-representational research highlights the unpredictability, experimental and unexpected aspects of everyday performance that are 'involved in the construction of unstable times, performance is also concerned with constantly unstable spaces, spaces of possibility, "as if" spaces' (Thrift 2008:136). Non-representational thinking thus embraces the uncertainty and discontinuity of everyday performance, facilitating 'a broader process of knowledging' (Thrift 2000:8).

Importantly, non-representational research engages with our understanding of change. Through the concepts of an *event* and *movement*, non-representational theory explores unsettled, lively and changeable aspects of the world. Non-representational theory argues 'that all life is based on and in movement. Movement is the "stuff of life", capturing the joy of living. Matter and movement have no way of expressing what is in becoming, because they are always in excess of language' (Boyd 2016:29). The movement-space is 'the unfolding of events, characterised by a prepositioning and turbulence, and by material, experiential and relational effects of spacing, timing, movement, sensation, energy, affect, rhythm and force' (Merriman 2012:21). This movement-space is always relational and in a state of becoming, 'spacetime is seen as arising out of multiple encounters, which through structured, do not have to add up: as myriad adjustments and improvisations are made, so new lines of flight can emerge. The fabric of space is open-ended rather than enclosing' (Thrift 2008:98).

Non-representational research studies *affects* and *atmospheres*. Using the notions of affect and affective atmospheres, non-representational researchers attempt to understand 'the ways in which affective life comes to be temporarily organised in relation to social, political and other processes, forms and forces' (Anderson 2014:4). Affects 'are properties, competencies, modalities, energies, attunements, arrangements and intensities of differing texture, temporality, velocity and

spatiality, that act on bodies, are produced through bodies and transmitted by bodies' (Lorimer 2008:552). In Spinozist and Deleuzian philosophy, bodies 'are not only the human body but also the bodies of buildings and objects, the fabrics and form of the city (Samson 2015:318). For example, in relation to affective urbanism, Kristine Samson (2015:318) explains that 'affective production covers how cognitive processes are being produced in relation to the urban environment and how people engage with the city and choose places suitable for their urban imaginary, reflections, actions and desires'. Relatedly, affective atmospheres are sets of collective affects that are 'generated by bodies – of multiple types – affecting one another as some form of "envelopment" is produced' (Anderson 2009:80). In more detail, affective atmospheres can be understood both theoretically and empirically 'as the ongoing sensory and affective engagement with our lives and their impressions, sensations and feelings and the environments' (Anderson and Ash 2015:15).

In summary, at the foreground of the improvisational mode of non-representational research is 'a greater focus on events, affective states, the unsaid, and the incompleteness and openness of everyday performances – something that is beginning to characterize non-representational research style writ large and well beyond the traditional definitional boundaries of ethnography' (Vannini 2015a:319).

Improvisation in the Hotel Havana urban space

Since Luanda's birthday, Munch Malo and I have periodically met up. Sometimes we meet for coffee at his place or in the city, and sometimes we meet while he is restoring and preparing for his exhibition. Sometimes we meet when he and Ørjan are painting the mural at Hotel Havana. We meet during the winter, summer, autumn and spring, in the day and in the evening. Sometimes I take photos of him while he works. Sometimes I take pictures of the Hotel Havana space. Through my conversations with Munch Malo and my observations of his artistic practices in these meetings, I have learned about him, his art, myself and Hotel Havana.

'Munch mask'

One summer day, Munch Malo, Luanda and I were sitting in Hotel Havana. Munch Malo had brought with him a small piece of chocolate moulded in the shape of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch's mask. While we were eating the chocolate, Munch Malo talked about his concept, 'Munchmasken'. It emerged that, over the past twenty years, he had developed different artistic expressions

of the face of Edvard Munch, which he had modelled on Munch's original death mask and grave bust. These expressions had taken shape as a Munch chocolate, Munch bread, Munch cake, Munch teaspoon, Munch doorknob, Munch coin, Munch pillow, Munch soap, Munch lightbulb, Munch fruit plate and much more. The 'Munchmasken' concept is *brukskunst* (i.e. 'functional art') – art that can be used. Munch Malo explained that 'the "Munchmasken" concept is not about Edvard Munch or himself, but with Munch'. For him, Edvard Munch's paintings expressed a feeling behind the anatomy*;* in other words, the 'Munchmasken' art idea was as follows:

> to create a common identity for people. The concept is the mask, but all the associations open up for new thoughts and feelings. The concept is a metaphor – for example, an eraser in the form of a Munch mask. To me, it is very metaphorical that you use the face of Edvard Munch to wipe away your own artwork with the help of an artistic face. It creates a metaphor, a picture in my head that you remove your own work and the work of history (Munch Malo, *Folk er folk* magazine, Nr. 62, 6 of October, 2019, p. 2, translated by author).

