Expanding Literacy Spectrum: Aesthetic Literacies of Street Artists in a Russian Post-Soviet City

Mariia Barulina

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EXPANDING LITERACY SPECTRUM:
AESTHETIC LITERACIES OF STREET ARTISTS IN A RUSSIAN POST-SOVIET CITY

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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May 2017
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This phenomenological study explored the aesthetic domain of literacy practices of the four street artists in the post-Soviet Russian city. The study focused on the street artists’ reported understandings of their aesthetic experiences, such as their graffiti and street art practices in the city. The two major aspects emerged from the data, collected via semi-structured interviews and sensory inquires: the participants’ social and political understandings of their aesthetic experiences, and the reported sensory experiences, linked to the city space. The analysis of the findings revealed the negotiation between the cognitive and sensory dimensions of the aesthetic experiences of the street artists. Finally, the definition of an aesthetic literacy, chosen for this study, was challenged, and an updated understanding was proposed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

How It All Began

“What’s the point in researching some weirdos from your Russian neighborhood, Masha?”

“How the hell it’s related to your major?”

These two questions popped up many times during the conversations with my colleagues and friends in the US and Russia. What happens out of a classroom stays out of a classroom, so what is the rationale for a teacher to investigate it then?

At some point of my life as a teacher-scholar, I started constantly reflecting on what I do and why I do that. It helped me answer many of the questions I used to ask myself about my teaching, studying and research. Thus, I start this chapter with my reflective story about how I have been researching these “weirdos from my Russian neighborhood” during my entire life and why I decided to do that again in academia.

I became interested in street art and graffiti long before I started thinking of my career as an educator. I was born and brought up in Volga City, a Russian provincial city, which is located on Volga, the largest river in Russia. Volga City is one of the many former Soviet cities, which lost their titles of important industrial centers after the USSR collapsed in 1991. Ironically, my life started in the same year as my parents’ country died with a dramatic suffering. With its death everything changed drastically, and the long path of transformation to a new state began. In Russia, people who were brought up in the 1990s are sometimes referred as the “lost generation.” Why? We never had a so-called national idea. We were never “oktyabryata” or “pioneers” (equivalents of Boy and Girl Scouts in the USSR). Most of us were on our own most of the time while our parents tried hard to make ends meet after the denomination of the Russian currency. At the same time, we were the first generation to

\[1\] This name is a pseudonym, chosen by the researcher
freely watch American movies and cartoons and listen to American music, such as hip-hop. The first generation to play Dendy, Sega and Sony PlayStation. Though this new freedom brought entertainment like *MTV, Love Is* gums and Snickers chocolate bars, it was a very tough time for all Russians. The 1990s was the unforgettable period in the Russian history, when the incredible number of young people died due to drugs, such as heroin, which was sold in many schools and universities. In a nutshell, it was a time of confusion and constant transformation, when happiness and freedom went hand in hand with grief and loss. That was the first time graffiti appeared on the streets of my hometown in Russia.

A long time after, in 2010, when I was a second-year college student with a short boyish haircut and a pierced nostril, I went to the new screening in the indie movie theater of my hometown. The movie was *The Exit Through the Gift Shop* by Banksy, an ironic piece about the street art. By that time, I was a huge admirer of this London-based street artist, who created socially- and politically-charged street art on streets around the world and stayed anonymous. However, I was not really keen on either street art or graffiti. After the movie, when my friends and I went out of the building, we saw a group of young guys in baggy jeans who gathered on the street by the movie theater. They all had red and white Keffiyeh scarves wrapped over their heads to hide their faces from the public. Their hands with spray paint cans were moving quickly, almost flying over the walls of the movie theater. The view was fascinating, like watching something magical. Beautiful.

Since then, I mostly devoted myself to seek a career as an educator: I graduated with a specialist degree in English Linguistics and worked as a translator, a tutor, and a specialist in a university international office, but my curiosity about street art remained. I occasionally visited street art festivals or took pictures of random graffiti that caught my eye on the street walls. I always wondered (like people who have no idea about a particular thing), why these guys did what they did.
When I came to Indiana University of Pennsylvania with the help of the Fulbright Scholarship, I started thinking of the way I could utilize my interest in street art and art in general in my teacher-researcher projects in my MA TESOL program. At IUP I realized how important for me was to work on the things which were meaningful to me, to bring change in my life and the lives of my community. In several courses at IUP, we discussed the concept of “literacies.” In Russia, and I believe in many other countries, this term is still defined as the ability to write and read. I realized that I had never in my life challenged this understanding. Later, I learned about other ways to look at literacies - literacies in plural. Literacies, which are not bounded by the academic paradigm. Not merely bounded by stuffy school halls and hidden behind closed doors of university rooms. Literacies are practiced in people’s multifaceted experiences of learning, creating and enjoying. This made me look at what I was always wondering about - the street artists’ experiences which shape what I call in this study their aesthetic literacies in the space, which are often overlooked in research and practice (Bogard, 2016; Hull & Nelson, 2009).

Thus, I decided to ask the “weirdos from my Russian neighborhood” to tell me their stories.

Это для вас, ребята.

**Purpose and Rationale for Conducting the Research**

Most importantly, I want this study to provoke academic discussions about how we understand the contemporary meaning of literacies, in particular, aesthetic ones. Moreover, one of the goals of this study is to uncover the way these literacies are experienced by the four people, who associate themselves with a largely marginalized concept in Russia: street art and graffiti. Hence, this study aims to contribute to the existing literacy research scholarship by sharing the local evidences of aesthetic experiences of the members of a marginalized group. This study is the attempt to look beyond what we usually understand by
literacy, a set of abilities and skills, determined by the imagined “civilized”, “educated” and “upper-class” social groups (Gee, 2015). Thus, with this empirical study I intend to stimulate new ways of thinking about literacies in terms of aesthetic domain. Aesthetic literacy and aesthetic experience are two major concepts, which I utilize in this study. In this study, I utilize the term of aesthetic literacy as an umbrella term for the street artists’ experiences and understandings of these experiences, associated with the aesthetic domain of their literacy practices in the city. Aesthetic experience is used as a notion, which indicates any street artists’ experiences in Volga City, which they interpret as aesthetic or beautiful. Moreover, this study is my attempt to rethink literacy as a product-oriented practice, and explore literacy as a process or experience per se. The current study utilized the phenomenological approach to literacy (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2007; etc) as its theoretical basis. In order to understand the current trends in the understanding of aesthetic literacy in general, and of street artists, in particular, I reviewed the existing research on the literacy and aesthetic literacy trends (Bogard, 2016; Hull & Nelson, 2009; Pahl, 2014; Pennycook, 2010; Street, 1994, 2003; etc.), aesthetics and aesthetic experiences (Ashcroft, 2015; Cartus & Leder, 2014; Joy & Sherry, 2003; Massumi, 1995; Weinstein et al.,2012; Wolff, 2010; etc.), space and place (Gandy, 2013; De Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991; etc.) materiality and material culture (Boivin, 2009, Thielemans, 2015), street art and graffiti (McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011; Riggle, 2010; Gartus & Leder, 2014; Merill, 2014, Riggle, 2010; Willard, 2016; etc.) and so on. The review of these scholarly works serve as the theoretical ground for further investigation of the aesthetic domain of literacy in terms of graffiti and street art practices of the four street artists in Volga City.

As a teacher-scholar, I also think the practicality of this research. Speaking of the practicality of this kind of literacy research for educators, I argue that examining the literacies of particular individuals in rarely researched contexts, e.g. a provincial city in Russia, may
impact the way we perceive street artists’ literacies in general. Evidences of various literacies, which exist in the world, enrich our teaching practice. I believe the conducted study of street artists’ aesthetic literacies in the context of the overlooked urban space in Russia may serve for both literacy scholars and TESOL professionals as the step towards re-conceptualization and destigmatization of the literacy practices, such as graffiti. In this particular study, I investigate the context of a post-Soviet post-Industrial city in Russia, which underwent drastic transformations for the past decade, which influenced the life of its inhabitants. Knowing how diverse individuals from such context shape their aesthetic literacies may reveal the ways our present and future students really make sense of the world around, including the practices they experience in classrooms. I strongly advocate that educators should critically challenge the academic status of literacy, which might be helpful to accommodate students, who are diverse in their literacy practices.

**Research Questions**

When I decided to do a research study, I struggled to find proper questions to ask. At the beginning of my thesis journey, I had a lot of presuppositions and hypothesis about street art and graffiti, which influenced the ways I view my participants’ experiences. Frankly speaking, in the beginning, I believed that the analysis of the artworks of the street artists would be the key data source to explore their aesthetic experiences in the city. Therefore, I was planning to conduct my research using a linguistic landscaping design. However, further I went, I saw those questions did not lead me to understanding the essence of the street artists’ aesthetic literacies. Based on the analysis of the reviewed literature and the collected data from the interviews and sensory inquiries of the participants, there emerged the different questions, which clearer address the issue I hoped to bring to light – the aesthetic domain of the street artists’ literacies. Therefore, the study is intended to answer the following questions:
• How do these four street artists understand their aesthetic experiences in relation to street art and graffiti practices in a post-industrial urbanspace?

• What relationships between cognitive and sensory dimensions of aesthetic experience are evident from the street artists’ reported understandings?

**Significance of the Study**

This thesis study became a part of me, both as a person and as a scholar. This study aims to focus on the aesthetic domain of a literacy practice, which is often overlooked in the research studies in favor to more traditional views on literacy practices. Thus, I want this thesis study to contribute to the larger body of the literacy scholarship with the vivid local literacy evidences, which identify experiences that unfold on “aesthetic” levels. It is worth noting, that I do not directly connect local and global, or universal, however, the findings might reveal some broader concerns in literacy scholarship (Pennycook, 2010). Hence, by no means I am to claim this study is universal for every context, even in terms of Russian provincial cities. Hopefully, all who read this research would expand their literacy spectrum by learning about the literacy practices, which exist and in the context I, my family, my friends and my neighbors live, work and create.

Finally, I realized the significance of my research in the process of doing it. While I was conducting interviews with my participants, they asked me many times why I was doing this study. It seemed bizarre to them: the outsider of their subculture community is interested in their experiences in some Russian provincial city. Although the participants were surprised by my interest, they were genuinely happy that this kind of research would be done. One of the participants confessed that he hoped that such research could possibly change the long-standing stereotype about street artists as vandal and deviant, and graffiti and street art as public eyesore. Hence, this study is my attempt to provide readers with the evidence that
these people are the “part of story” – therefore should not be marginalized (Moje, 2000). Thus, this study may help me and other fellow educators broaden their understandings of stigmatized groups like street artists. Therefore, there is a need for researchers to extend their understandings of what is considered to be a relevant literacy practice. In other words, there is a crucial need for literacy researchers to broaden the literacy spectrum, which they explore in their works. As for educators, the analysis of such contexts and experiences may challenge and enrich the way we teach and learn in general.

Overview of the Chapters

In this section I want to briefly describe what I discussed in the next four chapters of this study.

In Chapter Two, I analyzed the scope of scholarly works, which focus on conceptualizations and theories, which seemed relevant to the given research. In the first part of this chapter, I analyzed the contemporary views and definitions of literacies, and their aesthetic domain. Then, I discuss the concept of an aesthetic experience, which is pertinent to understanding aesthetic literacies of a person. I provide different approaches, taken in the works on aesthetic experiences. These approaches vary in the ways they emphasize the role of the cognitive or the sensory dimensions of an aesthetic experience, focusing on the often overlooked sensory dimension. Next, I define the concepts of street art and graffiti in general, and in terms of artistic practices, which are related to aesthetic experiences. The analysis of the literature revealed the links between aesthetic experiences and space and place, therefore I included the section, dedicated to the understanding of space and place, in the research in general, and in connection to an aesthetic experience.

In Chapter Three of the study, I describe the methodological qualitative design, which I took to perform this study. I discuss the rationale of this approach, and discuss particular methods I used to collect and analyze the data. Thus, I present the methods of a semi-
structure d interview, and a sensory inquiry. I also include the sections, which describe the site of data collection, the participants, the locality, and the researcher’s positionality in this study.

Chapter Four is the presentation of the data, which is organized in the particular way to demonstrate two themes, which emerged from the data. Hence, I discuss the social and political explicit participants’ interpretations of aesthetic experiences, and the reported sensory experiences in the city.

In Chapter Five of the given research, I present my analysis of the themes, and possible interpretations of them. First, I identify the three phenomena, which emerged from the themes, and refer to the theoretical works on the topic. Then I bring the identified phenomena to the discussion of the notion of aesthetic experience. Finally, I challenge the definition of aesthetic literacy, which I used in the study, and propose an updated understanding of it.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, I provide the readers with the review of the existing research, which is relevant to my thesis study. The first part of the literature review is dedicated to the concept of an aesthetic literacy. In this part, I discuss contemporary understanding of the term literacy per se, and what the theoretical grounds are for researching an aesthetic domain of literacy, in particular. Then, I discuss the ways scholars define an aesthetic literacy and several approaches, which are taken in different scholarly works about aesthetic literacies and aesthetic experience, related to them. In this section, I particularly focus on some concepts, related to a sensory dimension of an aesthetic experience, namely, the concept of affect and presence. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss the literature, which is connected with conceptualizations of graffiti and street art. I define these concepts according to the works from various disciplines. Moreover, I describe how graffiti and street art are viewed and researched in relation to aesthetic experiences. In the third part of the chapter, I focus on the particular role of space and place in aesthetic experiences in general, and, in graffiti and street art practices, in particular. I review several influential works on space and place as well as more recent scholarly works, which study space and place in connection with aesthetic experiences, and graffiti and street art practices. Finally, this chapter finishes with a brief summary of the literature analysis and the research questions, which emerge from the review of the relevant literature.

Aesthetic Literacy

To begin with, it is necessary to admit that the concept of an aesthetic literacy has been continuously neglected in the field of the applied linguistics and many other disciplines, as well. The possible explanation might be that for a long time the term literacy was primarily
associated with the traditional educational paradigm. For decades in the history of the research, literacy was seen as the individual abilities of a person to read and write, and was mainly studied in terms of education. To introduce the term an aesthetic literacy, I would like to discuss how the term literacy per se transformed from the ability to write and read to a more complex construct. In order to do that, I reviewed the literature from various scholarly fields and contexts. Probably, the best way to start this conversation is by mentioning the so-called New Literacy Studies (NLS) group of the 80s of the 20th century, whose works influenced the ways literacy was perceived. These scholars attempted to understand the literacy apart from its product, the written text. The prominent NLS researchers, such as Brian Street (1994, 2003) and James Gee (1991, 2005), placed the focus on the ways sociocultural contexts and ideologies shape human literacies, rather than looking at literacy as an individual static commodity of a human being. Moreover, they focused on literacy as a practice, rather than a product. This gave other researchers of literacies a fresh look at what literacy was and what it meant to be literate. The possible catalyst for the further re-conceptualization of literacy might have been the globalization of the world in the 20th century. People traveled from one place to another, bringing diverse literacies, e.g. languages, cultures, world views, etc. (Tomlinson, 2003). Another point to mention is the vast spread of digital devices in the last decade of the 20th century, such as smartphones and computers, which made people from all other the world interact with each other using their new skills, and boost the research of digital literacies. Bringing together all the above said, literacy has become “a necessarily multimodal, multimedial, dynamically changeable enterprise” (Hull & Nelson, 2009, p. 206,). As the term literacy became wider in its understanding, today, we now have the studies on many different literacy domains: critical literacies (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Shor, 1999), health literacies (Nutbeam, 2008; Rudd, 2007), digital literacies (Bawden, 2008; Smythe & Neufeld, 2010), visual literacies (Felten, 2008; Stokes,
2002), and even gang-connected literacies (Moje, 2000). As it is stated in Pahl’s (2014) book, today’s literacies are “tied to the process of searching, finding, discovering” (p. 77).

