

"Guerrilla Art and Protest in Modern Russia"

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	page 4
Introduction	page 5
Framing Theory and Russian Opposition Movements	page 7
Rights, Revolution, and Art: Why Art Matters as a Protest Tactic	page 14
Guerrilla Art: Tactics and Consequences	page 25
Conclusion	page 43
Appendix	page 46
Bibliography	page 61

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The term guerrilla art encompasses acts or visual works, which are meant to challenge authority or societal norms, and are displayed in public spaces without permission. The beauty of the guerrilla art movement in Russia is not only that it has created and reappropriated symbols for the mass populace to use¹, but guerrilla artists themselves have become unifying symbols for the opposition to Putin's government. The rise of Russian guerrilla art has garnered much attention in Western media within the last ten years, in part due to the amplification of the power of street art through the digital revolution. A simple cell phone camera shot of a sticker on a pole in Moscow has the power to take the artist's work across the country or across the globe through Facebook, VK.com (Russian social media site similar to Facebook), email, blogs, or newspaper wires. However, the real reason for the rise in outsider art is that the current Russian government itself has exceedingly limited legitimate opportunities for Russian citizens to participate in their governance. Guerrilla art is a call to act outside the law by which many already find themselves alienated, and the call will become louder in direct relation to the increase in the number of perceived illegitimate actions by the Russian government.

Scholars may then find it useful to more carefully study guerrilla art trends when analyzing larger social movements to discern reasons for dissent and priorities of opposition forces. In Francesca Polletta's work on narrative and storytelling in activist movements, she uses the terms

¹ See Appendix for examples.

"ellipses" and "click" to explain how race and gender equality movements gained supporters.²

The "click" moment is when someone outside the movement understands why they belong inside the movement. The ellipses comes into play after activists make the importance of their cause known to others, then "...": the desired change is effected. Polletta's terms can be used in a variety of ways to explain the political opposition movements in Russia, but I propose that guerrilla art is both intended as the trigger of the "click" moment (the precursor for the ellipses), and a concrete sign that the movement's momentum has begun.

Two of the more famous Russian guerrilla art groups, Voina and Pussy Riot, are particularly useful for this study; in addition, I will draw from a sampling of the street art I documented on my travels to both St. Petersburg and Moscow during the summer of 2012, and in brief explain the connection between guerrilla art and protest signs and symbols.³ For my analysis of the common themes and tactics of Russian guerrilla art, it is important to understand the dynamic connection and interplay between the guerrilla artist and the government or society at large. I will draw from many sources⁴ to show how both guerrilla artists and the Russian government use both Western and Soviet framing processes and frames to justify their actions, and ultimately how the repression of "legitimate" democratic participation increases the need, use, and relevance of "subversive" protest tactics of guerrilla artists.

² Polletta, Francesca. **It Was Like a Fever: Story Telling in Protest and Politics**. University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 2006.

³ Lure, V. **Azbuka Protesta: Narodnyĭ plakat**. 2012. Moscow: OGI.

⁴ Sources have been translated using the Library of Congress transliteration system, except for certain proper names for which a different English translation has already been established. <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsol/roman.html>

Chapter 2

Framing Theory and Russian Opposition Movements

In order to better understand the current Russian opposition protests, I began my search online. One of the most well-known, ongoing protest movements in various cities across Russia that began prior to the December 2011 electoral fraud demonstrations, is the Strategy-31 protests, so named for the 31st Article of the Russian Constitution which guarantees the right to assemble⁵. Those who wish to attend a Strategy-31 protest plan to show up to the agreed upon meeting place in their city on the 31st day of any month that has 31 days. While in Moscow in July 2012, I easily found the time and location through word of mouth, and viewed the third anniversary protest in Triumfal'naia Square from the sidewalk, between a group of supporters and two lines of Russian police and OMON.