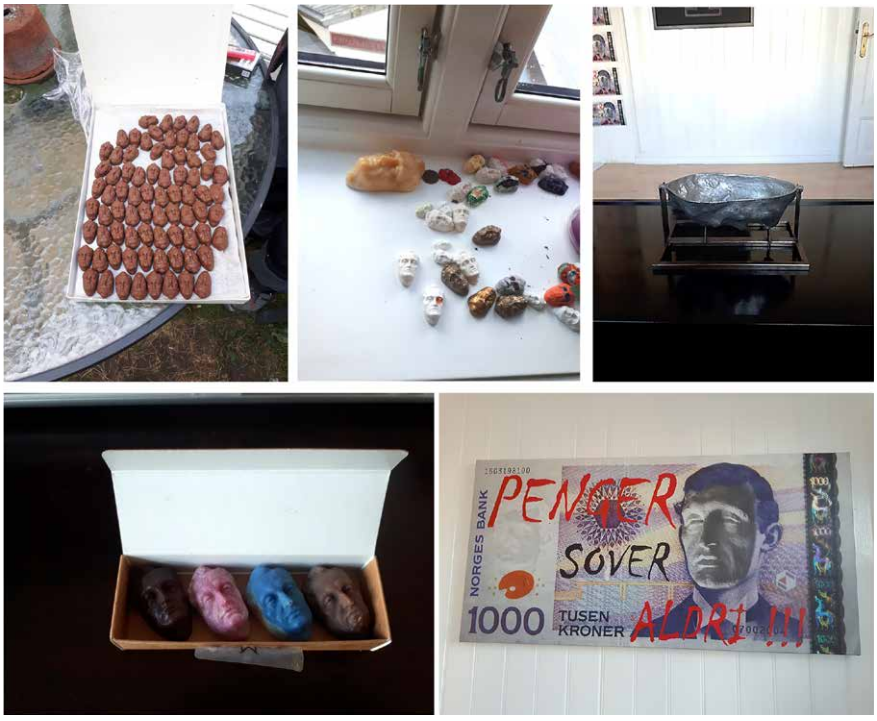

Figure 1. Munchmasken

Over a period of time, Munch Malo created several hundred plaster masks of Edvard Munch's face. One of my friends told me that she found one of the masks at Munch's gravesite.

Munch Malo's inspiration from Edvard Munch resulted in his first pseudonym: Munch. The nickname Malo, which means *bad* in Spanish, was given to him by a childhood friend. His friend had not remembered his real name – Hammayu Rashid – so Malo had asked him to come up with a name he would remember. By the time I met Malo, his complete artist name was Munch Malo.

Movement

> There are always at least two bodies. These two stand close, facing one another, reaching toward an embrace that will signal an acceleration of the movement that has always already begun. The movement within becomes a movement without, not internal-external, but folding and bridging in an intensity of preacceleration (Manning 2009:13).

Figure 2. Movement

Munch Malo and I stand with our bodies facing each other, reaching out to one another. Our bodies are more than just two human bodies. We are also surrounded by different material bodies, with our movements shaped and governed by the spaces and materials between us. We are 'volumes, always more than one, emerge from surfaces, recombining with lines, folding, bridging, knotting. This coming-together proposes a combination of form-forces where preacceleration potentially finds passage' (Manning 2009:13). Munch Malo moves as he paints, and his movement is simultaneously produced by the molecular vibrations of the space. I stand still and take pictures of Munch Malo while he moves. Although my feet are planted firmly, my hands, eyes and body move with the camera. I am more than one body. I am also composed of 'compositions – actual, virtual, organic, prosthetic' (ibid.:13). My movements produce moving images of Munch Malo's movements. These moving images are 'no longer the image "of" something else. Movement no longer foregrounds a part-object-it transmutes the image. Movement as image reveals force not as a discrete element of form but as its operational envelope' (ibid.:129). I produce glimpses of moving reality; these images look like a dance – Munch Malo's dance. He dances and moves towards a new place – the 'Gallery in the Hallway', and I move with him.