Therefore, scholars of literacies seek to find new ways to interpret the term and depict how it exists in contemporary societies. When I discuss the term literacy in this study, I refer to the Street’s (2003) understanding of “everyday” literacy practices as person’s processes of “ways of thinking about” in various cultural and social contexts (p.79). In other words, a literacy is a composite of numerous ways we interpret, make meanings, reflect and use our experiences in the course of our everyday life in particular contexts. (maybe delete) Moreover, I see literacy not just as a fixed set of competences, rather than an evolving experience. Therefore, I rely on Hull and Nelson’s (2009) definition of literacy as the “capacity to design coherent, elegant impactful meanings out of the multiplex, shifting array of memories, emotions, ideas and artifacts that are the stuff of everyday life” (p. 206). In other words, literacies are framed, constructed and practiced with the help of an amalgam of various experiences, both cognitive and sensory.

In this study, I want to focus on the particular element of “the multiplex” - the aesthetic domain of literacy (Hull & Nelson, 2009). The scholarly interest in exploring aesthetic literacies in the field of the applied linguistics and education might be caused by the critical need to understand and facilitate the students’ potential to create new meanings and visions, rather than just decode and encode the ones, which already exist (Hull & Nelson, 2009). Therefore, the research of aesthetic literacies might help scholars and practitioners to shed the light on how people interpret the world around and become motivated to design new meanings with the help of their aesthetic experiences.

**Aesthetic Experience**

In this section, I discuss aesthetics and aesthetic experience, which are the vital concepts for understanding aesthetic literacy. The definition of aesthetics is not fixed, and
varies depending on the research field. The term aesthetics traditionally associated with some “high art”, such as the old masterpieces of Italian painters or Rodin’s sculptures. Understanding of an aesthetic experience in connection with art and artistic practices might be rooted in a socially agreed view on the art as an object of aesthetics (Parsons, 1990). Leder and Nadal (2014) argued that, it is true that aesthetics is an essential part of art, however, these two terms (aesthetics and art) cannot be used interchangeably. As in Hamblen’s (1986) work, aesthetic experiences are the part of “the ongoing experience with a variety of objects in both nonart and art-specific environments” (p. 68). From this interpretation, we may derive that aesthetic experiences are not limited by ones with the art. For instance, some contemporary researchers have shifted to seeing an aesthetic experience as an everyday life practice, e.g. the pleasure of taking a hot bath or enjoying the view of one’s backyard garden (Consoli, 2012; Leddy, 2012). Drawing on the latter notion, it is necessary to clarify what experience might be considered as “aesthetic” in this study. Therefore, here I address Burnett’s (1988) work on understanding Dewey’s concept of aesthetic experience as juxtaposed with a religious one. Drawing on Dewey’s (1934) work, the author cited that both experiences aimed in discovering “a world beyond this world” using “imaginative realization and projection” (such as in the case with street artists) (Dewey, 1934, as cited in Burnett, 1988, p.206). According to Dewey (1934) aesthetic experience is opposite of what he considered to be ordinary experiences (the experiences which do not explore the worlds beyond the world). Subsequently, aesthetic experience in comparison with any other experience includes a sufficient level of “strangeness” – people (in this study – street artists) making experience extraordinary or strange. This way of looking at aesthetic experience leads us to the contemporary concept of everyday creativity (Richards, 2007). Creativity is an essential part of one’s everyday life. However, in most cases everyday creativity “may be actively downplayed in a society focused on other values” (Richards, 2007, p. 500).
According to Richards (2007), despite the fact that this kind of experiences might often be ignored in a society, aesthetic experiences are not optional to people. This means that all people have some aesthetic experiences with the world, even if it might not be evident for them. Pahl (2014) also argued that people’s aesthetic experiences “inform everyday literacy practices” (p. 21). Taking this into consideration, aesthetic experiences should be considered to be a relevant part of one’s literate life. Therefore, I agree with Hull and Nelson (2009), who suggested that scholars, who study aesthetic literacies, need to take “a holistic view of aesthetic practices”, paying attention to various contexts and ways of aesthetic experiencing (p. 203). Bogard’s (2016) defined aesthetic literacies as the various ways people experience beauty with their surroundings and how they communicate the aesthetics of their everyday lives. He also claimed that a person’s aesthetic literacy is constructed with the help of both “the reasoning mind and the sensing body” (Bogard, 2016, p.89). In his article, Bogard (2016) discussed the concept of an aesthetic experience, which is pertinent to aesthetic literacies. In other words, it is possible to say that an aesthetic literacy is interplay of art-related and everyday aesthetic experiences of people. It is worth noting, that many studies I came across, which discussed an aesthetic experience primarily focused on the prevalent role of cognition and meaning in one’s aesthetic experience (Cartus & Leder, 2014; Joy & Sherry, 2003; Weinstein et al.,2012). On the contrary, a number of the scholarly works propose the idea of the sensual, bodily and the affect as the relevant part of one’s aesthetic experience (Ashcroft, 2015; Wolff, 2010).

The primary focus of a number of cognitivists’ works lies in the interconnectedness of cognitive and emotional elements of an aesthetic experience, where the prevalent role of the cognition is emphasized (Cartus & Leder, 2014; Joy & Sherry, 2003; Weinstein et al.,2012). For example, Weinstein et al. (2012) posited that aesthetic perceptions of space are shaped by meaningful experiences. Meaningful experiences themselves might be created by meaningful
associations from the lived experiences of a person, e.g. by person’s memories - “a sense of nostalgia when recalling important places in the past“(Weinstein et al., 2012, p. 245). From this example, we can understand that despite the fact, that the role of cognition is emphasized, a sensation, which is experienced by a person, when he or she recollects a meaningful place or event from the childhood, is also present. In such studies it is argued, that an aesthetic experience is primarily shaped by the meaning, which is carried by an aesthetic object perse, e.g. an artwork, and the ability of a viewer to decode this meaning with the help of his or her previous lived experiences and values. For example, from Gartus and Leder’s (2014) attempt to systemize the elements, which constitute one’s aesthetic experience, we can conclude that an aesthetic experience directly depends on our values and judgments in connection with our empirical knowledge, and the context we are in. Weinstein et al. (2012) clearly stated that an aesthetic experience is about the meaning created via cognitive processes and in reflection to how physical spaces are used. However, we should be critical about this argument, as Weinstein et al. (2012) investigated the spaces, such as home and school, which carry an amalgam of strong socially- and culturally-constructed meanings. In other words, people might have pre-existed attitudes to such environments, which might be stronger than the ones, for instance, they aesthetically experience to a random building (not a school, a mall, etc.) in the city.

In some of the recent works in various fields of study, a greater attention to the sensual and bodily aesthetic experience is paid (Ashcroft, 2015; Wolff, 2010; etc.). This shift of the focus might be explained by the fact, that for a long time emotions, feelings, and sensations, did not hold a central place in the research, e.g. in the literacy research, as I mentioned in the beginning of the chapter (Wolff, 2010). Joy and Sherry (2003) defined an aesthetic experience with the emphasis on embodiment and the multisensory and how it reflects on aesthetic “thinking”: an aesthetic experience is explained in response to art as “not
just the process of thinking bodily but how the body affects the logic of our thinking about art” (Joy & Sherry, 2003, p. 259). A postcolonial concept of aesthetic experience is defined as “the qualitative effect of the stimuli on the senses” (Ashcroft, 2015, p. 415). This definition links aesthetic experiences with the sensation - a sensory response to an aesthetic object. In her book chapter, Janet Wolff (2010) stated that an aesthetic experience may be characterized by “a certain ‘presence’ [of an individuum, involved in aesthetic experience], which precedes meaning and interpretation” (p. 9). The idea of presence is as well vocalized in Ashcroft’s (2015) work about the postcolonial view on aesthetics. Ashcroft (2015) argued that presence gives us the idea, that “there are ways of experiencing, responding to, of ‘understanding’ the world apart from structures of meaning” (p.419). Coming back to Wolff’s (2010) idea of presence, it is notable that she relates it to the concepts of *immediacy* and *affect* - two concepts, which are widely used in a number of further scholarly works (Carter, 2014: Thielemans, 2015, etc.).

**Immediacy and Affect**

To understand the concepts of *immediacy* and *affect*, and why they might be important to the notion of aesthetic experience, I need to analyze how these concepts are defined in the literature. In her book review of Haedicke’s book on aesthetics and politics of the European street art, Carter (2013), brought up the author’s understanding of the affect as an emotional response to an aesthetic experience of the art: “live responses in the moment rather than consideration of the art’s content on later reflection” (p. 419). In other words, this notion of an aesthetic experience describes immediacy of the affect. The idea of an aesthetic “moment” can also be found in Ashcroft’s (2015) article on postcolonial art genres. In his article, he opposes the cognition and aesthetic moment, positing that an aesthetic moment is “a moment of non-cognitive apprehension” (p.419). Thus, an aesthetic moment might be considered a sensory response to an aesthetic object. In one of the recent works in visual studies, the
concept of affect is directly linked to the body and the sensual, that is how we aesthetically experience things irrationally (non-cognitively), driven by our instant emotions, feelings, and sensual (bodily) experiences (Thielemans, 2015). However, I find this distinction onto cognitive versus non-cognitive to be problematic for the research, as it is almost impossible to trace. Therefore, I look at an aesthetic experience in regards of the relationship between what is considered to be bodily and sensual, on the one hand, and cognitive and rational, on the other hand. Here, I should address Massumi’s (1995) seminal piece about the concept of affect. In his article, the author claims that, affect functions on several levels, which are connected with a bodily affection, and, “shadowed” by the idea of affection (Massumi, 1995). Massumi (1995) posited that, affect “attains the level of conscious reflection,” which, as we may assume, is connected to the cognition (p. 92). Following Massumi’s (1995) conceptualization, I want to discuss the term embodied cognition. Despite the fact, that different studies emphasize different aspects of an aesthetic experience, most of them do recognize that one’s aesthetic experience is shaped by both mind and body. Therefore, our mind might influence how we sense and react to an aesthetic experience, and our body might have an impact on how we make meaning of it. The term embodied cognition describes an idea of “the mind must be understood in the context of its relationship to a physical body that interacts with the world”, therefore its senses (Wilson, 2002, p. 625). Coming back to an aesthetic literacy, the notion of embodied cognition might help to understand the ways people experience what they think is beautiful using “the reasoning mind and the sensing body”, as in Bogard’s (2016) definition (p. 89). In this study of street artists’ literacy practices, I want to address what constitutes one’s aesthetic literacy, and in what ways it is influenced by one’s interconnectedness of body and cognition. Thus, revising the understanding of one’s aesthetic literacy as the capacity to create aesthetic meanings using both senses and cognition, I believe that the term “embodied cognition” serves the discussion of an aesthetic literacy best.
Utilizing this term, I look at the participants’ experiences as both having cognitive and sensory elements, which might not be separated. Thus, the idea of a “sensory meaning” helps us to take a holistic view on an aesthetic literacy, which might create a more in-depth understanding of its essence.

However, what if we suggest that, the sensual and bodily might prevail over the cognitive in aesthetic experiences? Despite the fact that, the research of literacy has been quite slow to move from the more traditional semantic paradigm, some studies see the concept of the affect, embodiment, and sensory responses as relevant. Although many of these studies agreed on the vital role of the non-cognitive in an aesthetic experience, the ways they discuss it differ from one scholar to another. Speaking of the trends, there are two major concepts, which are discussed in the scholarly works of this approach. These two concepts are connected with “physicalness” of any aesthetic experiences. These concepts are *materiality* and *place/physical space*.

Thielemans (2015) claimed the material turn in the visual studies of aesthetics. The author states that there is a huge scholarly interest for “reversing the traditional understanding of the causal relationships between human activity and inanimate ‘things’ by attributing agency to the objects themselves” (p. 2). So, that means that the object of aesthetic experience per se might be a “stimulus” for a bodily or sensory response, or the affect. It is not a new idea, and it brings us back to Weinstein et al. (2012) article, where, speaking of aesthetic experience, the authors cite an older work, which claims that, “beauty comes from the lines, forms, colors, and harmony of a physical space” (Daniel, 2001, as cited in Weinstein et al., 2012, p. 245). Joy and Sherry (2003) also stated the connection between the material environment and an aesthetic experience. In the article, the author discussed the idea of “optimal body-environment relationship”, when a person has a sort of a “perceptual gestalt”, dictated by his or her senses, which makes a person react to material environmentin
a particular way, e.g. paint a fence in a certain color (Joy & Sherry, 2003). It is possible to say, that one’s aesthetic experience may be linked to the sense of harmony with the physical surroundings. It is also pointed out by Wolff (2010) that physical objects such as street artworks “engage in everyday life, rather than conceptualized as passive objects, or even as animated by human intentions” (p.10). I provide a more in-depth discussion about place and space later in my literature review.

However, aesthetic literacy is more than an aesthetic experience. Aesthetic literacy includes a person’s reflections, responses, reactions and reinventions of aesthetic experiences. I like to view aesthetic experience as a core component of aesthetic literacy, which might provide evidence of how this literacy exists. However, in order to truly capture the essence of one’s aesthetic literacy, we should go beyond an aesthetic experience. We need to look holistically at the amalgam of other literacies, lived experiences, feelings, attitudes, perceptions, which of the utmost importance in understanding how one’s aesthetic literacy exists. In the next part of the chapter, I want to look at particular concepts and ideas, which might be helpful in understanding the particular aesthetic literacies of the participants of the study - the street artists, who work in the urban space. Thus, I join these scholars in my own journey through the aesthetic literacies of the four Volga City street artists, with the hope to discover the essence of these literacies.

**Street Art and Graffiti**

There are many understandings of the concepts street art and graffiti across the research fields as well as within the same ones. Why is it so? First of all, I believe today it is very difficult to conceptualize these urban phenomena in the research due to the various contexts, perceptions, and local policies to street art and graffiti - the outcomes of the processes, which take place in the contact zones (Pratt, 1991). A contact zone is a concept, which is also described as “a space of transculturation,” that is when various literacy
practices are clashed and negotiated (Canagarajah, 2013). For example, street art and, especially, graffiti, is a part of American Hip-Hop culture, which traveled to Russia after the collapse of the USSR as a part of the globalization process. Second of all, these concepts are very relational, and many researchers interpret these terms differently, according to the theoretical frameworks they use. In the context of Russia, most scholars tend to associate graffiti with the vandalism², as it is commonly perceived by the government and the society. Thus, this makes it difficult for people to look beyond sociopolitical meanings of these arts. In this part of the literature review, I want to see what views on street art and graffiti are illustrated in the scholarly works, which discuss aesthetics, literacies, linguistics, and visual studies.

The definition of the term graffiti was found in an explicit form in many research studies. The majority emphasized the illegal nature of it (Gartus & Leder, 2014; Merill, 2014; Riggle, 2010; etc.). For example, Merill (2014) defined graffiti as “an unauthorised act of inscription onto public or private property, and is divided into political, chronological, spatial, social and cultural subcategories” (p. 370). I found this definition problematic, as it aims to systematize all the diverse graffiti practices only based on their meanings and representation (e.g. social, political, etc.). However, we should bear in mind that today graffiti “extends through many different forms, with writers and artists informed by myriad motivations” (McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011, p.129). In his theoretical article, Riggle (2010) defined graffiti as an “illegal writing, usually a pseudonym, on a public surface” (p. 251). Moreover, McAuliffe and Iveson (2011) utilized the phrase “urban disorder” in relation to graffiti. On the contrary, some scholars reported on the legitimization of graffiti (Blommaert, 2016; Nash, 2013). For example, in one of his latest articles, Blommaert (2016) posited that graffiti has made a

² According to Article 214 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, graffiti is considered to be an act of vandalism
journey “from a subversive, under-the-radar and illegitimate activity . . . to a legitimate and popularly recognized form of art making its way to the events-and-markets mainstream of the art industry” (p. 101). Even though I agree that some street artistic activities became more socially acceptable even in the context of Russia, in reality of a Russian post-Soviet city, street art, and, in particular, graffiti still remain stigmatized. On a social scale, graffiti is “a way of unsettling settled visions of the city, providing space for those whose presence is not strongly represented in visions of order” (McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011, p.133,). This understanding is coherent with my claim in the introduction of the thesis: street artists’ practices are marginalized in Volga City. A more precise definition, which addressed the idea of “marginalization” of graffiti was articulated by Hanauer (2011). In his article, graffiti was defined as “public literacy act that brings marginalized messages within the wider sphere of public discourse” (p. 302), in which “messages” referred to political statements of graffiti artists. However, I consider graffiti to be intrinsically political, as it utilizes public spaces, in this study I attempt to re-consider this form of street artists’ public literacy act as not necessarily an explicit political message, but a form of an aesthetic response to (political) space. In other words, this study aims to examine street artists’ understandings of their literacy practices, such as graffiti, from their own perspective, which might not always be explicitly political.