The Strategy-31 protest works on the principle that by holding the protest to exercise their guaranteed right, the protesters show that Russian citizens do not have this right in reality. Legal rights, in both the Western sense and those specifically guaranteed in the Russian Federation's constitution, have provided a unifying frame for multiple activist groups. While the Strategy-31 movement has strived for a number of years to uphold the right to assemble,⁶ the number of people who attempted to exercise this right increased after Putin began to officially seek a third term (although it was widely assumed this would happen when Medvedev took power from him). In response to these and other opposition protests, police often arrest protesters and

⁵ Russian Federal Constitution, Article 31 of Section 1, Chapter 2.

<http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/ch2.html>

⁶ "Moscow Police Raid 'Strategy 31' Office, Promise Arrests." March 30, 2011.

<http://www.theotherrussia.org/2011/03/30/moscow-police-raid-strategy-31-and-promise-arrests/>

barricade the squares to be used. In the past, division has occurred within the Moscow Strategy-31 movement due to those who wished to remain by their original plan to protest in Triumphal'naia Square, which had been fenced off for "construction" for more than two years, while the city only granted permission to protest in another part of town. The result was that while some protesters showed up at the "true" protest and others at the city-"sanctioned" protest, the overall number of protesters seemed diminished and the cause was weakened. Because the Strategy-31 protesters have tried to act legitimately, with the local governments to the extent that many NGOs in Russia must, organizing in public offices and working with the letter of the law in order to show contradictions, activists have left themselves exposed to more punishment and illegal searches than had they "illegally" protested without warning and without attempts to garner the proper city permits. While the Strategy-31 movement has not changed its tactics significantly, other activists became more creative in their reactions to increasingly harsher government reactions. It is these alternative tactics that I began to research more thoroughly, through site visits to traditional and non-traditional art centers in St. Petersburg and Moscow, through exploration of the city and documenting findings in photograph and video, current Russian language books on protest and art, and a variety of media sources.

In order to better understand the Russian opposition protest movements, I studied Social Movement Theory, from Mancur Olson's Collective Action Theory through Karl-Dieter Opp's Structural-Cognitive Theory (which attempts to create an overarching synthesis of wide-approach Rational Choice Theory and Framing processes)⁷. A widely acknowledged danger of applying theories to events is the tendency to make the events fit the model. These studies

⁷ Opp, Karl-Dieter. **Theories of Political and Social Protest Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis**. Routledge: New York. 2009.

reinforced my opinion that it is impossible to predict human behavior using theories. However, for the purpose of understanding how social movements have succeeded in gaining momentum, I found that Collective Action Frames and Framing processes, as outlined by David Snow and Robert Benford⁸, help shed light on how activists have used culture, historical circumstances, and the current political state to help shape protests in Russia. Looking specifically at St. Petersburg and Moscow, I also found Francesca Polletta's work on narratives⁹ useful for understanding how both the government and activists use framing processes to sway public opinion in order to quell dissent and provide incentives for social mobilization respectively. Whoever provides the more compelling and believable narrative, the protester or the authority, will win public opinion.

For the purpose of creating and packaging narratives which can then be used for the purpose of protesting, guerrilla artists provide a valuable service to the opposition movement. Guerrilla artists have succeeded in attracting free media attention to the opposition's cause, and in the cases of Voina and Pussy Riot, their success has actually been bolstered when the government punishes the offenders. One potential explanation for their success is that they rely on the framing of rebellion before being caught, and martyrdom after, although this is an oversimplification. Frames are not static, and transitional states may be useful as narratives for social mobilization as well (the loss of power and freedom versus the static states of being free or being imprisoned) due to the need for quick response in order to stop an undesired outcome.

⁸ Snow, David; Benford, Robert. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26. August 2000. pp. 611-639.

Snow, David; Rocheford, E. Burke, Jr.; Worden, Stephen K.; Benford, Robert. "Framing Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4: August 1986. pp. 464-481.

⁹ Polletta. 2006.

Understanding what makes a particular frame or narrative compelling or believable entails analyzing the environment, history, culture, and circumstances surrounding the actors and acts.