Do-it-yourself 'Gallery in the Hallway' exhibition and change

Munch Malo's movements are more than just simple movements. They stretch towards a new place – his gallery space in the Hotel Havana. He is reorganizing the place, putting on new layers and colours. He is doing this to create a gallery space that he will name 'Galleri i gangen' (Gallery in the Hallway). He has no financial support and no deadline. He is not in a rush. He takes his time and allows the colours and images to unfold over time in the different corners of the space. His first work is the *Cave Painting and Mosaic* mural, a collaboration project with Ørjan. Elsewhere, he places a series of paintings, including *Kysset*, *Samadhi*, *Hemisphere*, *The Dreamer*, *Still Waiting*, *BBC*, *At the Death Bed* and *Separation*.

These paintings are not just singular images but Munch Malo's personal stories about his life and artistic background. Each was created during different periods of his life, and each evokes strong emotional responses in both me and him. We pass by the images, stopping to look at each. Munch Malo tells me stories about the images and, in so doing, finds that new associations and memories arise. *Samadhi* reminds him of his friend William, who nicknamed

him Malo and who died young: 'He reminds me of Leonardo DiCaprio – full of action, energy and beauty, enlightenment represented with the purple colour. The purple colour echoes in my mind a mystic and mythic personality'. In describing the *BBC* painting, he speaks of war and Benazir Bhutto, the prime minister of Pakistan: 'I landed in Lahore Pakistan two days before Benazir Bhutto was shot. I felt that I had come from a very, very cold place to burning hell – a hell that was happening around me. BBC means that it used to be a woman called BB. *BBC* is also about the world of terrorism and media attention and tension'. *Cave Painting and Mosaic* evokes his childhood and first impulses to paint: 'I was so fascinated by cave paintings when I was little. I went to kindergarten, and I painted circles in the stone hills'. *Kysset* and *Still Waiting* are about his ex-girlfriends and 'about a love, love between two people, the essence of life and the reason to live … still waiting, the train is leaving behind, she is sitting, the sun goes down, it is a quite pathetic picture'. Finally, when looking at *Dreamers*, he speaks about his philosophy of life and love: 'the woman holds a woman, she is embarrassed by peace, she can be a sister, a lover or a mother, an emotion of freedom and the hemisphere'.

Taken together, Munch Malo's artistic interventions at Hotel Havana could be seen as an 'affective correlate of the performative expression of the right to appear' (Duff 2017:520). Duff asserts that 'the right to appear always presupposes a space of appearance inasmuch as space is central to the body's appearance, just as space is affectively transformed in the event of this appearance' (ibid.). In the present case, the affective bodies include not only Munch Malo's physical person but also his art objects and the material layers he has produced at Hotel Havana. His images have become integrated into the everyday 'life' of the neighbourhood – embodied in the space. His art interventions affect both 'the human social body and the urban environment, its design and architecture' (Samson 2015:318). They are affective and performative because they cause 'something to happen, affecting bodies and transforming space' (Duff 2017:520). In other words, Munch Malo's artistic interventions are affective and performative because they affect and transform the space through material change, as well as through singular appearance.

Malo's images are not static, and neither are the layers he produces in the space. Rather, they unfold through the events of improvising bodies (humans and non-humans), which 'engage in spaces where "all kinds of affects play their game" (Nietzsche 1967:264), and they exist in constant states of change as they are impinged on by events (and as they impinge on events), those events also forming conduits to other bodies' (Stover 2016).