Graffiti and street art are commonly stereotyped as abnormal and deviant, and street artists as “gangs”. In this case, graffiti is described as “an unconventional form of public expression” (Arthur, 2015, p. 44).

In several definitions of graffiti, which I mentioned above, we see that it is not referred to an artistic practice, rather than to the practice of writing. This is one of the counterpoints in many works, dedicated to street art and graffiti. Is graffiti a part of street visual art? Should graffiti be even considered to be an artistic practice? In her essay about
graffiti and place, Chmielewska (2007) posited that, “the practice of graffiti is certainly that of writing” (p. 149). Although she clearly states that graffiti is an act of writing, later, she admits that it can as well be “‘writing’ of a nonlinguistic sign”, e.g. an image (Chmielewska, 2007, p.149.). Discussing graffiti as a writing or an artistic practice, Riggle (2010) distinguished two types of graffiti: mere (e.g. signatures - *tags*) and artistic graffiti (e.g. more complicated *pieces*), where the first relates to writing, and the second - to an artistic practice. Iveson (2013) developed the idea of graffiti as a writing practice, but focuses on its relationship with space. Thus, he comes up with the definition of graffiti as the “writing to the city” (Iveson, 2013). Drawing on the above mentioned dichotomies of graffiti as an artistic practice and graffiti as a writing, I find it problematic as these two conceptualizations might as well overlap. For example, tags might not be seen as just mere writings (as in Riggle’s (2010) definition), but the writings, executed in a particular artistic style. At this point, I want to go back to the question of a literacy practice as the central in my study: if we assume that graffiti is an artistic act of writing in a particular place and space (which, then, by all means can be seen as a literacy practice), what it may bring to the research of literacy about the concept of writing per se? The understanding of the graffiti as this kind of literacy might uncover the aesthetic dimension of texts: this type of writing is sensitive to the style of graffiti and space and place, where it is executed. Speaking of the importance of its artistic form or style of such “writing”, I want to borrow Bogard’s (2016) term of “designerly” ways of practicing this literacy, where “designerly” is connected to aesthetic literacies of a person, who writes. What aesthetic literacies do street artists develop as they write or draw a letter, a word, or an image in a particular graffiti style? This is one of the questions I wish to investigate with the help of this study.

In my study, I also use the term street art, which should be defined as well. Oftentimes, graffiti is perceived as a part of the larger street art concept. Although graffiti and
street art share a lot of common features, e.g. relatedness to urban space, the concept of street art occurs to be more complex and diverse in its definitions. Comparing with graffiti, street art is rarely defined as “illegal”. More often, researchers define it as the art, which opposes institutionally recognized art (McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011; Willard, 2016). Riggle (2010) considered street art to be “a post-museum” form of art. He gave an explicit definition of the concept of street art as the “art placed on the street, where ‘the street’ is taken in a very broad sense to denote, roughly, any urban public space” (Riggle, 2010, p.244,). Hence, street art is usually defined in opposition to other “recognized” forms of art, e.g. art, which might be found in galleries and museums. However, several scholars also discuss street art in opposition to public art – the art, which is aimed to increase the use of city space and engage with communities (Sharp, Pollock & Paddison, 2015). In other words, street art might be public art, but not always. It seems that public art’s major goal is to produce a positive effect on urban environments and communities. As for street art, it is not always the case. One of the major differences between these two “arts” is the durability. According to Riggle (2010), one of the main attributes of street art is its ephemerality, of which an artist is usually aware of. Public art is mainly “sanctioned”, or created with the permission of the authorities, and usually is more viable, therefore, stays on the street longer. The example might be the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia, USA, which was aimed to revitalize the city walls, marked by “unsanctioned” graffiti and street art works, and change them to murals, which is the most common public art form. This is the example of gentrification, when art is purposefully used as “a tool for de-stigmatization of the place” (Lavrinec, 2014, p. 66). In his book, Schacter (2013) utilizes the term independent public art for street art and graffiti, which I find quite convincing for understanding these concepts in opposition to public art, because in the case of independent street art, street artists work independently and not controlled by official authorities. Discussing street art, Carter (2013) listed many forms, which street art might
take, including performances, installations, etc. However, in this study, I focus on mainly visual street art, created with spray paint, posters, and other similar mediums. So, let me borrow Riggle’s (2010) broad definition of street art, as the art that, “embodies a different [from that of public art] response - one that truly allows art to join the living” (p. 255).

Admitting a strong connection between street art and human life, Schacter (2013) posited that street art and graffiti are “linked to the primal human desire to decorate, adorn, and physically shape the material culture” (p. 9). As Merill (2014), he also recognizes the “materiality” of street art and graffiti. He argues that street artists utilize space as a medium of their artistic practice, or their material use of space (Merill, 2014). Arthur (2015) described street art as an “important product of a youth subculture”, which may be referred to the street art and graffiti as the material culture, created with aesthetic literacy practices of street artists (p. 45).

Here, I need to elaborate of what I mean by the term material culture, and how it speaks to the idea of an aesthetic literacy practice. By the term material culture, I mean the idea of “people use the world and its material richness to think with” and, respectively, how people materialize their various ideas and literacies in the material world (Boivin, 2008, p. 50). However, according to Boivin (2008), what has been often left out in the scholarly works about the material culture is the idea of the sensual and emotional. Boivin (2008) stated, the Western world tend to stick to the rational, the mind over the body. In other words, in the Western thought, oftentimes such practices as graffiti or street art are perceived as the instruments to represent the political meaning, rather than a street artist’s sensory response to the surroundings. In his article, Graeber (2014) also pointed out that human actions are usually taken as rational, driven by our logic. Opposing this view, the author argues that “to exercise one’s capacities to their fullest extent is to take pleasure in one’s own existence” by being engaged in a meaningful play with the world (Graeber, 2014, p.53). Drawing on this understanding of the way people interact with the surroundings, we might have a fresh look at
the ways people create and use the material richness of the world around, including the art practices of street artists. In this research I wish to see what kind of experiences drive street artists to paint on city walls, and what part of these experiences might be shaped by sensual responses to particular material worlds of the Russian city.

Exploring such experiences, it is necessary to refer to the sense of competence, which is discussed in regards to street artists. In Iveson’s (2013) article, the author claimed that “micro-spatial urban practices”, e.g. graffiti and street art, can be described as the so-called Do-It-Yourself Urbanism. Drawing on Lefebvre’s (1996) Right to the City and De Certeau’s (1986) idea of the contested urban space, Iveson (2013) saw street art and graffiti activities as an attempt to rebuild the “alienated” urban spaces by street artists’ taking agency in space. The concept of agency is also mentioned in works on aesthetics by Weinstein et al (2012), where the scholars talk about the sense of competence in one’s aesthetic experience, which is the ability of a viewer/doer to beautify the place.

In a nutshell, street art and graffiti are largely analyzed in the social studies dedicated to the various issues, such as language and linguistic landscapes (Blommaert, 2016; Chmielewska, 2007), education (Moje, 2000), community (Lavrinec, 2014), social justice (Soja, 2010), and, most of all, political movements and protests (Soja, 2010; Zaimakis, 2015). It is not a surprise, that a large scope of research, which was done in a Russian context (Moscow and St. Petersburg), examines street art and graffiti as primarily expressive tools of political resistance and protest. In a major collection of “independent Public art”, Schacter’s (2013) The World Atlas of Street Art and Graffiti, presents only the examples of the Russian street art (a well-known Russian street artist Radya and the art-group Voina), which represent political activism. Unfortunately, there is no study has been found, which focuses on the diverse aesthetic experiences of Russian street artists with street art and graffiti, in Russian or in English. It seems that scholars try to conceptualize street art and graffiti, as the semantic
markers of one’s political thought, which is not always the case. In these highly politicized times, I want to argue that in Russian urban context graffiti and street art might be seen as aesthetic literacy practices. In other words, graffiti and street art might create particular aesthetic experiences and literacies of street artists, who take their understandings of space and beauty - their “designerly” ways of seeing linguistic and non-linguistic texts - to the city streets. Through their interactions with the urban environment, street artists might create new urban aesthetics and develop their own meanings in space. All of the above may shed the light to how particular aesthetic literacies are created in the context such as a post-Soviet city in Russia. Hopefully, my study will help readers to look at the Russian post-Soviet city as not only a space for resistance and eternal fight with the government, but as a space, where particular material culture is created and various aesthetic literacies are negotiated.

**Space and Place**

As one of my research questions directly utilizes the concept of urban space (and the ways street artists interact with it), I need to explicitly define and explain the concepts of place (physical space) and space I use throughout this study.

There are different ways scholars utilize the concepts of space and place. For example, in many studies, space may be referred to both physical place (site) and socially-constructed one (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2014). However, it would be wrong to say that the relationship between place and space is dichotomic. Place is a crucial element of space, and vice versa. Hence, in many studies these concepts are used and researched in connection. Depending on the discipline, in which these concepts are grounded, their definitions and the approaches to their analysis may differ.

The prominent spatial scholars (Lefebvre, 1991, 1996, De Certeau, 1984, 1986) emphasize the social nature of space. In one of these works, space described as a “practiced place” (p.117, De Certeau, 1984). Subsequently, we may assume that place is a part of space.
To illustrate this interpretation, let’s imagine architects and urban planners which build a school building (a physical place). However, they would need students, teachers and administrators to work and study there to create a school space. In other words, space is shaped by repetitive human practices (e.g. students attend classes every day) in a place. Elaborating De Certeau’s idea of space as a practiced place, the more recent research also viewed space as a process of everyday literacy practices (Pennycook, 2010). Pennycook (2010) focuses on how graffiti writers’ literacy practices constitute urban spaces. Urban space is also described in Lavrinec’s (2014) article as “a form of thinking”. This might serve as the grounds for stating that space is not only constructed by physical actions of people in a place, but by the way they interpret and think of it.

The way we think of certain places might change or create spaces. This perspective was taken in the research done by Gandy (2013), where he discusses a concept of a marginalized urban space, which is often neglected by ordinary people. He talks of the wastelands of London’s suburbs, which are claimed to be an eyesore of the city. He argues that there exist two counter discourses of this marginalized space: places, which are “simply awaiting their erasure and redevelopment”, and spaces of “adventure, imagination, and self-discovery for artists . . . and other explorers of the urban realm” (Gandy, 2013, p. 1302). These “spaces of ambivalence” are therefore described by “a multiplicity of ‘aesthetic worlds’ that are integral to . . . urban space” (Gandy, 2013, p. 1310). Such an approach to neglected urban spaces makes me think of the work sites of street artists in Volga City: abandoned houses and factories. This concept of space and street art practices might be also discussed in relation to the so-called Broken Windows theory, which claims that the appearance of graffiti or any other street artworks demonstrate “unresolved disorder that sends the message that nobody cares” (McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011, p. 130). Consequently, the space itself appeals to street artists for its aesthetic re-birth.
As in the case with studies about aesthetics and aesthetic experience, street art and graffiti are almost always described as sensitive to space (Chmielewska, 2007; Gartus & Leder, 2014; etc.). In regards to space and street art, some scholars differentiated space, place and site (Visconti, Sherry, Borchini & Anderson, 2014), where space “refers to something anonymous, whereas place . . . accounts for the meaningful experience of a given site” (p. 512). Subsequently, according to them, space and place both are social construct and site is a mere physical element of the cityscape. Chmielewska (2007) claimed that, “each city canvas invites a different treatment, form, placement, extent, and magnitude for wallwriting” (p. 156). In other words, she talks of the importance of the physical urban space, where graffiti is done. Most of the scholars, who published works on aesthetics and aesthetic experience, put these concepts in the central part of the discussion. Even, if we come back to the ways scholars analyze aesthetic experience, we have to admit that they commonly define and discuss it in regards of physical (material) space and space as a practiced place. The studies, which connect aesthetic experience and cognition, tend to talk about space as a “series of psychological associations,” which make an aesthetic experience of a physical place a meaningful one (Weinstein et al., 2012, p. 246). Other studies of aesthetics and aesthetic experience argued that a place should be practiced to provide people with an aesthetic experience: “repetitive actions in public space provide a possibility of publicly shared emotional and bodily experience” (Lavrinec, 2014, p. 60).

In this study, I look at the concept of space, from the perspective, found in several conceptualizations. First, I utilize De Certeau’s (1984) idea of a space as a practiced physical place, in which street artists sensory, politically and socially respond, a place of “adventure, imagination, and self-discovery” (Gandy, 2013, p. 1302). Second, I investigate space as a shared public understanding of place, e.g. a public view on abandoned industrial buildings or poor neighborhoods (Lavrinec, 2014).
Lastly, I want to say that aesthetic practices have been researched mainly from two perspectives: a viewer's aesthetic experience or aesthetics of the object (place). In my research study, I focus on an active viewer-creator aesthetic experience, or the ways a street artist experiences a physical space of his or her artwork. Understanding these ways might help find out what aesthetic literacies are shaped by such urban aesthetic experiences with street art and graffiti.

**Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, I provide readers with a review of the literature, connected to the concepts I utilize in this study. Namely, I define and discuss the notions of a contemporary literacy practice, and an aesthetic literacy, other concepts, which are related to it - aesthetics and aesthetic experiences. Drawing on the number of scholarly works on aesthetics, aesthetic experiences and aesthetic literacies, I talk about the concepts of the bodily and the cognitive, and the idea of embodied cognition. Then, I look at the various definitions of street art and graffiti, and the ways they are linked to the concept of an aesthetic experience and literacy. As graffiti and street art are aesthetic experiences, which are sensitive to place and space, I review the works of various interpretations of place and space, provide readers with the common understandings of them, and particularly discuss spatial concepts, which seem relevant to the study, e.g. marginal spaces, urban place and space, etc. As the result of my review of the literature about aesthetic literacies, and the related concepts, and in order to explore the essence of aesthetic literacies of the street artists, who participated in this study, I have become interested in investigating the following questions in my research:

- How do these four street artists understand their aesthetic experiences in relation to street art and graffiti practices in a post-industrial urbanspace?
- What relationships between cognitive and sensory dimensions of aesthetic experience are evident from the street artists’ reported understandings?
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The goal of this master’s thesis study is to explore the aesthetic literacies of the four street artists, who live and create in a Russian post-Soviet city, in order to formulate a concept of their aesthetic literacies based on the reported experiences of street artists. Drawing on the literature review, I define the term aesthetic literacy as the participants’ capacities to interpret and design meanings using the multiplex of their aesthetic experiences, including cognitive and sensory (Bogard, 2016; Hull & Nelson, 2009). Therefore, my aim was to explore the participants’ aesthetic experiences in Volga City. To best serve the purpose of this study, I chose a phenomenological approach to literacy research as a methodological framework for my qualitative study.

Research Questions

First step of the research was to reflect on the literature review and generate the research questions, which communicate the research issues of aesthetic literacies in a most effective way. Considering the participants’ aesthetic experiences to be important building blocks for understanding their aesthetic literacy, I needed to realize what experiences they interpret as aesthetic. To tackle this issue in the given research, I came up with the first research question:

- How do these four street artists understand their aesthetic experiences in relation to street art and graffiti practices in a post-industrial urban space?

This question is designed to help understand the ways street artists understand their aesthetic experiences, which are considered to be the important elements of their aesthetic literacies (Hull & Nelson, 2009; Pahl, 2014).
In Chapter 2 of this thesis study, I also questioned the way aesthetic experience operates, in particular, how its elements co-exist. Therefore, the second question of this study is aimed to enlighten this issue:

- What relationships between cognitive and sensory dimensions of aesthetic experience are evident from the street artists’ reported understandings?