Snow and Benford define framing processes and collective action frames as follows:

"[Framing] denotes an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. [...] It entails agency in the sense that what is evolving is the work of social movement organizations or movement activists. And it is contentious in the sense that it involves the generation of interpretative frames that not only differ from existing ones but that may also challenge them. The resultant products of this framing activity are referred to 'collective action frames.'"¹⁰

The 2010 "Blue Bucket Protest" in Moscow is an excellent example of how successful¹¹ guerrilla art utilizes framing processes and collective action frames. This public participation movement encouraged citizens to tape plastic blue buckets (such as would be used by children in a sandbox or at the beach) to their cars, bicycles, or even heads¹² to represent the illegitimate power that the rich in Russia paid for every day. Russian politicians and businessmen have been allowed to pay to install the blue light traditionally reserved for police vehicles on their own personal cars; these

¹⁰ Snow; Benford. 2000. p. 614

¹¹ Success is subjective when speaking about guerrilla art; however, for the purposes of this paper, I would suggest that widespread media coverage, either traditional or through self-broadcast media sites such as YouTube, suggests that the artwork made an impact on the intended audience.

¹² "Russian Blue Bucket Protester Climbs on VIPs Car." May 26, 2010.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wFRMEaJkRk>

lights are then used to justify breaking traffic laws, resulting in accidents and deaths of innocent civilians.¹³ The movement served as an outlet for citizens to freely express their dissent with corruption in a humorous way that encouraged others to participate, too. In terms of collective action frames, the Blue Bucket Protests "performed [an] interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of the 'world out there,' but in ways that [were] 'intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists' [...]"¹⁴ That innocent victims had died and the politicians had faced no discernible consequences added to the sense of urgency, necessitating immediate action, and this guerrilla movement created an action that was easy for others to do: purchase and display a bucket in whatever fashion is most convenient. The blue bucket as a metaphor for an illegal, yet official police light provides protesters with a concrete visual image of power as something that is bought and sold. The concept proved that protest of even serious issues did not always need to be serious. In fact, humor has played a large role in the more well known guerrilla art tactics in Russia and is the factor which best "demobilizes antagonists"¹⁵. By using humor, the protesters delegitimize the authority figures and shorten the power divide between the two sectors of society. In Polletta's study of the role of narrative as a mobilization mechanism in the 1960s Civil Rights movement, she illustrates that even as students faced grave danger while participating in sit-ins in the American South, activist narratives "conveyed a sense of fun". Students laughed about the ridiculousness of their situation and the fear of the authorities. "[Protesters]

¹³ "Moscow Police Arrest 'Blue Bucket' Protesters." July 21, 2010. Radio Free Europe Online. http://www.rferl.org/content/Moscow_Police_Arrest_Blue_Bucket_Protesters_/2106230.html

¹⁴ Snow, Benford. p. 614.

¹⁵ Snow, Benford.

emphasized not the sober religiosity and serious characteristic of pacifist and Quaker nonviolent witness, but rather humor and a giddy sense of excitement."¹⁶

The artists behind the blue bucket concept belong to Voina (Russian for "War"), a St. Petersburg based collective¹⁷. Shortly after the Voina collective started to gain international notoriety for subsequent tactics, the Moscow based feminist punk performance collective, Pussy Riot, formed in response to the announcement that Putin would be running for a third presidential term.¹⁸ A shared characteristic of both collectives, beyond the fact that two of the three members of Pussy Riot who were arrested were also members of the Voina art collective¹⁹, is encouragement of public participation in their works. The members of Pussy Riot encourage other women to take up their own brightly colored balaclavas and perform as well, and Voina's tactics, although unique in execution, are easily adaptable to other environments. They highlighted shared concerns and causes through their work, and created processes for others to use these frames as tools for social activism.