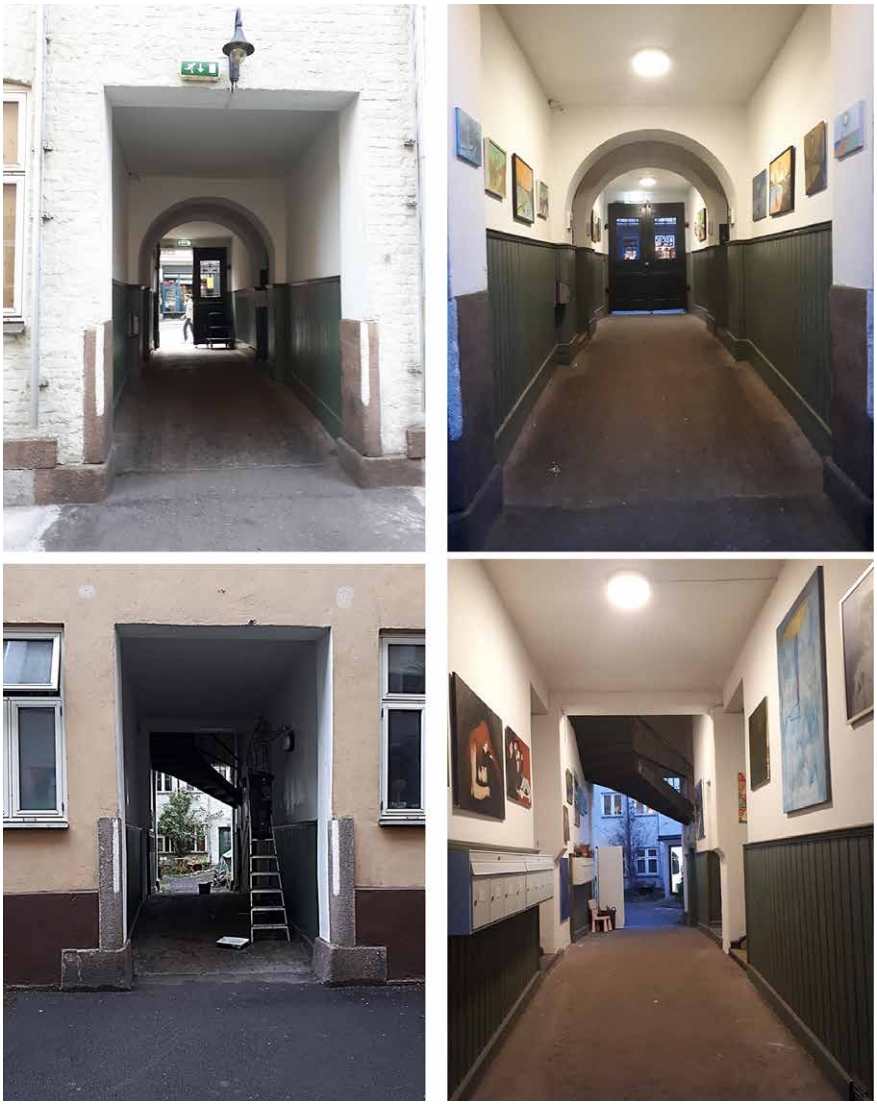

Figure 3. Change before Galleri i gangen

Materiality and encounters

Events unfold in the materiality of the space, and the materiality of the space pervades my body. I walk around the space and trace the materiality: the bench, the chairs, the roofline, the building, the trees, the Hotel Havana catering stand and equipment, the ladder, the grass, the lamps, the windows, the gates, the electric box, the kitchen window, the hidden room, the attic, the mural, Munch Malo's new paintings, the

19th-century architecture and the stairway to Malo's apartment. I do not question this materiality analytically, but perceive it by walking around and through it, as 'in real life, for the most part, we do not perceive things from a single vantage point, but rather by walking around them' (Ingold 2004:311). My knowledge about the materiality is only partial: 'cognition is secondary to life in movement, enabling us to make only partial sense of what has already taken place'.

The materiality of the space is functional. However, the 'materiality is not reduced to material properties, but also things like decay, affective and dazzling charges of things' (Woodward 2019). My experience and knowledge about the materiality of the space is 'an emergent outcome of strategic joint-action for which it acts as a guidance function, monitoring and interpreting the situation as found' (Thrift 2008:7). The joint action with the materiality emerges through walking, encountering the materials and interacting with Malo, Luanda and other guests in the space. The materiality produces 'imperatives to action which guide, imply, and ordain corporeal sensibilities' (Anderson and Wylie 2009:325). For me, Malo and Luanda, the materiality is a vessel for our dreams and imaginations.

We climb up to explore the hidden attic space of Hotel Havana, dreaming of how the space could be used for improvisational performances, gallery exhibits or other events. We look at what is inside – old materials – and wonder about the age and origins of the objects we see. We look further at the mural with angels, trees and a pathway. The painting evokes different fantasies and memories in each of us. For me, it triggers memories of Mediterranean summers with heat hanging in the air and Granada city.