In this research question, I want to address how the participants’ cognitive and sensory dimensions exist within their aesthetic experiences.

In order to investigate these questions, I used phenomenological qualitative study design, with two primary ways to collect the data, which I discuss in the next section of the chapter.

**Phenomenological Qualitative Study Design**

Phenomenological approach is an umbrella term for various methodologies and methods, utilized in literacy studies, which intend to research multifaceted experiences of individuals. Lester (1999) stated, that phenomenological methodology is “particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions” (p.1). In other words, this approach might help to understand the participants’ aesthetic experiences, taken into consideration their points of view. The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies (Rowsell & Pahl, 2015) suggested this approach as a way to “gain a meta-perspective on phenomenon” (p. 468). Therefore, this approach helps a researcher explore and interpret ongoing literacy experiences of individuals, emphasizing the importance of the participants’ views on a phenomenon. I view this methodology as a great opportunity to understand such complex experiences emphatically, or, using a well-known saying to look at “the beauty through the eyes of the beholder”. As this study seeks to investigate the phenomenon of the
aesthetic literacies of the four street artists, this approach was helpful to discover the experiences as they are recognized by the participants.

Speaking of the objectivity of such phenomenological studies, the findings of a research, which utilized a phenomenological stance, are often difficult to generalize. Hence, as a researcher of a phenomenological study, I hoped to capture “the essence of experiences” (Rowsell & Pahl, 2015) or “the heart of things” (Rilke, 1987, as cited in van Manen, 2007) with this kind of a research. This research was not aimed to reveal particular generalized knowledge about how the street artists view and utilize their aesthetic experiences, but to describe an amalgam of “thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas and situations that portray what comprises an experience” of the participants’ aesthetic experiences in the Russian post-Soviet city (Moustakas, 1994, p. 47,.). Subsequently, I hoped that the findings of this study might contribute to the discussion of the contemporary understanding of aesthetic literacy, and serve as the material for further reflection and research in the literacy field. According to Max van Manen (2007) phenomenological approach presents “a project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence - sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications” (p. 12). Therefore, my role as a researcher was to situate the meanings, reported in the interviews and the sensory inquires, which I discuss in detail later in this chapter.

In the study I used two qualitative methods of the data collection: the semi-structured interviews with the participants, and the sensory inquiries, created by the participants, which I discuss in more depth in the next few paragraphs. These two qualitative methods were utilized to ensure the collected data is information-rich. Due to the fact that this study explored the unique experiences of the participants, I decided that a qualitative framework
would serve my study goals best. In the next section, I discuss the above mentioned methods of data collection in detail.

**Data Collection**

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

The method of semi-structured interviews is claimed to be the most common in phenomenological qualitative studies (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). Drawing on the methodological research in phenomenology, the qualitative interview is an exchange of views on the particular phenomenon, where a researcher tries to “understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples' experiences” (Kvale, 1996, as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p. 1-2). Therefore, conducting an in-depth interview on the phenomenon of aesthetic experiences helped me acquire a “meta-perspective” on how this phenomenon exists in the participants’ everyday experiences. Some methodological studies also see an interview as a specific research context, where participants create and reflect on their experiences (Kvale, 1996). Thus, a qualitative interview, in particular, a semi-structured one, helps provide participant with a more comfortable context for making meanings of their experiences.

During May, 2016, I conducted three 90 minutes semi-structured open-ended individual interviews with the participants. I also conducted one Skype interview with the fourth participant in June, 2016. I asked the participants to decide where they preferred to be interviewed due to several reasons. First, as my study was aimed to explore participants’ aesthetic experiences in the city, I believed that, “observing dynamics in that place, and paying attention to what the participant says about the place, may generate useful research material” (Elwood & Martin, 2000, p. 656). Second, I tried to reduce the effect from a researcher- participant power relation to create a rapport with the participants. Also, the
interviews were conducted in Russian as the participants felt more comfortable to speak in their native language.

The setting of the interviews in Volga City, which were chosen by the participants:

1. City Park, the main city avenue
2. Theatre Square, a small park near the City Opera and Ballet Theatre
3. Multiple locations in the city, in the car, while the participant was driving
4. via Skype

I asked the participants to provide me with the visual materials (digital photographs of their artworks) beforehand, so I could better navigate the interviews. However, I need to clarify that the study primary focus was not the discussion of the participants’ artworks, but how they navigate their artistic practices in space and make meanings of their own aesthetic experiences. Hence, I did not examine the styles of works and the participants’ artistic skills. I used the materials, which they provided to me, mostly to prepare the questions about particular places, where they had their aesthetic experiences. Doing this, I rely on my own familiarity with the context of the city.

One of the specific decisions I made was not taking any notes during my interviews. There were several rationales for this decision. First, some of the interviews were conducted while walking or driving in the city, hence I was not able to take any notes without distracting attention from the interview. Second, I noticed that without taking notes I was able to engage the participants in a more relaxed conversation.

The interview questions, which I created beforehand, served as guidelines, which aimed to help me to cover all the relevant points. During the interviews, many follow-up questions emerged, which helped me to collect a more in-depth data from the participants.
I recorded all the interviews. After the data collection process, I transcribed the interviews and placed them into four separate files. I analyzed the interviews in Russian and, then, translated the meaningful samples in English.

**Sensory Inquiry**

One of the methods, used in this study is a *sensory inquiry* with each participant. From June 2016 till January 2017, the participants of the study were creating their sensory inquires. Their sensory inquiries were made through their own comprehensive photography of the places in the city, which they found aesthetically attractive for their future artistic practices, followed up with short reflective thoughts about each of the experienced sites. In other words, during these months the participants explored the city and took pictures of different public places, which they found interesting to create their art. Then, they wrote short inquires about why the depicted places attracted them, using their senses, experiences, emotions, etc. All the decisions on how and what to include in the sensory inquires we made by the participants. The sensory inquiries were collected during October 2016 - January 2017 period. Overall a sensory inquiry entailed the following steps, which were performed by the participants:

- the comprehensive photographing of places, the participants would like to create an artwork (based on their sensations, feelings, experiences, etc.)
- the descriptions about what they feel or think in the chosen places

If the concept of a semi-structured interview is one of the most popular and has been widely discussed in the scope of methodology literature, the concept of sensory ethnography, on which I based the method of a sensory inquiry, is a relatively new one. The concept of sensory inquiry is taken from a larger concept from the field of visual anthropology - a sensory ethnography (Nakamuro, 2013). There exist several approaches to defining what a sensory ethnography is. The definitions are usually quite similar; however, they differ in what
the primary focus in data is. Nakamura’s (2013) reflective piece on various ways of how sensory ethnography used revealed two main approaches to it. Nakamura (2013) discussed Sarah Pink’s (2009) approach as focusing on “multisensory-experiential data” (p.133), which refers to five human senses, such as vision, hearing, etc. The other approach to sensory ethnography, which was described by the author, was practiced by Harvard Sensory Ethnography Lab. There, they focus more on the evidence of emotional states, which may be captured via “vivid aesthetic-sensual immersion” (p. 133). In this study I primarily utilized the second approach to sensory ethnography. In other words, the participants were able to respond to a place of their aesthetic experiences capturing their personal ways of “feeling” these places, sensually, emotionally, and so on. This method of collecting data usually uses participants’ visual materials, which are expressed through filming or photography. However, in order to examine the participants’ understandings, I also included a short written inquiry, which was aimed to give additional information about the visual component, e.g. a picture.

The rationale for using a sensory inquiry in this study was the attempt to look at how the participants navigate their senses and feelings in the spaces in the city through creating a kind of “albums” of the places, which they found attractive for their future artistic practices. In phenomenological studies, this idea of participants’ “imaginings” of experiences might be referred to Moustakas (1994) idea of, “using the imagination, the senses, to distinguish between the possible cognitions that relate to the object (p. 35). Therefore, in order to capture the essence of the participants’ aesthetic experiences in the city, I asked the participants to create these albums. Also, it is necessary to say that this method was designed to compliment an in-depth semi-structured interviews with the participants. Thus, a sensory inquiry was aimed to create a larger picture of the participants’ experiences, which might not be captured via a verbal interview.
Site of Data Collection

One of the study goals was to explore the participants’ aesthetic experiences in the city space, therefore the vivid and rich textual description of the site of the data collection was required.

In this study, the aesthetic experiences of four street artists, who were born and have been living in a former industrial city in the Volga Region of Russia, are explored. Volga City is a so-called provincial city, which is the term generally used to describe all cities and towns, which are located relatively far from the country center. By the latter it is commonly meant Moscow and Moscow oblast’. A phenomenon of a provincial city is a research site of some of Russian studies in philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, philology, etc. (Lyakhova, 2006; Voevodina & Mekka, 2013). The state of many Russian provincial cities are very alike: the former industrial cities, which lost their wealth and importance in the course of the painful collapse of the USSR and the associated reforms. The industries, which once formed the cities, were destroyed or abandoned.

Thus, like many other cities, which lost the status of important industrial centers, Volga city has become invisible and financially unattractive to most other Russians as well as to local and federal governments. With the population of almost a million people, it still preserves its status of one of the least attractive Russian cities to live and work. In 2010, the federal newspaper was released with the headline, which said Volga City “must be destroyed” (Sokolov-Mitrich, 2010). The author of the article stated that the destruction of the city would be a cheaper solution to the city local problems, such as the condition of the roads and streets, and old buildings.

The phenomenon of the cities such as Volga City is the way its urban public space is constructed not often by the government decisions, but by the individual initiatives of local community. Some studies claimed (Pchelintsev, 2008), that since the collapse of the USSR,
the constant process of transformation has been taken place in provincial cities due to the drastic change in economics and social literacy. A great number of the transformations are not secret to local communities and, in case of my hometown may often be observed in shared public space of the city. Therefore, this study is aimed to examine the phenomenon of individuals’ aesthetic literacy experiences in a Russian provincial city.

The Participants

My choice of participants was determined by the fact that these street artists actively interact with the public space. All the participants of the study had to be over 18 years old and had at least two years of experience of creating art in public space. As I considered participants’ artistic practices to be aesthetic experiences (please, see Chapter Two), it was to ensure me that the collected data would be relevant to my research. In this study, selection criteria did not address gender, race or social status of the participants, as I was afraid that this might have created stereotypical presuppositions about the participants’ perspectives on their artistic practice.

Hence, I chose the four Volga City street artists, who met the study criteria, mentioned above. Here, I would like to describe each participant background in brief, which might be relevant to the further data analysis. All the names are pseudonyms of the participants’ choice.

Phenomenological methodology also addresses the importance of an observation of a participant, as one of a complementary data source, which might be used in the research. Hence, I included some observational remarks from the interviews with each participant. As this study touched upon the artifacts of the material subculture of the participants, I thought it might be important for the readers to create an image of them.

1. **Tock.** Tock is a 23 years old tall skinny guy, who was smoking cheap cigarettes with a funny Russian name on them every ten minutes of the interview. He started doing
graffiti when he was at high school. He has been a street artist for eight years already and is well-known in the community as an “all-city” artist. All-city genre is when an artist’s works can be seen all over the city. He is from a working class family, and currently works as an electrical technician at the city railroad service. The first moment I met him, he apologized for his gruff voice. He said he was still trying to cope with the hangover, after drinking too much the day before. He was wearing a black coat with an upturned collar, dark jeans and old snickers. He spoke in a gruff, yet very quiet, voice in a polite manner.

2. CaminMraz. CaminMraz is 21 and he was finishing his final project for his undergraduate degree in Design and Architecture. He is a DJ and plays his tunes at the city night clubs. He is very interested both in art and music. He is famous due to a very notorious artwork he did in 2009, where he used the image, recognized as the city governor, which attracted public attention to the low quality of the city roads. He was asked to be interviewed by US-based media, such as the Washington Post and Radio Svoboda, and he did conduct an interview for the British newspaper Guardian. However, he did not like to talk about this during the interview. He smoked premium class cigarettes and was wearing a track jacket and blue jeans, both seemed to be bought in a second-hand store. His voice was quiet and he talked fast.

3. Rocks. Rocks is the most experienced participant. He is 30, and he owns business - a graffiti store, where he sells spray paints, markers and other supplies for streetartists. He is also a well-known city photographer. I was conducting the interview with him, while he was driving from one street art object to another. His outfit was very neat: a nice colorful track jacket, jeans and sneakers.

4. Dexo. He is 20 years old sophomore student at one of the Tech Universities in Volga City. He became interested in street art in school. I conducted the interview via
Skype. He was sitting in a dark room, so I could barely see his face. His voice was low and soft.

**Researcher’s Positionality**

As I was conducting my study in the site of my hometown and with the local community, I realized it was necessary to discuss my researcher’s positionality. I have been living in Volga City for almost my entire life. I was born in a local hospital. I went to a local school and graduated from one of the city universities. The city is familiar and casual for me. Being raised in a provincial city in the 1990s gave me the chance to look at the dynamics of the city transformation, to be the part of it. Thus, I am able to interpret many things about my research site in a “local” way – without a generalization to the overall notion of “a Russian provincial city”, would be complementary for the phenomenological approach I took. Although my familiarity with the history and significance of these sites might have enriched the interpretations and the data analysis in my study, I had to be mindful about the readers of my research, who might be unfamiliar with the context, which I usually took for granted.

Despite the fact, that I am local to the city, it was obvious that I am not the part of street art community, members of which I was interviewing. This fact might have influenced my data collection in terms of insider/outsider perspective. To reduce the effect, I made my interviews very informal and, as I mentioned above, gave the participant the right to choose where and when they want to be interviewed. I also decided not to set any deadlines for their sensory inquiries projects. Moreover, I want to admit that, I have been known one of the participants, Rocks, for many years, and it was him, who helped me to recruited the other participants, who met the study criteria.
Locality

Although many Russian cities seemed to be quite similar in origin and local development, it is important to note that as a researcher, I am aware of the fact, that the findings of this single research of literacy practices in particular city do not determine the general patterns of all other literacies in Russian provincial cities. Therefore, the main objective of the study is the in-depth inquiry into “the local” not in terms of the opposition to “the global”, but as an individual complex phenomenon. Pennycook (2010) stated that, “if we confine the notion of the local always to the small and the overlooked, the micro and the contextual, we run the risk of the constraining the potential of the local at the same time we explore it” (p. 53). However, in this study I used the term of (trans)locality due to the debate about literacy practices in the age of globalization, mobility and digital development (Canagarajah, 2013). This understanding of locality is linked to Pratt’s (1991) “contact zones” and “space of transculturation”, which I discussed in Chapter II. Indeed, it is difficult to examine the literacies of Russian street artists locally, thus, eliminating their (trans)local everyday experiences with American Hip-Hop culture, which traveled to Russia after the collapse of the USSR. As a researcher, who conducted a phenomenological study, I had to bear in mind the translocality of literacy practices, but we should also do not overlook local contexts.

Data Analysis

In this study, I utilized the phenomenological method of the data analysis of the participants’ interviews and sensory inquires, which included coding, categorizing, distinguishing themes and relationships between them, and creating a qualitative textual description of the “essence” of the phenomenon (Starks & Trinidad, 2007)

Step 1. Contextualization. After the data was collected and transcribed, I put each participant’s interview data in a separate word document. Then, I read each document to
identify the data units, which were relevant to the research goals. As this study seeks to explore the essence of the participants’ aesthetic literacies, I particularly looked for the data, in which participants described their aesthetic experiences (e.g. their own artistic practices, the responses, in which they describe “beautiful” or “aesthetic”, their encounters with the art.), and the so-called “shadowed data”: the participants responses to other street artists’ artistic practices, which might have been also relevant (p. 1374, Starks & Trinidad, 2007). I also focused on the specific words, which they repetitively used towards some of their aesthetic experiences in the city, which might help to identify their sensory responses to the city space of their aesthetic experiences, such as the words “feel”, “feeling”, and other words and phrases, which were used in specific contexts in the data. Also, I intentionally did not utilize the data samples, in which the participants discussed the conventions of what they considered to be graffiti or street art, e.g. Hip-Hop, specific graffiti styles, etc. My rationale for that was to investigate their personal understandings of their artistic practice, rather than the way they characterized their work using the traditional terminology of the genre. However, I did examine the samples, in which the participants’ experiences with the genre’s conventions might have influenced their understandings of the aesthetic experiences.