If "the 'definition' of the situation is important for individual action"²⁰, then one definition which underlies all the collective action frames of Voina, Pussy Riot, the other guerrilla artists to be discussed, and opposition members utilizing more traditional protests is a **sense of injustice**²¹. Within this frame, tactics can be refined to address frames of corruption, electoral fraud,

¹⁶ Polletta, p. 41

¹⁷ Voina official website: <http://en.free-Voina.org/about> .

¹⁸ Lerner, Mike; Maksim Pozdorovkin. *Pussy Riot - A Punk Prayer*. Roast Beef Productions. 2013.

¹⁹ <http://freepussyriot.org/about>

²⁰ Opp, 2009. p. 330

²¹ Snow, Benford. p. 615. Polletta, p. 35.

illegitimate power, feminism, and more. To understand guerrilla art and its narratives, we will examine the historical background of Russian dissident art, modern guerrilla tactics, and the framing processes used by the artists to create compelling work. Likewise, we will examine how the government has reacted to both groups using collective action frames and framing processes, specifically those frames of law and religion. In addition to researching social movement theory and looking at the more famous case studies, I also documented street art in the Moscow and St. Petersburg city centers, and have included several examples in the Appendix. By analyzing a few selected examples, I hope to demonstrate the depth of subject matters present in guerrilla art, its purpose, and the accessibility of its tactics.

Chapter 3

Rights, Revolution, and Art: Why Art Matters as a Russian Protest Tactic

That public political art does have such a strong role in Russian society and history lends currency to the idea guerrilla art tactics are a more natural resource for the Russian political opposition. While some may argue that guerrilla art is ultimately ineffective compared to other tactics, many historians acknowledge the role art in public spaces played in the Revolution, the maintenance of Soviet society, and even the downfall of the Soviet Union. In order to understand why guerrilla art in Russia is successful (and what constitutes this success), the outside viewer must pay closer attention to the country's history and cultural traditions; in Moscow and St. Petersburg especially, one must understand how history and culture impact physical spaces in the minds of Russian citizens, and what kind of impact this has for guerrilla art in these spaces.²²

When asked what it was like to live in St. Petersburg his whole life, one tour guide likened the experience to living inside a museum exhibit: it is interesting at first, but there is little room for change.²³ The history of St. Petersburg and the Russian revolution is embedded in its architecture and space. Moscow seems to be more open to change: the boundaries of the city continues to expand outward, creating more room for new buildings, districts, and projects²⁴, and once impressive landmarks such as the Hotel Rossiya in the city center have been demolished to make

²² Zhao, Dingxin also explores the relationship between physical space and protest tactics in Beijing: "Ecologies of Social Movements: Student Mobilization during the 1989 Prodemocracy Movement in Beijing." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 103, No. 6 (May 1998), pp. 1493-1529. The University of Chicago Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/231399> Accessed: February 13, 2013

²³ Personal communication, 2012.

²⁴ Steadman, Ian. "Plans to Double Size of Moscow Greenlit." *Wired Magazine*, United Kingdom. September 12, 2012. <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2012-09/12/moscow-expansion-plan-chosen>. Accessed May 27, 2013.

space for new projects. Yet even in Moscow, there are still numerous structures and monuments that have withstood the post-Soviet commercialization and modernization processes: for example, Red Square, the Kremlin, and its many cathedrals contained therein have remained the same, even as GUM²⁵, which sits opposite the Kremlin, now houses many expensive foreign designer shops. When modern Russian political artists work within the public spaces of their city, they incorporate the physical space and the accompanying Russian history in their work.

Modern artists simultaneously continue the Soviet public art tradition (which, in part, drew its power from Tsarist Russian folk and religious art for themes, subjects, and mediums) and challenge the existing authorities: be it through emphasizing or negating the meaning inherent in the space. While it was Lenin's intent for early Soviet artists of the revolution to target the masses by emphasizing a political message, shifting art outside the galleries, and making it free for distribution,²⁶ modern guerrilla artists seek to reach both the masses and those in power.