Figure 4. Projection. Malo and Luanda looking at the Hotel Havana attic space. The mural, painted by the former neighbour, is 20 years old.

Guests and neighbours stop by Hotel Havana to view the images in the space. Their material encounters stimulate further dreams and fantasies – the materials entering and creating the affective atmosphere.

Figure 5. Encounters with the images

Affective atmosphere

> Atmospheres are pervasive: they are everywhere, we're always in them, enveloped by them. The weather is an atmosphere, and we're always in a 'weather'. So, too, is the 'climate' that prevails in a room or in a building. Every social gathering is replete with atmospheric qualities, charging the space between all those present at the scene (Slaby 2019:274).

The atmosphere of Hotel Havana is saturated with the weather, presenting seasonal changes from winter to spring, summer and autumn. Each seasonal transition affects the building, architecture, light, shadows, social gatherings, paintings, sky, rain, snow, sun, colours, music, sounds, dance, singing, talking, noise and stillness. These atmospheres are spatially and temporally specific, 'according to the time of day or season, to the levels of activity and movement, to the weather, personal experience and predilections … unexpected occurrences and encounters' (Sumartojo, Edensor and Pink 2019:4). I have entered the atmosphere of Hotel Havana at different times of day and during all four seasons, during different weather conditions. My encounters with these different atmospheres have been unplanned; I have not searched for them, but they have found me, and I have

Figure 6. Four seasons. From left to right: summer, autumn, winter, spring. Top row: the development of Munch Malo and Ørjan's mural. Bottom row: the mural (artist name unknown).

engaged with them via my affective involvement. Philosopher Jan Slaby explains Schmitz's notion of affective involvement as:

> the conscious subject's constantly being affected by and involved with what goes on—an involvement both realised and mediated by corporeal feelings that in turn make manifest (disclose) goings-on in the environment. Affective involvement is an immediate, pre-reflective, not yet articulated self-consciousness—Schmitz calls it 'self-consciousness without identification' (Schmitz, Müllan, & Slaby, 2011, 245).

Though I can cognitively grasp the different elements of the affective atmosphere of Hotel Havana, but I do not think about its meaning, nor do I question or analyse it; rather, I allow myself to be affectively involved with all my senses. Similarly, philosopher Merleau-Ponty describes: 'my perception is ... not a sum of visual, tactile, and audible givens I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once' (Merleau-Ponty 1964:48).

Even when my eyes are cast towards the paintings, I do not perceive them as isolated from the atmosphere and physical surroundings. Instead, I sense that

they are part of the weather, the air, the light and the season. In turn, the weather, the time of day, the season and other elements create and recreate the paintings, enabling new expressions and experiences. The paintings are integrated into the overall atmosphere and, as a guest, I sense the entire atmosphere of the space. I feel the light covering my face and warming my body, my footsteps in the snow, the fresh summer air, the melancholy of winter, the grey autumn day and the lightness of spring. I experience light and darkness, weather, seasonal change and the movement of humans and non-humans.

I sense the density of the light that stretches across the building. This light has a specific character, feeling and texture. It lifts me and brings me to another dimension – a fantasy space in which I imagine and sense the working-class people who have lived here, the light paths over Oslo, a pulsing sky full of feathers, the crows of youngsters and the silence of the wall. The light is in dialogue with the shadow: 'light and its accompanying shadow give volumes, surfaces and spaces their character and expressive power, and they reveal the form, weight, hardness, texture, moistness, smoothness and temperature of material objects. The interplay of light and shadow also connects architectural spaces with the dynamics of the physical and natural worlds, seasons and the hours of the day' (Pallasmaa 2016).

Figure 7. Lights and shadows

Together, light and shadow straighten the material expression of the place by colouring the roof, walls and ground. They connect the architecture with the season, the building, the people, the paintings, the grass and the hour of day. They give life to material objects, colouring them and shading them. The shadow

counteracts the light and brings tranquillity, while the light enriches the shadow and adds vitality; together, these contribute to the vibrancy of the place.

Improvised everyday practice as a performative method

Before I had begun to write this essay, and while I was still exploring the Hotel Havana urban space, I had not yet considered particular theories or methods for gathering data. Even as I was taking photos (several hundred photos over a two-year period), I was not anticipating that they would generate any knowledge, and I was not applying any photographic, scientific methods. Furthermore, during my many conversations with Munch Malo, I was not applying interview techniques. As he was my friend, doing so would have felt inappropriate.