Step 2. Decontextualization (coding). I read and re-read the data samples, which I identified in Step 1. I highlighted and color-coded the items, which appeared in more than one data unit, using the highlighting tool. I also highlighted the unique responses about the artistic practices, which seemed meaningful for the participants. I added the commentaries to each item, which include my inference of what experience the participant was discussing (bracket views). I revised the comments and items, and the following codes emerged:

1. References to the art
2. References to the use of English and Russian in their artistic practices
3. References to the buffing
4. References to the negativity towards their artistic practices

5. References to the general public

6. References to the sense of atmosphere in places

7. References to the abandoned places as places of their artistic practices

8. References to the sense of fun in places of their artistic practices

9. References to the sense of harmony with places of their artistic practices

10. References to the sense of transformation in places of their artistic practices

11. References to the sense of freedom in places of their artistic practices

12. References to the sense of “being alive” in places of their artistic practices

Simultaneously, I analyzed the sensory inquires, which the participants sent to me during the period of October 2016 - January 2017. Due to the fact, that most sensory inquires of the participants contained only several pictures and short textual descriptions, I had to make a specific decision of the way I would use the data. Thus, I used the sensory inquires to complement to the codes, which emerged in the data. In other words, I looked for the connections between the codes, emerged from the interview data, and the sensory inquires.

Step 3. Recontextualization (Themes). After the codes were defined, I examined the relationships between them. For example, I noticed that the references to the sense of transformation of space usually appeared in connection with references of the sense of “atmosphere” of places and harmony with places. This gave me the idea of the theme: “Reported sensory experiences, linked to place and space”. However, not all the responses fell under strict thematic patterns, as most of the understandings, reported by the participants, were connected with each other. Here, it is necessary to come back to the notion, that the phenomenological research seeks to capture the essence of the lived experiences, which, as a life itself, might not be easily systematized into distinctive patterns. Hence, my attempt might be seen as one of possible ways to build the larger themes on the emerged codes.
Later, I wrote textual descriptions about each theme based on the data evidence, and added my interpretations of how these findings related to the research questions. Then, I came back to the overall data set to re-contextualize the themes, which were created. As a researcher of a phenomenological study, I was aware that I had to be “honest and vigilant about [my] perspective, preexisting knowledge and believes, and developing hypothesis” (p. 1376, Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Hence, I discussed and negotiated the themes with my thesis advisor. Finally, I interpreted the findings and looked at the relationships between the interpreted findings and the existing theories, which I discussed in Chapter Two.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings from the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and the sensory inquiries of the four street artists from Volga City. This chapter is aimed to shed light on what understandings the participants associated with their aesthetic experiences. Going back to the definition of the term used in this study, an aesthetic experience might be roughly defined as a particular experience in a material place in which a person responds to what he or she considers aesthetic or beautiful, which commonly include cognitive and sensory responses to it. Therefore, I focused on the findings in which participants discussed the experiences related to their artistic practices of creating graffiti in the public space of Volga City. Exploration of the participants’ aesthetic experiences might help us understand the aesthetic literacies of the participants, as aesthetic experiences and the participants’ interpretations of these experiences are seen as the elements that inform aesthetic literacies (Pahl, 2014).

This chapter discusses the participants’ interpretations of the experiences, which they linked to their aesthetic experiences. Through the systematic analysis of the codes, the following themes were formed:

1. Explicit social and political understandings of aesthetic experiences
2. Reported sensory responses, linked to place and space of aesthetic experience

In Chapter Two of this study, I described the concept of embodied cognition, which I used to make sense of the participants’ aesthetic experiences (Wilson, 2002). Hence, such division of the themes is not aimed at segregating the participants’ experiences into the ones linked to the cognitive or the sensory domains. My goal here was to identify the data about
the ways Bogard’s (2016) concept of “the reasoning mind and the sensing body” was negotiated in the reported experiences of the participants.

**Explicit Social and Political Understandings of Aesthetic Experiences**

In this section of the findings, I want to identify the explicit statements in the data in which the participants discussed the social context of their artistic practices and the instances where they expressed an overtly political message or meaning to their artistic practices in Volga City.

The participants’ responses revealed several ways in which they expressed the social and political understandings of their experiences. For example, Tock described his graffiti experiences as opposing to what he considered to be legal: “I . . . don’t like a law, don’t like the interaction between a law and people” (”я...не люблю закон, не люблю взаимодействие закона с людьми”) (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). It is notable that Tock’s usage of the word “law” did not refer to any particular Russian law. It seemed that he stood against the idea of a law that might restrict his artistic practices. Moreover, he also referred to the artworks, which might convey the similar political meaning. For example, Tock named Petr Pavlensky, a Russian performance artist and political activist, as an artist who inspired him. Many of Pavlensky’s notorious works, such as the performance in which he nailed his testicles in the middle of the Red Square in Moscow, are considered to be unacceptable and vandalism by the authorities and the common public in Russia. Although Tock positively evaluated Pavlensky’s works as the art, he himself did not relate his graffiti practices to the art. Thus, it is possible to suggest that in Tock’s view, his artistic practices were grounded in the opposition to socially agreeable concepts or the recognized concept of the art. Moreover, Tock portrayed “the common public” who did not understand his graffiti
and “the authorities” who “buffed” his street works as some impersonalized, faceless crowd. He said, “[I] oppose myself to the public, the opinion of the public” (я противопоставляю себя общественности, мнению общественности), pointing at a random couple passing by our bench in the park during the interview (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). Hence, we may speculate that Tock took up a clear social role while distancing himself from a group.

When CaminMraz expressed his social understanding of his artistic practice, he illustrated it with the example of a Russian street phenomena, outdoor advertising, which he called “the scourge of our time” (“бич нашего времени”) (CaminMraz, interview, May 20, 2016). In his opinion, the ugly outdoor ads placed throughout the city public space, including the beautiful old buildings in the city center, were perceived by the common public as a norm and therefore neutral, whereas graffiti and street art often received a negative response by the public. He wished to challenge this social understanding with his own artistic practice:

Граффити намного лучше, чем реклама. Просто люди еще не поняли этого.
Потому что граффити хотя бы живое в какой-то степени. То есть это - частичка человека какая-то, который сделал это рукой, не напечатал нигде на компьютере. Просто вложил в это часть вот этой энергии живой своей.

Graffiti is way better than ads. People just don’t get it yet. Because graffiti at least alive to some degree. This is a part of a person, who did it with his hand, didn’t print it somewhere on the computer. Just put his life energy in it. (CaminMraz, interview, May 20, 2016)

Like Tock, CaminMraz distanced himself from the concept of “the public” by admitting that they did not reach the understanding he already possessed. However, if the public carried the meaning of “the otherness” in regards to CaminMraz, he emphasized the

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3A graffiti writer’s jargon for the painting over a graffiti work with a flat color, conducted by the authority representatives.
Another example of social “distancing” might be CaminMraz’s experiences with the use of the English language and the Latin script in his artistic practices. In Russia, Cyrillic is a primary script, and Russian is the official language used by the government, all public institutions and most of the citizens. The idea that the English language would not be decoded was attractive to CaminMraz. He “distanced” from the common spoken language and script in which most of the ads, which he hated, were written. He stressed that English did not carry meanings that might be easily decoded by an average Russian person who does not speak English:

Мы слышим что-то, не понимая…Вот мы слушаем, там, музыку, допустим, трек какой-нибудь на английском и мы не вдумываемся в смысл того, что они говорят. Нам просто нравится сочетание того, как слова ложатся на музыку. А тут вот, я думаю, то же самое примерно работает, потому что если ты смотришь на граффити и понимаешь его, то, что там написано, то, что это по-русски, как-то сразу так становится типа «фуу, типа Россия какая-то»…

We hear something, not understanding. We listen, like, to music, let’s say, some music track in English, and we don’t go into details of the meaning of what they’re saying. We just like the combination of words being put to music. And here, I think the same thing works, because if you look at the graffiti and understand what it says, it's in Russian, somehow it becomes like “meh, Russia.” (CaminMraz, interview, May 20, 2016)

In this example, CaminMraz negatively responded to the Russian language as a part of a big concept of “meh, Russia,” as he seemed to perceive it as something common and uninteresting that might reveal the boring life of “the common public”. The English language
and script, on the contrary, produced a “distancing” effect, which might help the participant to speak with the styled forms, not linguistic signs. Tock also emphasized the importance of “the shape, the dynamics of letters” (форма, динамика букв), rather than the meaning of what is written (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). Although Tock appreciated the philosophical works of Russian graffiti writers who put the word “Зачем?” (“Why?”) on the street walls, he looked at the idea of language as “an issue of a perception” (“вопрос восприятия”), stating that “it doesn’t matter what is written” (“не важно, что написано”) (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). Although Tock explicitly reported his favoritism to the shapes of the script, he mentioned the social role of the styled shapes and letters as a communication means in the street art community, who “saw the dynamics in it, and some shape, which is pleasant for them” (“видят в этом динамику и какую-то форму, приятную для них”) (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). This signaled Tock’s understanding of his styled forms as socially valuable in his community.

On the contrary, Dexo stated that the value of the Latin script and the English language is universal. Dexo posited that the Latin symbols (letters) may be visually recognized almost everywhere on the Earth, as opposed to other scripts like Arabic or Chinese. In his response, however, he accentuated that no matter what script or language was used, he utilized the particular forms and angles. In general, Dexo did not pay much attention to the meaning of his graffiti work, pointing out that the most important thing for him is “the mixture of colors and forms” (Смесь цветов и формы) (Dexo, interview, June 12, 2016). Hence, the linguistic means might be seen as a sort of clay in the hands of the street artist, who might transform it in a particular way he found beautiful. Rocks appreciated the originality of the works that used the Cyrillic script:

Когда появляется кто-то с кириллицей, да еще и с какими-то древнерусскими шрифтами, то, конечно, все начинают шуметь: “о, там, ты видел?”
When you see someone [create a street artwork] with the Cyrillic alphabet, and even with some old Russian fonts, of course, everyone starts making fuss: “Oh, you saw?”
(Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016)

It is worth noting that Rocks particularly mentioned the old Cyrillics, which look different from the modern script. The aesthetics of the old Russian script may lay in its connection to religion and the pagan mythology. It should be said that the latter is widely romanticized in Russia. Hence, street artists who utilize old Cyrillics might attempt to draw public attention to the originality of a work.

Rocks, as the most experienced street artist, valued the positive reactions from the public, which he might bring with his artistic practices in the city. For example, he said he enjoyed positive reactions from people:

Я отошел, постоял в стороне, посмотрел. И люди так проходили, так оборачивались. Ну, то есть, когда ты можешь как-то повлиять на людей, оно собственно и приятно. Тем более, что это не такая же реакция, типа какого черта. То есть, они смотрят, им интересно, потому что, ну, силуэт собаки, он не может вызывать каких-то негативных эмоций.

I walked away, stood on the side, watched. And people were passing by, turned their heads. I mean, when you can have some impact on people, it's actually nice. Moreover, it's not the same kind of reaction, like “what the hell!?” So they look at it, they’re curious, because it’s the dog's silhouette, it can't cause any negative emotions.
(Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016)

Rocks saw his artistic practice as having a positive impact on people from his city. He attempted to challenge the common public views on the everyday objects such as

The old Cyrillic script is still used by the Russian Orthodox Church. The Bible is also written in the old Cyrillic script.
neighborhood water pumps, which he painted in different colors. He said that, in general, people who saw these colored water pumps carried the idea that if something was beautiful, then it meant somebody paid for it. Rocks admitted that “the fact that you live in the city and you have a need to change something” (“а то, что ты живешь в городе, и у тебя есть потребность что-то поменять”) was often neglected (Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016). Therefore, this participant claimed his social agency towards the transformation in the space he lived. However, in many cases Rocks had to face a negative social response to it. For example, he stated that people from outside of the subculture usually made unfair conclusions about an artistic practice on the streets: “They say, first you painted a picture, then another one, then you broke windows” (“как говорят, сначала нарисовали рисунок, потом еще один рисунок, потом окна разбили”) (Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016).

Indeed, the participants pointed out that their artistic practices in public spaces often met negative social responses. For instance, Dexo admitted that the common public had a pre-determined negative attitude to graffiti:

Они [общественность] относятся к этому, в любом случае, что бы ты ни рисовал, пока ты в процессе рисования еще не нарисовал, они относятся как будто ты отрицательно.

They [common public] seem to relate negatively to what you’re painting, even if you’re in the process of painting and haven’t finished. (Dexo, interview, June 12, 2016)

Dexo’s response echoes CaminMraz’s response that common people lacked understanding of graffiti. Thus, the very process of creating graffiti was socially perceived as deviant. The common perception, or the aesthetics of an unknowledgeable public, led these artists to self-identify themselves as vandals.
It is worth noting that the participants did not personify such social and political constructs as the government or the common public. In their responses, these constructs carried the notion of “otherness” to their community and their personal practices of creating graffiti. Moreover, neither Dexo nor Tock, who worked in graffiti style, separated the public and the government or gave them any particular names in their reported experiences. The public was described as people who “don’t give a shit, they are into their own trivial household duties” (“просто насрать, они увлечены своими заботами какими-то банальными бытовыми”) (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). Thus, the participants (Tock and CaminMraz) linked the common public to a particular image of a trivial, uneventful, and mundane reality.

Another notable political issue that arose from the participants’ responses was their attitudes to “buffing”. Buffing is a jargon word of the street art community, which describes the process when a street art work is diminished (covered with paint) by the authorities. As I have already mentioned, for all the participants, the authorities were seen as distant, impersonal objects. Thus, the participants did not attribute any specific political meaning to this process. This might be grounded in the participants’ acceptance that their aesthetic experiences were not understood by the collective public (including the authorities):

Они приводят к какому-нибудь первоначальному виду. Как минимум, к чистому. Опять же никому непонятно что написано, что нарисовано.

They [the authorities] bring it to some initial condition, At least, to a clean one. Again, nobody understands what is written, what is painted. (Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016)

In this example, I want to draw attention to Rocks’ idea of a buffed place as a clean place. This idea appeared in the response of another participant, Tock, who actually saw the beauty of this process: “Even when [the authorities] painted it over, it’s beautiful, yeah.
Because...because the confrontation is beautiful, I think, because there’s nothing unnecessary [in it] (“даже когда закрашивают, это красиво, да. потому что… потому что противостояние - это красиво, я считаю. потому что нет ничего лишнего”) (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). This view on buffing might tell us that the participants had to deal with some kind of political and social “contracts” with regulations to which they agreed when they started painting on the streets of the city. For example, Rocks described his personal code about the places where he could create a work:

[I thought] I can afford to paint everywhere, except for the cultural heritage buildings...But now, for example, I wouldn’t paint on a private property, a van, a “Gazel”, a bus or a store, because I know the price of this work. (Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016)

This example illustrates Rocks’ social understanding of his artistic practice. It is worth mentioning that unlike other participants, Rocks identified some part of the “common public,” or the people who own and take care of their private property. The possible reason of this might be that Rocks himself was an owner of a graffiti store, and he had the understanding of what it meant to have his property damaged.

Many responses were connected with the political and social understandings of the participants, which they had attached to their experiences within their subculture community. For the three of the participants (Tock, Rocks and CaminMraz), the community was the

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5 Brand of Russian van, which is usually used by private transportation companies
people who understood them more than “common public” and who could communicate well with them:

Все граффитчики, они живут каким-то определенным образом жизни, и с ними просто разговаривать, и интересы одни и те же почти у всех.