From Tsarist Russia to the collapse of the Soviet Union, we can easily see the role that art played in disseminating information quickly to a wide audience. We can also see that while artwork is often used to serve as a reminder of power, be it the power of God or heroic leaders (princes, tsars, Bolshevik revolutionaries...), there is just as great a tradition of illustrating leadership's weakness or challenging unfavorable practices or principles. Graffiti written directly on the walls of Orthodox Churches by Pagans in the 11th Century demonstrates how old the tradition of guerrilla art is. According to Alexei Plutser-Sarnov, these writings were considered to be

²⁵ Glavnii Universal'nii Magazin, or "Main Universal Store"

²⁶ ed. Tolstoy, Vladimir; Bibikova, Irina; Cooke, Catherine. *Street Art of the Revolution: Festivals and Celebrations in Russia 1918-1933*. Thames and Hudson Ltd., London: 1990. p. 11.

"inscriptions on the body of Christ [because] the church was both the 'body' of the Lord and the 'body' of the church community." Ironically, those incensed by the desecration of the church walls also used the same tactic; one devotee responded "May Your Hands Wither" directly on the wall as well.²⁷

A later example of how the same art form can be used both for and against the State is the traditional Russian *lubok* (woodblock print, plural form of *lubok* is *lubki*), popular from the 17th to 20th centuries. *Lubki* and *lubok* prints (a technique meant to emulate the woodblock style, however drawn with pencil and painted with a translucent layer of tempera) were inexpensive forms of art popular amongst the peasantry and middle class, who were unable to afford actual icons or "real art" but were nevertheless able to afford these inexpensive versions. Themes included religious parables, historical events such as massacres²⁸, affirmations of women's subordinate place in society, calls to war,²⁹ and even pornography³⁰. *Lubki* were also used for satirical purposes. For example, foreign combatants were just as likely to be characterized in less than flattering terms, but one of the most famous *lubky*, "The Mice Burying the Cat", is a thinly veiled depiction of the burial of Peter the Great. This leader was also the subject of a related

²⁷ Baldaev, Danzig; Alexei Plutser-Sarno; and Sergei Vasiliev. **Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia, Vol. I.** Murray and Sorrel FUEL: London. 2003. p. 35

²⁸ Itkina, E.I. **Russkii Risovannyj Lubok iz obraniya Gosudarstvennogo Istoricheskogo muzeya Moskva/ Loubok- Russian Popular Prints From the Collection of the State Historical Museum Moscow.** Russkaia Kniga: Moscow. 1992.

²⁹ Kascheeva, E.G. **Russkij batal'nyi lubok serediny XIX veka: Krymskaya voina- 1853-1855 godov.** Izdatel'stvo Puhkinskaya Doma: Saint Petersburg. 2010.

³⁰ Alaniz, José. **Komiks: Comic Art in Russia.** University Press of Mississippi: Jackson. 2010. p. 17.

lubok, "The Cat of Kazan," in which the cat is distinguished as Peter the Great by his Western style mustache.³¹

New styles of artwork became dominant with the demise of Tsarist Russia and the forming of the Soviet Union. The mass propaganda of the early revolution was meant to convey thematic ideals of strength, hard work, and devotion to the cause, as well as foment distrust of anyone disloyal to the Union and, therefore, an enemy to the worker. To this end, Soviet propagandists utilized artists of all fields to create posters, performances, and monuments to indoctrinate the as yet illiterate masses³². Art was used to reinforce the superiority of Soviet idealism over Western hypocrisy in films and official educational materials. One common narrative that artists often used was the plight of the oppressed racial minorities of the American empire through the creation of agitprop³³, successfully challenging America's image as the land of the free; another was to target the capitalists and bourgeoisie getting fat off the work of the proletariat³⁴. Image played a strong role in maintaining the political order in the Soviet system, and artists were not permitted to create work that did not meet the Party's goals.