Since that time, I have begun to consider several questions: What happened in that urban space? How can I explain this without recourse to methodology? Did I use any methods at all? Can my improvised practice be considered a method? What theories and methods might help me answer these questions? In searching for the answers to these questions, several methodological approaches emerged; one of these was non-representational theory, which helped me structure this text.

In retrospect, I would hold that I did indeed use certain methods in collecting my data, and these methods lie in improvisational everyday practice and performativity, wherein 'the point is that procedure is not known. The point is, rather, that something performative in research itself, something experimental and creative …' (Dewsbury 2009:322). In relation to performativity, human geographer John-David Dewsbury asserts that the process of living our mundane life is, in itself, a method: it is performative and full of possibilities that enact different discoveries and realities:

> performativity is the sense of experimentation that greets us everyday; it is our ongoing tentative endeavour to enact local utopias that seek to create situations for joyful encounters, to enact performances that work in such a way that they do not question the superiority of one body over another, but rather compose a rhythm that sustains and eases (Dewsbury 2000:493).

Furthermore, Ronald J. Pelias (2008:186) asserts that 'performance itself is a way of knowing. This claim, axiomatic for performers, rests upon a faith in embodiment, in the power of giving voice and physicality to words, in the body as a site of knowledge'.

In addition to being initially unaware of my performative method, I was also unaware of my research objective in advance. However, even this was shaped through my improvised everyday practice in the urban space, and it continued to evolve through my encounters with theory and practice. These encounters were not designed to find the ultimate representation and perfect academic answer, but they were instead foregrounded in 'an interest in rhythm'. Dewsbury (2009:328) explains that 'an interest in rhythm' is 'an immediate and emergent and real practical-theoretical engagement that produces particular space-time connections and thus particular modes for manifesting such connections, for manifesting "an interest in rhythm"'. In my research, this 'interest in rhythm' emerged and evolved through the practical-theoretical engagements involving improvised performative practice, relations, change, movements, affect and atmosphere.

My performance at Hotel Havana was, itself, a way of knowing. Whenever I was simply standing in the space, talking to Malo, photographing, sensing, being, seeing or walking around, I was participating in a knowing process. These improvised performative practices enacted new realities and discoveries about Munch Malo and his artistic practices and the urban space. My first experience of the urban space brought with it unexpected discoveries, such as my chance meeting with Munch Malo, who soon became a great friend. Through our friendship, I came to be better acquainted with him, his 'Munchmasken' and his artistic practices, and I also learned about the urban space. Through my periodic visits over a prolonged period of time, I was able to capture the changing landscape of the space, as influenced by seasonality, affective atmosphere, movement, materiality and change.

Just being in or walking around in Hotel Havana, I obtained unconscious and conscious knowledge of the space. Timothy Ingold (2004:331) asserts that 'the act of walking is "a way of circumambulatory knowing"'. He describes movement as a complex interplay between the mind and the body, which creates 'perception paths' (ibid.). Thus, walking is an 'unconscious way of moving through urban space, enabling us to sense our bodies and the features of the environment. With one foot-after-the other, we flow continuously and rhythmically while traversing urban place' (Matos Wunderlich 2008:2). Walking facilitated my thinking about, sensing, feeling and belonging to the place. Through walking, I traced the different materials and substances and, in this way, formed an impression of how the urban space was shaped by non-human elements. Furthermore, through my walking and material encounters, I traced the interrelations between Malo and his paintings, guests' encounters with the environment and images, and the materiality of the space and its process and relations.