All graffeurs, they lead some specific way of life, and it is easy to talk to them, and [they] all have the same interests. (CaminMraz, interview, May 20, 2016)

In this example, CaminMraz reported a particular way of life, which was led by the subculture community members. It is notable, in comparison with the image of the common public and the authorities, that the subculture community was personified: the participants referred to the experiences of other street artists from their hometown and other cities in Russia. Being a part of the community also appeared to be about the hierarchy and following the rules of it. In his interview, Tock revealed the importance of the idea of respect in the street art community:

Мне кажется, нужно в первую очередь, иметь уважение к окружению, в этом кругу, то есть, там, я имею в виду не перебивать там кого-то, кого ты считаешь...кто уже добился успеха,

I think, first of all, you need to respect those who surround you in this community. I mean, do not cover up [the street works of] those, who you think...those, who became successful. (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016)

This example reveals a completely different political message from the one Tock attributed to buffing. If the buffing conducted by the authorities was not addressed as a strong political move, a cover-up done by another community member seemed to have a very specific political statement: disrespect to other member of the community.

In this section of the findings, the reported experiences related to the social and political understandings of the participants aesthetic experiences are presented. The experiences
showcased various understandings of their artistic practices in the city: the confrontational feeling to the concept of the common public, the political interpretation of the authoritative actions such as buffing, the community social relationship, and the positive intentions of artistic practices in the city. The data demonstrated that the participants’ interpretations of their own aesthetic experiences were remarkably framed by their social and political understandings of the latter. Unlike sensory experiences, these understandings were closely linked to the participants’ cognitive effort to “make meaning” of their aesthetic experiences in Volga City (that is, their street artistic practices in the public space).

In the next section of the findings, I continue with the reported experiences, in which the participants discussed their sensory responses to the city space.

**Reported Sensory Responses, Linked with Place and Space of Aesthetic Experience**

In this section, I present the findings in which the participants reported the various sensory experiences which they connect to their aesthetic experiences in public space in Volga City. To explore how street artists navigate in the city and how their senses respond to it, I provide the readers with the findings from the interviews, complemented by the findings from the sensory inquires of the participants, in which they had to walk the city with a camera and depict the places they found attractive for future artistic practices.

In both the interviews and the sensory inquires, all the participants stated that all the places they found attractive to them as artists possessed “the atmosphere”. In the search for atmosphere, the participants navigated the places and spaces of their artistic practices. However, the ways the participants connected “the atmosphere” to their artistic practices are not identical. For example, CaminMraz linked his experiences of atmosphere with the aesthetics of the old times, which might be found in some parts of Volga City:

Мне очень нравится, наверное, район моста. троицкий собор. в принципе, все, что его окружает там очень… Мне кажется, там сохранилась атмосфера именно
вот такого [города] восемнадцатого века. То есть туда вот ты приходишь, и ты там чувствуешь атмосферу старины какой-то купеческой. И плюс там Троицкий собор - это первая вообще каменная постройка в [городе]. То есть это здание, оно застало такие времена вообще, что… В принципе, ничего кроме него и не осталось. вот. мне нравится очень…Мне нравятся очень, на самом деле, все вот эти вот домики двух- трехэтажные такие, которые… У меня складывается, у нас в городе вот такой Петербург на улицах на этих.

Perhaps, I really love the bridge area. The Trinity Cathedral. In general, everything that surrounds it. It seems to me that the atmosphere is that of [Volga City] of the 18th century. I mean, you come there, and you feel the atmosphere of some sort of the old merchant times. and there is also the Trinity Cathedral, which is the first stone building in [Volga City]. I mean, it's a building, and it has seen all those times, that ...

Basically, there's nothing left except it. I really like... I really really like all these two- and three-story houses, which ... It makes our city streets look like some kind of St. Petersburg. (CaminMraz, interview, May 20, 2016)

In this example, CaminMraz expressed the sense of nostalgia of times he had never lived in. However, he compared Volga City streets to St. Petersburg, which still holds the historic residential sites with two- and three-story European-like houses. The city of St. Petersburg is claimed to be a national cultural capital and one of the most beautiful cities in Russia. It is evident that this participant tended to connect his feeling of atmosphere with the image of the city that used to exist before the USSR. In his sensory inquiry, CaminMraz also mentioned that each place he chose for his future artistic practices has “its own atmosphere” (“своя атмосфера”) (CaminMraz, sensory inquiry, December 2016). His selections were the old water tower (see Figure 1), the old part of Volga City (see Figure 2), and the old part of the embankment (see Figure 3). All these places appeared during pre-Soviet times.
Figure 1. A photo of the old water tower. Taken from: CaminMraz, Sensory Inquiry, December 2016.

Figure 2. A photo of the historical part of the city. Taken from CaminMraz, Sensory Inquiry, December 2016
Figure 3. A photo of the old city embankment and the wall with a barbed wire on top of it. Taken from CaminMraz, Sensory Inquiry, December 2016

Dexo also linked the atmosphere with the image of the city from the past, in his case the times of the USSR:

Мне больше нравится именно такие знаешь индустриальные объекты, если можно так выразиться, где какой-нибудь тот же завод, не то что он заброшенный но такой уже который именно пережил те советские времена . . .

Не знаю, в этом есть какая-то любимая там деталь мне конкретно. Я на самом деле люблю всю эту тематику, скажем так. Если б я в тот же чернобыль съездил, я бы радовался как маленькое дитя. Ну, мне нравится чисто заброшенное постсоветское пространство. Вот что-то в этом есть. Представляешь вот, смотришь на объект и думаешь - вот когда-то там много людей работало.

I like these, you know, industrial objects, if I can say so, where some kind of a factory, not that it is really abandoned, but it lived through those Soviet times … I don't know, there's some kind of my favorite thing there for me. I really love this whole theme, let’s say. If I went to Chernobyl, for example, I would be as happy as a
little child. Well, I really like the abandoned post-Soviet space. There is something in it. Imagine, you look at an object and think - there were times when there a lot of people worked there. (Dexo, interview, June 12, 2016)

In this example, Dexo particularly accentuated the unique atmosphere of abandoned factories of the Soviet times, the space of Soviet people’s histories and memories. In Dexo’s sensory inquiry, one of the places he wanted to work in was the abandoned hangar in the city suburbs (see Figure 4), a place where his work would “create a contrast to the environment” (“может создать контраст в этой среде”) (Dexo, sensory inquiry, September 2016)

![Figure 4](image.png)

*Figure 4. A photo of the abandoned hangar in the city suburbs. Taken from Dexo, Sensory Inquiry, September 2016*

For instance, CaminMraz also felt the atmosphere created by the contrast (see Figure 3) of an old embankment and a fence with barbed wire. In other words, the contrast here is the way these participants visually sensed the place. This visual sensing might be the key element in how they felt “the atmosphere” of the place.

Most participants (Tock, CaminMraz and Rocks) reported “a sense of harmony”, or some kind of connection with the places of their artistic practices. Tock, for instance, admitted that sometimes he became physically attracted by certain places, and he had an uncontrollable sensation to write his graffiti there. He agreed that this sensation was primarily
connected with some sort of gestalt: he just felt the need to fill the space with his graffiti. In his case, he usually was attracted to places of “no color” that he would be able to transform: “It was grey here, now it’s become colorful” (тут вот было серо, а стало цветное) (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). The transformation of color was also described by Rocks:

> Imagine, rusty piece of iron, it’s…the paint is crumbling, it’s becoming just black and red, and when it becomes bright violet with white dots . . . and around this, it’s dirt . . . all these wooden houses. (Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016)

In this example, Rocks described the way the bright colors on a water pump made a contrast with the dirty streets of the poor neighborhood.

In his interview, Tock also pointed out that he seeks the particular sensation in a place of his art practice—a sense of danger, the feeling of being “at risk”. The search for this sensation made him climb up the rooftops, sneak into government properties at night, and paint the trains. When I asked him to do a sensory inquiry (it was on a voluntary basis), he told me he could not do that, as he almost never planned ahead: “It’s not important what to paint, it’s important where and under what circumstances (“не важно, что рисовать. важно где и при каких обстоятельствах”) (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). However, later he shared with me a new spot he found accidentally (See Figure 5), followed with a phrase “it’s an emotional outburst” (“Это выход эмоций”) (Tock, sensory inquiry, December 2016). Therefore, the opportunity to express his emotions was of utmost importance for Tock’s response to a place.
In other participants’ experiences with the city space, there was the sense of harmony with the space as well. For example, CaminMraz and Rocks seemed to link the feeling of harmony with the sensation they had when they discovered a place that might be transformed by their artworks. In both cases, the participants admitted that they see places as if they look at them through a camera lens. For example, when Rocks was showing one of the places on the street he worked in, he described the way he saw his idea of an artwork might perfectly blend into the environment yet create a new vision of the place. It is possible to say that in their artistic practices in the city, Rocks and CaminMraz visually reacted to places: they saw particular forms and angles that might be transformed by them. For example, Rocks stated that the strongest sensation he had was when he saw a place in the city that he could transform in the way only he saw it:

Самый первый этап, от которого я кайфую - когда я вижу какой-то объект, я понимаю, что с ним можно что-то сделать, и я понимаю, что другие этого не понимают, и еще не сделали этого.
The first stage when I'm feeling “high” is when I see some object, I know that I can do something with it, and I understand that others don't see it and haven’t done so.

(Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016)

In Russian, Rock’s sensation, which he described as “feeling high” ("кайфую"), might be also interpreted as the physical feeling of euphoria experienced by drug users. Hence, we might assume that the agency to transform gave this participant a very strong sensation of excitement.

In his sensory inquiry, Rocks provided the picture of a place and Photoshopped artwork of a “fat rose cap”, a slang term for the cap of a certain kind of spray paint used by street artists (see Figures 6 and 7). He wrote that he saw this place and “the shape dictated it” ("форма продиктовала это") (Rocks, sensory inquiry, January, 2016). The visual sensing of shapes, angles and lines in the city might be one of the sensory stimuli for the street artists in their space navigation.

*Figure 6.* A photo of a sewage pipe, the shape of which attracted Rock. Taken from Rocks, Sensory Inquiry, January 2017.
Speaking of the participants’ feeling of their agency to transform the city space, I need to also mention their responses about the places they felt they could not transform in any way. All the participants agreed that they did not feel compelled to create their works in places considered to be of historical or architectural importance. For example, all of them mentioned the Volga City Conservatory, the symbol of the city, as a place they would never touch with their spray paint. It is necessary to be critical here, as it might not be their personal understandings but rather conventional views of the city. It was interesting, though, that CaminMraz stated that he would not work in places with a “cultural heritage” unless he felt they are “in a very bad condition, with broken windows” (в раздолбанном состоянии, с выбитыми окнами.) (CaminMraz, interview, May 20, 2016). This might lead us back to CaminMraz’s feeling of “the atmosphere” or the place of contrast—beautiful yet destroyed and abandoned.

Moreover, several participants reported that clean public places that are taken care of do not attract them as artists. For example, Dexo considered such places to be “without the atmosphere”, while the dirty street walls in the suburbs carried more potential:

*Figure 7. A Photoshopped photo of a sewage pipe transformed into a spray paint cap. Taken from Rocks, Sensory Inquiry, January 2017.*
[Мне] нравится когда ты рисуешь на таких стенах, они грязные, какая-то история в них пропиталась, если можно так выразиться . . . Но чистые места, мне кажется, это не так красиво будет выглядеть. Не так атмосферно что-ли. [I] like when you paint on such walls, they’re dirty, the history is immersed in them, if I can say so . . . As for clean places, I think, it would look less beautiful. Not as atmospheric, I guess. (Dexo, interview, June 12, 2016)

This may help us to understand the ways the participants navigate between what they feel is beautiful by itself and what they feel requires a transformation of some kind.

Summarizing, it might be said that the participants’ relationship to place and space of their aesthetic experiences is informed to some extent by how they sensually respond to it, and vice versa. Moreover, it is evident that the reported sensations and feelings may not be interpreted as pure sensory responses to the city but rather to the concept of the city (the way the participants only see the city space through their personal aesthetics).

Lastly, I want to mention the responses in which the participants linked their street aesthetic experiences with “fun”. However, it is difficult to refer the concept of fun with particular sensations reported by the participants. For Tock, “fun” of his street art practices is to “laugh, have good time, and . . . cook a barbeque, relax” (“посмеяться, провести хорошо время, там, . . . пожарить какие-нибудь шашлыки, расслабиться…”) (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). Rocks said that sometimes he likes to “just walk and enjoy” and make a couple of tags or quick “throw-ups” (“просто гуляю и развлекаюсь”) (Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016). For CaminMraz and Dexo, their street art practices were to have fun with friends or other street artists, to talk or to listen to music while painting on a wall. This concept of “fun” might be the exact thing that gave the participants the reported sensations of joy. Although it would be difficult to rationally connect the idea of having “fun” and the sensory experiences of the participants in the city, it is evident that the participants
themselves considered fun in the process, which followed their aesthetic interactions with the urban space. With this in mind, I want to finish this chapter with one of the responses, in which the participant (CaminMraz) was trying to reflect on his feelings and sensations in the city. He said that the entire process of buying spray cans, searching, discovering, painting, and having fun with friends is what makes him “feel alive” (“поечувствовать себя живым”) (CaminMraz, interview, May 20, 2016).

Chapter Four presented the various ways the participants make meaning of their aesthetic experiences in Volga City. The findings illustrated the political and social understandings of the participants’ aesthetic experiences and the sensory responses to the places and spaces of their aesthetic experiences. Moreover, the findings revealed the relationships between the two presented themes, which I discuss in Chapter Five of this study.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION OF THE THEMES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

Throughout this thesis study, I tried to challenge myself to find out the traces, the clues, which could lead me to an understanding of the aesthetic literacies of the four street artists, who agreed to become the participants of this study. During the data collection, I felt like I was a detective, who investigated the case: I carefully listened to the stories of the four witnesses, and tried to learn their perspectives. Thus, I had to look beyond my own understanding of aesthetic literacy, which I gained from the scholarly readings, and analyze the artists’ interpretations, which they associated with their aesthetic experiences in Volga City. This chapter is my attempt to rethink what I considered to be aesthetic literacy in this research, utilizing the evidence from the data.

This chapter focuses on the discussion of the two themes, which emerged from the data, in relation to the main inquiry of this thesis research, which is how aesthetic literacies are manifested in the lives of the four street artists from a post-industrial city in Russia. The questions, which guided this research, were:

- How do the street artists understand aesthetic experiences in relation to street art and graffiti practices in a post-industrial urbanspace?
- What relationships between cognitive and sensory dimensions of aesthetic experience are evident from the street artists’ reported understandings?

I start this chapter with addressing the first research question of the study. Therefore, I provide my interpretation of the understandings of aesthetic experiences in the public space of Volga City, reported by the participants in relation to their artistic practices. The interpretation of these reported understandings helps reveal the ways the participants framed their aesthetic experiences in the urban public space. In order to interpret these findings, I
refer to the relevant scholarly works, which indicate theoretical propositions, linked to the depicted phenomenon. Then, I continue with the discussion of the relationship between what I consider in this research cognitive and sensory dimensions of the artists’ aesthetic experiences, drawing on the participants’ reported social, political and sensory understandings of their artistic practices in the public space. I address the particular examples from the findings and the reviewed literature on the topic to demonstrate the negotiation of these two dimensions in the participants’ understandings of their aesthetic experiences. Finally, I take a holistic view of the discussed themes to create a larger argument about the ways the aesthetic literacies of the participants are manifested in this research study. In order to do that, I juxtapose the theoretical notions of aesthetic literacies, which I discussed in Chapter Two, and my interpretations of the participants’ understandings of their aesthetic experiences in Volga City. By doing this, I bring to light the ways the participants’ understandings of their aesthetic experiences inform their aesthetic literacies.

In the following section, I suggest possible interpretations of the two themes, which were described in the previous chapter.