However, a trend that started in Tsarist Russia with the exile, imprisonment, and tattooing of criminal elements, gave life to a new form of dissident art within the gulags. After the Revolution, tattooing began to be used by the prisoners themselves to distinguish hierarchies,

³¹ Boguslawski, Alexander. "Russian Lubok (Popular Print)." Website: 1999. Accessed June 9, 2013. <http://myweb.rollins.edu/aboguslawski/Lubok/lubok.html>

³² Multiple sources, including **Iconography of Power**.

³³ Kalatozov, Mikhail. "Ya Kuba" ("I am Cuba"). MosFilm. 1964.

³⁴ Lafont, Maria. **Soviet Posters: The Sergo Grigorian Collection**. Prestel: New York. 2007.

dole out punishment between the prisoners, and serve as challenges to authority.³⁵ In this way, prisoners carried graffiti directly on their body for multiple purposes. Elements known as "grins" served as insults to all levels of leadership, from the head of the Soviet state down to the prison guards. One such grin was documented by Baldaev from a prisoner convicted for assaulting a mechanic under the 1960 Criminal Code, Articles 206 and 108: "hooliganism and causing severe injuries". The prisoner's tattoo depicted Lenin with devil horns, sitting upright in a coffin labeled with the Communist Party initials, and saying: "Shoot [them]! Forward, towards Communism!" The man he had assaulted had allegedly "asked him for a bribe..." He was the second generation to be held in Soviet gulags, his father had been shot, and "life was unbearable because of communists [like the mechanic]."³⁶ Tattoos and their significance as protests by prisoners are also referenced by the literature of the era:

"[Eduard] Kuznetsov writes about a con who was operated on by prison authorities three times against his will to remove a tattoo on his forehead. The first tattoo read: Khrushchev's Slave. The second: Slave of the USSR. The third: Slave of the CPSU (Communist party). 'Now, after three operations,' wrote Kuznetsov, 'the skin is so tightly stretched . . . he can no longer close his eyes. We call him The Stare.'"³⁷

³⁵ Baldaev, Danzig; Alexei Plutser-Sarno; and Sergei Vasiliev. **Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia, Vol. I.** Murray and Sorrel FUEL: London. 2003.

Baldaev, Danzig; Alexander Sidorov; and Sergei Vasiliev. **Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia, Vol. III.** Murray and Sorrel FUEL: London. 2008.

Ed. Caplan, Jane. **Written on the Body.** Schrader, Abby M. "Chapter 11: Branding the Other/ Tattooing the Self: Bodily Inscription among Convicts in Russia and the Soviet Union." Reaktion Books Ltd.: London. 2000. pp. 174-192.

³⁶ **Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopaedia, Vol. III.** p. 103.

³⁷ Hodkinson, Will. "Russian Criminal Tattoos: Breaking the Code." The Guardian Online. October 26, 2010. Reference to Kuznetsov's **Prison Diaries.**

In correlation with official art and anti-authority art, censorship seems to be a cyclical phenomenon in Russian history. Art forms such as lubki³⁸ and tattoos (which could be forcibly removed via sandpaper, brick, surgery, or amputation, depending on whom the tattoo had offended)³⁹ were both subject to censorship based on the nature of their subject matters. There was a brief period of time for artists to explore private spheres of interest in traditional art forms after the death of Stalin, but the 1960s once again saw harsher measures taken against artists not toeing the Party line⁴⁰. A period of glasnost', or relative openness, when artists and writers were permitted to express their discontent with the society and its systems more brazenly than before, directly preceded the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Censorship of artists once again became an issue in the media during the early 2000s, after the appointment of Vladimir Putin. In response to this, Yuri Samodurov and Andrei Yerofeyev organized the "Forbidden Art — 2006" exhibit at Moscow's Sakharov Museum, and were fined 200,000 rubles (\$6,500 at the time) and 150,000 (\$4,800) respectively, for exhibiting such works as:

"[...] a Pop Art juxtaposition of an image of Jesus appearing with McDonald's golden arches as if in an advertisement with the words, 'This is my body'; an icon of the Virgin Mary [and child] with what looks like caviar where the figures should be; and a painting of Jesus with a Mickey Mouse head. A work titled 'Chechen

³⁸ According to Alaniz, this happened in 1804, 1839, 1848, and 1851. p. 23.