Taking photographs and viewing the images were also performative processes of knowing. Richard Shusterman (2012:250) expresses that 'the process of taking a photograph and the actions of the subject are all part of the performative process'. He asserts that the entire process 'is complex in that it involves the action and thought of both the photographer and the subject; it is difficult to define not only because it involves the elusive experiential flow of these two subjectivities but also because its physical actions of positioning and posing'. Although the photographs allowed me to document certain moments in the urban space, the process of taking the photographs was not static but relational and moving. Erin Manning (2009) asserts that movement always pre-exists us and is more-than-human and affective. She compares this movement with a room, drawing on Boccioni's notions of 'relative movement' and 'absolute movement'. Relative movement is understood 'in an hylomorphic quandary where form pre-exists matter' (Manning 2009:15). In absolute movement, however, 'individuation occurs in intimate connection between the moving body and its atmospheric potential. The room becomes configuring as the body recomposes' (ibid.). Accordingly, my photographic process at Hotel Havana could be compared to a photographic process within a room. Hotel Havana is like a room, comprised of a physical environment and atmospheric elements. This room pre-existed me. When I entered the space, the room set a frame for my photographic movement, but it also conditioned it. Without Hotel Havana and its atmospheric ingredients, my photographing would not have existed; but similarly, without my body, I would not have been able to produce the photographs. Thus, my photographic process occurred in the intimate connection between my body and the physical environment.

The process of selecting and editing the photographs was also performative, involving my encounters with the images, my practical experience of Hotel Havana and the application of theory. By viewing the images and connecting them to the academic literature, I was able to form connections between the theory and the empirical material. These connections pertained to: Munch Malo's movement with his painting; my encounters with the images; Malo's 'Munchmasken' and other artworks; the atmosphere, in the form of light, shadows and seasons; the materiality of the urban space; and changes in the physical environment.

Just as the dialectic practical-theoretical relationship was not static, neither was my experience with the photographs. After editing and grouping the original photos, I found them fundamentally changed; new images had been created, and these new images gave me new impulses and ideas for the structure of this chapter and new practical and theoretical knowledge. This combination of theory, photographs, methodology and experience facilitated my 'broader process of knowledging'.

Ongoing invitation to improvisational heritage research

Traditionally, heritage research has emphasised problem solving and object-led scientific thinking – that is, thinking that is detached from the researcher's everyday life. In contrast, I have called for the improvisational approach of non-representational theory to be applied within heritage research. The improvisational approach within non-representational theory suggests changing the way we think about heritage research and its methods. It views everyday practice, in itself, as a methodology and a method, it is performative and full of possibilities that can enact different discoveries and possibilities (Dewsbury 2009). The improvisational approach to heritage research views research as part of everyday life, embracing the relational, spontaneous, creative, moving, changeable and affective qualities of the mundane. The performative heritage methodology thus offers a creative, thoughtful, playful, experimental, and flexible way of studying and understanding the complexities of urban cultures and their relationship to people, the cityscape and the everyday.

In my empirical investigation, improvisation occurred through my random and spontaneous experiences with the visual artist Munch Malo, his painting practices and the Hotel Havana urban space. My improvised everyday practices functioned as a performative method, leading me to different discoveries about Munch Malo, his art and Hotel Havana. My performance at Hotel Havana was, itself, a way of knowing. Whenever I was simply standing in the space, talking to Malo, photographing, sensing, being, seeing or walking around, I was participating in a knowing process. The research continued to evolve through my integration of theory and practice, which enabled me to broaden my knowledge not only about Munch Malo and his artistic practices, but also movement, change, affective atmospheres, materiality and encounters, more generally. In turn, the poetics of the improvisational space engendered creativity, experimentation and new theoretical and practical knowledge about the improvisation of everyday urban life and urban art.

This research does not aim at discouraging traditional heritage research. However, as philosopher Alfonso Montuori (2003:253) asserts:

> the traditional academic writing style is useful but dreadfully limited and limiting since it leaves out so much of who we are, originating as it did in a time when for science to be science, the author's individuality and subjectivity had to be eliminated in favor of universality and objectivity.

With this research, I did not produce perfect academic answers, but only fragments of the moving reality of Hotel Havana. As Nigel Thrift (2008:19) claims, life is complex, and 'this is a world that we can only partially understand'. For this reason, I engaged with the poetics of my own mundane space, because I agree with Thrift that the 'poetics of mundane space and time … can teach us ourselves in better ways, that is ways which will allow peoples to survive their own environment by creating more rather than fewer worlds'. With this research, I have chosen to be honest with myself and to share a part of my own life because I believe that being open with the world and the people that surround us might provide us with heritage-academic work that is more sensitive, creative and meaningful.

Improvisational research is a creative process and our heritage work can become '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' (Montuori 2003:253–254). My improvisational heritage research has not ended with this text, but it is an ongoing navigation through the rhythms of my personal everyday life.

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