**Reported Experiences Framed**

“[I] Oppose Myself to the Public”: Street Artists’ Social Distancing

The participants’ understandings of their artistic practices and, in general, the experiences, they related to their aesthetic experiences, demonstrated that some ideas about the city general public were shared. I decided to put Tock’s quote from his interview in the title of this section, as it seemed to symbolize the phenomenon that emerged from the data: the phenomenon, which I called the street artists’ social “distancing”. The word “social” here signifies the relationship between the street artists and what they identified as “the general public”- people who either did not belong to the subculture community or had no particular interest in street art or graffiti.
Most vividly, the social distancing phenomenon was presented by the participants’ understandings, connected with the creation of an artwork in the public space. For instance, Tock attributed an image of a boring mundane life to his concept of the general public. Therefore, I posit that Tock’s way of framing his artistic practice as the opposition to the city general public may as well manifest his attempt to confront a boring way of life in the city, in general. Moreover, his interpretation of the general public and the local authorities as an abstract concept, rather than a particular social group, may also support this claim. Tock’s sensory response to “gray” places in the city, his desire to color them, may be considered another way of distancing himself from the mundane colorless reality of the everyday life of the general public.

The social distancing phenomenon was explicitly stated in the participants’ understandings of the linguistic means, which they chose to use in their artistic practices. For example, CaminMraz, Tock and Rocks acknowledged that they used the English language for their street art and graffiti in a Russian context in order to eliminate the semantic meanings of words, and, therefore, draw attention to “the shape, the dynamics of letters” as well as colors of the graffiti (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). Consequently, this created a distancing effect between a street artist’s work and an ordinary viewer, who they assumed not be able to decode the meaning, and would have to react to the visual element of the styled work. Although the participants intentionally avoided sharing any semantic messages with the general public, they reported that the very same shapes, angles, and colors served as a communication means in their subculture community. The artists were able to communicate via styles and fonts, which were recognized in a meaningful way within the street art community. This understanding indicates the difference in the relationships between the street artists and their subculture community, and the street artists and the general public of the city. However, the common idea of both was the use of a linguistic means as the kind ofa
language, which should be interpreted in an aesthetic way: in terms of the beauty of shapes and colors of letters. This speaks to Bogard’s (2016) idea of “designerly” ways of practicing literacy, namely, which emphasizes the teenagers’ aesthetic experiences with reading theatrical plays. In his study, Bogard (2016) described the phenomenon when while reading dramatic texts, some of the participants were attuned to the sounds or accents of word and phrases. Similarly, the street artists’ chosen shapes and colors for their wall writings may be considered to be a designerly way of creating and reading a graffiti text. However, unlike Bogard’s (2016) study participants, the street artists did not associate any particular meanings to their “designs”. Therefore, I argue that the participants of this study tended to rely on their sensory responses to the language or the script, such as Tock’s pleasure of looking at a colorful writing.

The participants’ use of the language and the script as a communicative means within their community also corresponds to Chmielewska’s (2007) concept of graffiti as a non-linguistic form of writing, which reveals “nuanced difference in directionality” (p. 152). In other words, depending on the target audience (the general public or subculture community), the street artists utilized different features of the language and script. Moreover, the material context, or a place, of a graffiti or street art object would be only recognized as meaningful only by a subculture community. The street artists might be seen as the writers, who utilized the multimodality of the language: using both linguistic and non-linguistic means in various social discourses (Kress & Selander, 2012). To sum up, directing their graffiti to a general public, they did not attribute any meaning to the language, which might seen as their social distancing from the faceless audience of consumers of street art and space, who they assumed did not appreciate their style or a chosen place, but might react to a widely recognized shapes and colors of letters.
In the following paragraph, I want to address the political understandings, which informed the street artists’ distancing from the general public and the authorities. The term “political understanding” I use here refers to the participants’ logic of their representation in public space in relation to who they considered being those, who “govern” this space. This appropriated understanding of “politics” comes from my interpretation of Ranciere’s (2009) work, in which he defined politics as not the power relations, but the relationships between worlds. In other words, political understanding is not based on the hierarchy of the powerful and the powerless, but to the relationships between the different “worlds”, claiming their rights to utilize public space, e.g. street artists, the general public, and the local authorities.

Most participants admitted the negativity to their street artworks and their artistic practice per se, expressed by the local authorities and general public. Moreover, the widespread perception of graffiti and street art as unsanctioned and illegal action, and the artworks as an “urban disorder” might have influenced the participants’ social and political interpretations of selves as vandals (Riggle, 2010, McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011, Gartus & Leder, 2014, Merill, 2014). Thus, the political understanding of “being outside of law” might be seen as inherent to the street artists’ understanding of their aesthetic experience in the public space of the city, which they recognized as controlled by actual authorities or the opinion of general public. That might shed the light on Dexo’s and Tock’s distancing themselves from the experiences, in which the authorities buffed their works. On the contrary, Tock’s statement that “confrontation is beautiful” signified his encouragement of any political engagement with the city space, even if it was counter-graffiti. Overall, the participants’ political understandings indicated the rationality in their artistic representation in the city.
“...You Live in the City, and You Have a Need to Change Something”: The City as the Space of Transformation

McAuliffe and Iveson (2011) claimed that street artists’ practices in the city are “informed by myriad motivations” (p.129). In this section of the chapter, I would like to address the idea of transformation, which motivated artistic practices of the participants of the study. When I discuss the notion of transformation of space, I include the social, political and sensory understandings, which the participants referred to their agency in the city. Drawing on Iveson’s (2013) idea of Do-It-Yourself Urbanism, we may discuss Rocks’s interpretation of his artistic practice in the city as the way of beautifying the stigmatized places in the city, e.g. his water pump artwork in the poor Volga City neighborhood. As in Iveson’s (2013) article, Rocks claimed his right to socially reinvent space within the city with his street art. Another example is CaminMraz’s understanding of his practice as a powerful way of transforming people’s attitudes to the city space. In this reported experience, he compared the ugly outdoor ads, which placed on the city walls by the general public, and his street art, which aimed to transform the space by replacing the ugliness of the outdoor ads.

Although the notion of transformation was found in the responses, which were concerned with social and political meanings, which the participants discussed, the notion of transformation was central in the reported sensory experiences of the participants. As presented in Chapter 4, all the participants indicated the sense of atmosphere, which attracted them in the city. However, if we look at the ways they communicated this feeling, we notice that all of them expressed the desire to change, to add something, or to create contrast in the places with an atmosphere. It is worth noting that the “atmospheric” places, which the participants discussed in the interviews and depicted in their sensory inquiries, represent so-called “marginal spaces”, e.g. the hangar in Dexo’s sensory inquiry (Gandy, 2013). Referring to Gandy’s (2013) piece, I argue that these marginal spaces might have been perceived by the
participants as spaces of “adventure, imagination, and self-discovery”, which might have invited them to play, have fun and transform the atmosphere of these places (p. 1302).

Moreover, one of the participants, Tock, reported that he felt some kind of a gestalt certain places - he physically felt the need to “complete” the place with his graffiti. It echoes Joy and Sherry’s (2003) idea of “optimal body-environment relationship”, when a person has a “perceptual gestalt” towards space, driven by senses. It is noteworthy, that the authors admitted the dual nature of such event: both cognitive and sensory. Thus, they considered a “perceptual gestalt” of an artist as “both physiological event and an intellectual judgment” due to the fact that the object of perception (in this case, a particular place in Volga City) is a part of larger political and social context of public space. Hence, what Tock reported to be a physical response to the place was negotiated with his skills about the city, learned through “involvement, practice, and experience” prior to his aesthetic experience (Joy & Sherry, 2003, p.263). This idea of such incarnate mind corresponds with the notion of embodied cognition, which I framed the participants’ aesthetic experiences with.

However, it should be pointed out that several participants stated that their ability to see the places as spaces of transformation became their second nature as street artists. During our interview ride around the city, Rocks was pointing to different places in the city, which might be interesting for his artistic practices. He explained that when he started to paint the streets, he began noticing things around the city, which commonly was out of his sight. Rocks posited that he was “feeling high”, some kind of euphoria, when he was able to see objects’ other “dimensions”: its shapes, angles and colors, which seemed to speak to him (Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016). This way of the participant’s sensory responding to the city reminded me of the concept of “parkour eyes”, the term used to describe the relationship with the everyday surroundings, experienced by the people, who practice parkour (Ameel & Tani, 2012). In a nutshell, parkour is “a physical discipline in which the aim is to move as smoothly
and quickly as possible from one location to another, overcoming obstacles on the way by using them as stepping stones”, commonly performed in a public space (Ameel & Tani, 2012, p. 164). However, this is a very simplified definition of the idea. According to Ameel and Tani (2012), parkour implies an innovative way of interacting with space. It is noteworthy, that the practice of parkour has many things in common with the graffiti and street art practices: both use the public space in creative ways, and movement is a pertinent part of an experience. The authors claimed that people, who parkour, experience space creatively, driven by their bodily reactions in their everyday spaces: “they see walls, fences, rails, stairs and benches as opportunities that they can use in a creative and playful way” (Ameel & Tani, 2012, p. 169). The notion of movement, which is pertinent to parkour, appeared in the street artists’ sensory responses, as well. For example, Tock pointed out the sense of danger, which he looked for in the spaces of his artistic practices. In his case, this sense of danger led him to climb the rooftops and secretly sneak into the properties. The examples of Tock and Rocks provide us with the evidence of their embodied experiences, which they related to their artistic practices. Therefore, their ways of sensory experiencing the city might be considered to be their creative attempts “of unsettling settled visions of the city” (McAuliffe & Iveson, 2011, p.133).

“[I] Just Walk and Enjoy”: Artistic Practice as a Playful Experience

In this section, I want to focus on the findings that emerged in the participants’ reported sensory experiences of the sense of fun. Analyzing it, there might be a chance that the sensory experiences of the participants are tied to the sense of fun they had during the artistic practices, and even while thinking of them as they were interviewed. Rocks stated that sometimes his artistic practice is just about to “walk and enjoy” in the city (Rocks, interview, May 19, 2016). It is fair to say that the notion of “fun” is often overlooked in the research on aesthetics. Critiquing a tendency towards a “rational” approach in social sciences, Graeber
(2014) noted the importance of “having fun, doing something we do well for the sheer pleasure of doing it”. Using Graeber’s (2014) idea, I suggest that street artists’ sensory engagement with the city space might be seen as a form of playful experience, which makes them “feel alive” (“почувствовать себя живым”) (Camin-Mraz, interview, May 20, 2016). With this saying, however, I do not aim to downplay the participants’ social or political engagement that framed their aesthetic experiences. What I want to propose is to look at the negotiation of meanings, which frames these experiences, as a kind of play in the city space. This sense of play, reported by the participants, also corresponds to the idea of parkour, I mentioned in the previous section. Ameel and Tani (2012) stated that parkour is often associated with a sense of “playing with fear”, which experienced by those, who practiced parkour. Similarly, Tock’s sense of danger and being at risk might reveal his playing with the sensory side of his aesthetic experience.

Tock’s sense of fun was primarily linked to his interactions with the members of the street art community with whom he could “laugh, have a good time, and . . . cook a barbecue, relax” while writing graffiti. This idea of fun connects us to Lavrinec’s (2014) statement that “repetitive actions in public space provide a possibility of publicly shared emotional and bodily experience” (p. 60). In other words, Tock might have connected his sensory experience not with his artistic practice or the space of his artistic practice, but with the things that came along with it: hanging out with friends, sharing a meal and joking. Thus, the latter became a significant part of his aesthetic experience in space perse.

**Aesthetic Experience Negotiated**

In this section I look holistically on the three above discussed phenomena, which I discovered in the reported understandings of the participants in terms of their aesthetic experiences, which I consider to be their artistic practices and related experiences. At this point I return to the discussion of aesthetic experience in my literature review chapter.
Drawing on the reviewed works, I restate that the sensory and cognitive dimensions of aesthetic experience are seen as interconnected in many scholarly works, and conceptualized as embodied cognition (Wilson, 2002). Using Joy and Sherry’s (2003) understanding of aesthetic experience as “not just the process of thinking bodily but how the body affects the logic of our thinking,” which emphasized embodiment and the multisensory, however, did not exclude the cognitive (Joy & Sherry, 2003, p. 259). I discuss what I called social and political understandings as related to the cognitive paradigm, as they included the participants’ judgments, evaluations, and verbal reasoning of the experiences. I connect the sensory dimension of aesthetic experience with the participants’ sensory responses to the city space, or how their body reacted to particular spaces and places of their aesthetic experiences.

In three discussed phenomena (the participants’ social distancing, understanding the city space as the space of transformation, and artistic practices as playful experience), I found that the participants’ social, political and sensory understandings, which I link to the cognitive and the sensory dimensions of the participants’ aesthetic experiences, were never expressed completely separately. By the latter, I mean that the reported understandings of creation of street art and graffiti, and consumption of urban space, indicated the strong connection between the social, political and sensory engagement of the participants, which echoes the theoretical notion of interconnectedness of the cognitive and the sensory, utilized in several research studies (Joy & Sherry, 2003; Wilson, 2002).

However, I came to the realization that the reviewed definitions lack the concept of the negotiation between the cognitive and sensory dimensions that emerged from the participants’ reported understandings of their aesthetic experiences. Taking into account the three discussed phenomena, I view the aesthetic experiences of the participants as a playful negotiation between the sensory and the cognitive dimensions, in which the sensory dimension plays the prevalent role in the overall experience.
In order to illustrate my claim, I provide several examples, in which the cognitive and the sensory dimensions are negotiated. The aesthetic experiences of the participants were negotiated in terms of the sensory, social and political understandings of the city space.

For instance, CaminMraz and Dexo claimed that they wished to change general public opinion about graffiti in the city, which, as they both stated, might be done if graffiti works would be seen in public spaces. However, CaminMraz’s and Dexo’s sense of the atmosphere was experienced mainly in destroyed and abandoned factory buildings, which are less politically and socially relevant in terms of the city space. By this I mean, that no one claims their right to these spaces, therefore the participants’ graffiti would not have a resonating effect on the general public or the authorities. The negotiation between their sensory response to the place and the social and political understandings of his artistic practice in the already marginalized space would be unlikely be seen by many people. In this case, despite their rational understanding, that graffiti should be seen by as many people as possible, CaminMraz’s and Dexo’s sense of harmony at place prevailed.

Another example of the negotiation between cognitive and sensory dimensions of aesthetic experience, is Tock’s artistic practice in places, where he had a sense of “danger”. Feeling fear of being caught, this participant consciously chose to enter private properties, such as train stations, in order to create his graffiti. This example also showcases the prevalence of sensory over cognitive in Tock’s aesthetic experience.

It is important to emphasize that the discussion of the negotiation between cognitive and sensory dimensions of these street artists’ aesthetic experiences are greatly framed by the city space and place. At this point, I discuss the way space and place impacted the participants’ understandings of aesthetic experiences in the city. As stated in the literature review, space and place are intrinsic elements of aesthetic experiences, as well as street artists’ practices (Merill, 2014; Riggle, 2010, Weinstein, 2012). The findings showcased that the participants’ political and social understandings were primarily
connected with the concept of space I used in this study, space as a practiced physical place, in which street artists share their aesthetic experiences with the public (De Certeau, 1984; Lavrinec, 2014). For example, Rocks’ understanding of his artistic practice in a poor neighborhood as his attempt to revitalize the marginalized public space (the water pumps, the neighborhood inhabitants utilize on a daily basis, however, it is considered the city eyesore) For example, Dexo’s idea of “creating a contrast to the environment” constituted of both his political understanding of the place (an abandoned Soviet factory building, which preserves histories of its workers) and his sensory response to this place as “atmospheric” (Dexo, sensory inquiry, September, 2016). Another example is Tock’s gestalt with a place, which I consider both political and sensory. The way Tock experiences this “body-environment gestalt” is largely influences by his sensory reactions to forms, shapes, colors in a place and as well his political effort to transform a place into something less ordinary: “it was grey here, now it’s become colorful” (Tock, interview, May 15, 2016). Thus, I assume that in most cases the participants did not separate their political understandings and sensory responses of place and space in the city, but rather negotiated them.