³⁹ Multiple sources including Baldaev et al and Kuznetsov.

⁴⁰ Peterson, Christian Philip. **Globalizing Human Rights: Private Citizens, the Soviet Union, and the West.** p. 17.

Marilyn,' of a veiled woman with her long dress billowing up, was deemed offensive to Muslims."⁴¹

Although the right to free speech is guaranteed under Article 29 of the Russian Constitution, and therefore should protect artists regardless of their subject matter, this right is immediately followed within the same article by language which may be used to negate it at the will of the government officials (as is shown in the case against Samodurov and Yerofeyev):

"Article 29.

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought and speech.

2. Propaganda or campaigning inciting social, racial, national or religious hatred and strife is impermissible. The propaganda of social, racial, national, religious or language superiority is forbidden."⁴²

The idea that citizens of any nation have individual rights such as the freedom of expression, and then, subsequently, what the boundaries of those rights are, is rooted in the Western tradition⁴³, and even then, abandoned in the West when it no longer serves the purposes of democratic governments. That freedom of assembly and freedom of speech *should be* rights which Russian citizens can feasibly fight for in the "traditional" Western ways without "traditional" Russian consequences is to ignore the whole of history and, at the very least, to ignore common sense.

While the Levada Analytical Center itself points to the fact that respondents to its surveys often

⁴¹ Kishkovsky, Sophia. "Organizers of Art Show Convicted in Moscow." July 12, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/13/arts/design/13curators.html?_r=0

⁴² The Russian Constitution. Accessed March 11, 2013.

<http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/ch2.html>

⁴³ Butler, W.E. **Russian Law**. Oxford University Press: New York. 1999.

contradicted themselves, the Center's 2010-2011 report⁴⁴ shows that Moscow respondents had strong opinions about how society should be run⁴⁵, such as the importance of the right to free speech⁴⁶ and what government's role should be in their lives⁴⁷, the majority of respondents recognized how little control they had⁴⁸, in large part due to corruption in the political⁴⁹ and judicial⁵⁰ systems. However, many activists, such as members of political opposition groups and domestic "watchdog" agencies such as Memorial, still rely on the Western framing of rights as they attempt to gain more opportunities to participate in governance and strengthen the transparency of government actions. Guerrilla art is itself a broad spectrum of ways that average citizens can protest based on what makes the most sense for their own environment and goals. For those who agree with the opposition forces, but are not as willing to face the consequences, guerrilla art may prove to be more suitable in that it offers relative safety through anonymity. Although the importance and accessibility of guerrilla art tactics for the powerless will be discussed in more detail later in this essay, it is important to address the intended audience of the messages first.

Soviet history has taught us that human rights activists do not need to petition their government directly to effect change. Soviet dissidents petitioned foreign governments for assistance when the Human Rights articles of the Helsinki Accords, to which the Russian government was a

⁴⁴ Zorkaya, N. "From Opinion to Understanding: Russian Opinion 2010-2011." Levada Analytical Center, Moscow. 2012.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Table 3.4.10, p. 31; 11.1 p. 209.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Tables 3.4.5, p. 29;

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Tables 3.7.2, 3.7.3, p. 45

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Tables 3.7.17, 3.7.18, p. 49

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Tables 3.7.13, p. 48; 3.7.22, p. 51. ; 12.14 p. 214

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Tables 9.2 - 9.8, pp. 167-169.

party, were violated.⁵¹ Modern dissidents in post-Soviet Russia continue to find it beneficial to work with outside forces to pressure their own government (due to reasons such as corruption and power networks formed in the Soviet Union). An obvious but necessary point is that while altruism is an actual motive for some foreign citizens to take up the cause of human rights abroad, in reality, corporations, both domestic and foreign, and state agents have concrete fiscal motivations to ensure property rights are secure, and that actions of the Russian government remain transparent for the sake of such investments. According to a 2012 US Department of State report: "past government actions have contributed to a sense of wariness among some foreign investors about the risks of the Russian market, such as the apparently politically-motivated investigations into businesses. Rule of law, corporate governance, transparency, and respect for property rights are gradually improving but remain key concerns for foreign investors."⁵²