Drawing on the discussed above findings, I claim is that in the aesthetic experiences of the four street artists, who participated in this study, the role of a sensory experience of the space or the artistic process was prevalent in most experiences. Juxtaposing the social, political and sensory understandings, it became apparent that reported social and political understandings of the participants’ aesthetic experiences served mainly as regulatory for the participants’ sensory response to the city space. In other words, the sensory experiences they had or expected to have, not their social or political responses to the city, largely informed their artistic practices. In order to facilitate the understanding of an aesthetic experience in this study, I appeal to Taylor’s (2003) conceptualization of an aesthetic experience as a
sensory experience “infused with thoughts about what we are sensing” (p. 1611). We may also see it as a form of the street artists’ contracts with themselves, in which they had to agree with certain regulations in order to have an access to a sensory experience. Drawing on Massumi’s (1995) concept of affect that I discussed in the literature review, and Panagia’s (2009) piece on the political role of sensation, I propose the term “negotiated affect” to describe the participants’ aesthetic experiences in the city. This term is based on Massumi’s (1995) view of bodily affection as the initial element of an experience, and Panagia’s (2009) notion of the sensible, connected both to making sense and sensory experiencing. Hence, the term “negotiated affect” illustrates the street artists’ making sense while sensing, in which the sensory response to space is the affection, and social and political understandings serve as regulatory constructs, which influence a sensory experience.

**Aesthetic Literacy Revisited**

In the concluding section of this chapter, I return to the purpose of the study, which I stated in the beginning. My particular interest was in finding what constitutes the aesthetic literacies of the four street artists in the urban environment of a post-Soviet city, as well as a theoretical curiosity in accommodating the term of an aesthetic literacy to the context of a Russian city. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, I share my thoughts and perspectives on what aesthetic literacies might be, based on what I found out doing this research study.

In this study, I utilized a definition of an aesthetic literacy that included several important counterpoints, which I indicated in the beginning of the research process. Mainly, I used Hull and Nelson’s (2009) definition of a contemporary literacy as a capacity to design meanings, drawing on an amalgam of (aesthetic) experiences, and Bogard’s (2016) idea that these experiences resonate both our body and mind. However, having analyzed the data, this definition of an aesthetic literacy seems problematic to me. The focus on the “designing” capacity of a person, which was central to the definition, overemphasized a rational,
cognitive, or intentional aspect of literacy at the expense of a robust understanding of affective negotiation. Although I do not separate sensory and cognitive dimensions of one’s aesthetic experience, and claim that they are likely to be negotiated, the concept of “design” implies a vivid cognitive investment in experience, which includes knowledge and memory; meanwhile, the reported aesthetic experiences were largely motivated by sensory responses.

My position echoes the one presented by Leander and Boldt (2013) as a part of their critique of the “design-oriented” literacy approach of the New London Group researchers (1996), who viewed literacy as an ability to design multimodal text, where text is taken in a broad meaning of any meaningful sign in diverse contexts. The main point of Leander and Boldt’s (2013) critique, which I join with my study, is the perspective on the bodily/sensory as something that might be “organized through design grammars” (p. 24). Likewise, Hull and Nelson’s (2009) understanding of aesthetic literacy as a capacity to “design” does not serve as a proper definition for the aesthetic experiences I discussed in this study, as it is primarily concerned with the cognitive ability.

Lastly, I suggest an updated understanding, which fits the current study, grounded in the discussion of the negotiated aesthetic experience. The aesthetic literacies of the four participating street artists are the interplay or a playful negotiation of the cognitive and sensory dimensions of their aesthetic experiences, where the sensory was a dominant element constantly negotiated with the cognitive. In other words, the street artists’ aesthetic literacies were largely concerned with negotiating meanings, related to different dimensions, in a playful manner, in order to “to take pleasure in one’s own existence” (Graeber, 2014, p. 53).

Finally, I want to discuss the implications for future research on the topic of aesthetic literacies and aesthetic experiences. I hope that this study would serve as one of the works, which might catalyze the further discussion of aesthetic literacies in the field of Applied Linguistics. I truly believe that today educators and theoreticians are in need of broadening
their literacy spectrums and discussing new ways of understanding literacy practices. Also, I would be happy if this study would be helpful for learning about the literacies, practiced by the four unique persons from the Russian context, which is often overlooked in the research—a provincial city. Moreover, this study might contribute to the conceptualization of aesthetic literacy and aesthetic experience in terms of graffiti and street art practices in a Russian post-Soviet context.
AFTERMATH OF THE STUDY

A Young Researcher’s Notebook: Limitations of the Study

In a perfect world this study would have been perfect. But in the real one, I had to face several challenges, which influenced this research. In this part of my thesis study, I want to share several things I realized through conducting this study.

When I started this journey, I doubted myself at almost every point. I questioned my intentions, my views on street artists and the city in which I grew up. Then I met them - the four street artists who shared their understandings of the experiences I will never experience myself. This fact fascinated me tremendously. In my head, I usually pictured myself as Alice, who followed the White Rabbit, and eventually entered Wonderland - the world of paradoxes and everyday creative inventions. To some extent, this is what my research was about: to see other worlds and experiences.

However, as I stated in the beginning of this chapter – we don’t live in a perfect world. My first challenge was … the participants. While most of my colleagues conducted their research projects with the participants, who were familiar to them – students and teachers, I immersed myself in a world, which was very different from mine. The biggest challenge I faced was the participants’ attitudes to the sensory inquiry projects. As I considered this data collection method to be an experiment, I realized that the participants experienced difficulties with this assignment. During the data collection process, I had to explain the procedure of sensory inquiry several times. Also, this method appeared to be less effective than I expected. Only one of the four participants provided me with more than five pictures, and the explicit notes about his experiences in the places, depicted on the pictures. Most of the participants supplied the pictures with only basic information, which was not related to how they sensory experienced the places. I believe it happened due to the several things. First, the sensory inquiry was not directly controlled by a researcher, therefore the
participants perceived this assignment as less important in comparison with the interviews. Second, the participants might have had difficulties to verbalize their sensations and feelings, which I asked to describe in the sensory inquiries. However, I do not regret incorporating this method in this research; I have to state that this method needs to be further improved. In this study, the data, collected via this method, was utilized as complimentary to the interview data.

**A Young Educator’s Notebook: Practicality of the Study**

When I started this research I thought what it may teach me as an educator. In this section, I suggest several ways of how my study may be used in TESOL, and education, in general.

First, I want to address the language theme, which occurred in this study, namely, street artists’ aesthetic use of language. In Chapter Five, I discussed the “designerly” ways of reading and writing graffiti texts, drawing on Bogard’s (2016) work. I emphasized that the street artists tended to address shapes and colors of their graffiti texts. This finding reminded me of my own experience as an ESL instructor in the ESL intensive program for international art students. This experience was concerned with an ESL studio class, in which students created designs and visuals for the English words they found meaningful. They chose particular shapes of letters and colors, which carried various meanings for them. The participants of this study, as well as the students from the Summer program, are likely to utilize their aesthetic literacies about the language and script. Juxtaposing the finding from this study and my teaching experience, I suggest, that ESL teachers, especially those, who teach art majors, should consider visual element of the English script as a fruitful learning tool.

Second, I hope that this study might showcase that street artists should not be perceived as members of a deviant social group. In the Russian context, educators tend to
identify their students, who are street artists, as vandals, who aim to destroy the city. Therefore, their practices are considered to be socially inappropriate. However, as my study demonstrated, street artists practices in public space might create aesthetic experiences, which then informed their literacy practices. Street art and graffiti practices of the participants of this study were motivated by their desire to “feel alive”: they combated the gray reality of ordinary lives. Moreover, they also attempted to bring positive changes in the space they live. Hence, my study might help Russian educators to rethink their attitudes towards such practices, and include them in the learning process.
References


Appendix A

IRB Approval Form

April 12, 2016

Maria Barulina
1302 Oakland Avenue 223EH
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Ms. Barulina:

Your proposed research project, "Discovering Aesthetic Landscape of a Russian City," (Log No. 16-129) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved as an expedited review for the period of April 12, 2016 to April 12, 2017. This approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University requirements, including, but not limited to, enrollment, degree completion deadlines, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

You should read all of this letter, as it contains important information about conducting your study.

Now that your project has been approved by the IRB, there are elements of the Federal Regulations to which you must attend. IUP adheres to these regulations strictly:

1. You must conduct your study exactly as it was approved by the IRB.
2. Any additions or changes in procedures must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented.
3. You must notify the IRB promptly of any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects.
4. You must notify the IRB promptly of any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in items 2 or 3.

Should you need to continue your research beyond April 12, 2017 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at irb-research@iup.edu or 724-357-7730 for further information.

The IRB may review or audit your project at random or for cause. In accordance with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if other difficulties are detected.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not
yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=91683.

While not under the purview of the IRB, researchers are responsible for adhering to US copyright law when using existing scales, survey items, or other works in the conduct of research. Information regarding copyright law and compliance at IUP, including links to sample permission request letters, can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=106528.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Roberts, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Criminology

JLR:jeb

Cc: Dr. Curtis Porter, Thesis Advisor
    Ms. Brenda Boal, Secretary
Appendix B

RTAF Approval Form

RESEARCH TOPIC APPROVAL FORM

Name: Maria Barulina
Address: 1302 Oakland Ave 223EH
City, State, Zip: Indiana, PA 15701
Phone Number: 7245411521

When this form has been returned to the Thesis/Dissertation Office in the Graduate School (120 Stright Hall), and after IRB or IACUC approval, if needed, the Assistant Dean for Research will notify the student that the research proposal has been approved. The student cannot begin thesis/dissertation research activity beyond preliminary steps (such as background research, IRB/IACUC-approved pilot study, or three-chapter review) until notice of approval has been received. If RTAF approval is marked "conditional pending outside reader approval," the student may commence thesis/dissertation research but CANNOT defend or graduate until the outside reader is approved.

PLEASE NOTE: IF CHANGES OCCUR, EITHER IN COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP OR TOPIC, A NEW FORM MUST BE COMPLETED AND APPROVED.

SECTION I. (To be completed by the student)

☐ Thesis ☐ Dissertation ☐ Recital: M.A. Music Performance Only

Department: English
Degree: M.A. Program of Study: TESOL

Title of Study: Discovering Aesthetic Landscape: the Case of a Russian city

SECTION V OF THIS FORM REQUIRE A BRIEF 1-2 PAGE SUMMARY OF YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC, including the method of study you expect to use, materials and equipment you will need, and an estimated time frame to complete each step of the process.

Check which one of the approved style manuals you will be using:

☐ American Psychological Association, Publication Manual, Sixth Edition
☐ Council of Science Editors, Inc., Scientific Style and Format, Seventh Edition
☐ Modern Language Association, MLA Handbook... Research Papers, Seventh Edition
☐ Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM), SIAM Journal on Applied Mathematics
☐ Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for... Theses, Dissertations
☐ Society for American Archaeology, American Antiquity Editorial Policy, Information for Authors, and Style Guide

Signature of Student ____________________________
Date: 03/18/2016

Anticipated Graduation Date: 05/09/2017

2/17/2015
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

My name is Mariia Barulina. I am a Fulbright Scholar, currently pursuing my MA in TESOL in Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA, the USA. I am conducting the study, which aims to investigate the ways aesthetic landscape in Saratov, Russia, is formed. By the aesthetic landscape, I mean the visual representations of space through the public art, created by Saratov street artists. The purpose of the study is also to explore the ways Saratov street artists manipulate and make sense of public space.

I invite you to participate in this research study, as you are a street artist, who is actively creating artworks in Saratov, Russia. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please, feel free to ask.

Participation in this study will require you to be interviewed for approximately 60-90 minutes in Russian. It will be a semi-structured interview. It means that there will be certain themes I would be asking about as well as I can come up with questions during the interview time. I will be asking the questions only related to my research. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are free to refuse to do that.

As a part of the data collection, I will observe the artists real-life spatial practices, while they are working at the street art event in May or June in Saratov. Although your participation in the street art event is voluntary, if you decide to participate, you will be asked to be videotaped.

Finally, you will be asked to write short sensory ethnographies in Russian in any form and style, which aim to help me to interpret and analyze the information, collected from the interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and be available to you at any stage of the research process. To maintain your confidence, I will use pseudonyms. The information obtained in the study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below.

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730).

Informed Consent Form (continued)
VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT)
Signature
Date
Phone number
E-mail
Форма добровольного согласия на участие в исследовании

Меня зовут Мария Барышева. Я стипендиат программы Fulbright, и в настоящее время получу степень магистра в Университете Индиана штата Индиана, г. Индиана, штат Индиана, США. Я провожу исследование, целью которого является изучение процесса формирования эстетического ландшафта в Саратове. Под эстетическим ландшафтом, я имею в виду интеграцию городского пространства, стрит-арт художников Саратова в постиндустриальном обществе. Также целью данного исследования является анализ взаимодействия между стрит-арт художников Саратова и городским пространством.

Я приглашаю Вас принять участие в этом исследовании, так как вы – активный Саратовский стрит-арт художник. Ниже представлена информация о том, чтобы помочь вам принять обоснованное решение о том, участвовать или нет. Если у вас есть какие-либо вопросы, пожалуйста, не стесняйтесь спрашивать.

Участие в данном исследовании, потребует от вас проявить интерес к теме в течение примерно 60-90 минут на русском языке. Это будет полуструктурированный интервью. Это означает, что будут определенные темы, о которых я буду спрашивать, но вопросы могут быть, а также они не будут связаны с моим исследованием. Тем не менее, если вы чувствуете себя неуверенно, отвечая на тот или иной вопрос, вы можете отказаться отвечать.

В рамках сбора данных, я буду наблюдать за художниками в течение их реальной работы в городском пространстве во время мероприятий, посвященных стрит-арту, в мае 2016 г. в Саратове. Хотя ваше участие в мероприятии является добровольным; если вы решите принять участие, я подпонру вашего согласия на видеосъемку.

И, наконец, вам будет предложено писать короткие тематические рассказы (внутриигры) на русском языке в любой форме и стиле, которые впоследствии, чтобы помочь мне интерпретировать и анализировать информацию, собранную из интервью.

Ваше участие в этом исследовании является добровольным. Вы можете принять решение не участвовать в этом исследовании, или уйти в любое время. По вашему запросу любая информация, касающаяся вас, будет уничтожена. Если вы решите принять участие, вся информация будет конфиденциальна и доступна для вас на любой стадии исследования. Для того, чтобы сохранить вашу анонимность, я буду использовать псевдонимы вместо вашего реального имени или фамилии. Информация, полученная в исследовании, может быть опубликована в научных журналах, или представлена на научных конференциях, но вам гарантируется полная конфиденциальность.

Если вы готовы принять участие в этом исследовании, пожалуйста, подпишите заявление ниже.


date

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ФОРМА ДОБРОВОЛЬНОГО СОГЛАСИЯ НА УЧАСТИЕ В ИССЛЕДОВАНИИ:

Я прочитал(а) и понял(а) информацию, содержащуюся в данной форме, и дую свое добровольное согласие на участие в данном исследовании. Я понимаю, что мои ответы являются полностью конфиденциальными, и, что я имею право покинуть исследование в любое время. Я имею неподписанную копию формы добровольного согласия в моем распоряжении.

Имя (печатными буквами)
Подпись
Дата
Номер телефона
E-mail
Appendix D

List of Interview Questions

General Questions:
- How long have you been active as a street artist?
- What places do you like in Saratov and why?
- What do you think about Saratov public space as a street artist?
- Why did you start create art in public space?

Mini-tour questions:
- Can you describe the best place for creating art?
- Can you tell me about your street art objects?
- Can you describe the process of creating street art object in details?
- Do you use signs or languages in your art? If yes, which ones?

Questions related to street art and street artists’ conventions
- Do you work in a certain style?
- Are there any rules for street artists regarding places or themes to use?

Experience and personal preferences questions:
- How do you usually find the place to create art?
- What are your favorite places in the city to create art?
- Do you usually work alone or with someone?
- What is your favorite public art object in Saratov? Why?

Attitudes and feelings questions
- Why is it important for you to be a street artist?
- Can you describe what you feel during the process of creating art?
- What do you feel when you see your art in the public space?