In order to protect relationships with the current networks that make it possible to retain power, Putin must not in actuality upset the status quo by allowing changes that would affect the financial interests of those loyal to him. In order to provide a welcoming image for foreign investors, the Russian federal government must maintain a balance between the appearance that it does in fact provide and protect the rights of its own citizens equally, while at the same time suppressing voices that threaten that image. Many scholars and policy analysts contend that the Russian government must provide stability by any means in order to avoid the pitfalls of the decade following the Soviet Union's collapse. According to the Levada Center, while this was

⁵¹ Peterson, Christian Philip. *Globalizing Human Rights: Private Citizens, the Soviet Union, and the West*. Routledge: New York. 2012. pp. 9-10.

⁵² Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs. "2012 Investment Climate Statement - Russia," June 2012. <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2012/191223.htm> Accessed March 21, 2013.

also the opinion for the overwhelming majority of Russian citizens surveyed in 2000 (81% of respondents answered that "Order, even if it can only be achieved by certain violations of the democratic principles and restriction of personal freedoms" was more important than "Democracy, even if consistency in following democratic principles gives destructive and criminal elements certain freedom of action"⁵³), the percentage of those surveyed who believe order must be maintained at all costs had dropped to 56% in 2011.⁵⁴ What's potentially more telling about the current incarnation of government in Russia is that 35% of respondents answered yes, and 50% answered "most likely, yes," to the question of whether they agreed "that many government officials do not observe the law".⁵⁵ While the protesters may be associated with hooliganism and disorder in the Russian mainstream media, these terms also describe the government itself.

For this reason, guerrilla art tactics in the larger cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, have proven effective for the purpose of drawing the Western media's attention to the opposition's messages in cases where opposition leaders have failed to steer their government using "legitimate" means. By using shock value and taboo to attract the attention of mass media outlets to distribute the art beyond their nation's borders, their tactics allow their message to spread quickly and without cost to the artist in a world where a traditional advertising campaign of this reach would cost billions of dollars. However, analysis of the diversity of guerrilla art, how it is produced, and where it is distributed shows us that the intended audience still very much includes the Russian people.

When guerrilla artists work in city centers more frequently visited by the foreigners to expose

⁵³ Zorkaya, N. 2012. Only 9% responded that the opposite was true.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Table 3.14.13, p. 31.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Table 3.7.26, p. 52.

alleged crimes of the government, the fact that the same problems may not be considered as important in smaller, more rural, or more conservative regions of Russia is often overlooked by foreign audience, but the narratives invoked by guerrilla artists must appeal to their fellow citizens. Although it is safe to say that guerrilla artists have not consistently managed to appeal to the largest percentage of the Russian audience, particularly given the fact that their tactics are best suited to larger cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, it is also safe to say that the Russian government, with the nation's resources at its disposal, has not accomplished this task either. These tactics and narratives will be discussed with greater specificity in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Guerrilla Art: Tactics and Consequences

Working within the system to protest the system in Russia is at times a sad, yet darkly humorous affair. In an article entitled "Moscow bans protest against political repressions 'due to lack of political repressions'", regarding the rejection of a 2012 protest to free jailed opposition activists, Russia's own RT News Agency states: "The application to hold the event was rejected by the authorities on the grounds that the 'current law does not provide any measures used by the state for repression based on political motives[...]'.⁵⁶ Despite the Russian Constitution guaranteeing the right to assemble⁵⁷, as Strategy-31 protests have shown, that right is at the discretion of the government. In addition to denying permits for protests, locations such as Moscow's Triumphal'naya Square have been blocked from use under the pretext of "construction", and activist offices have been raided⁵⁸. Protesters who did choose to take part in the official July 2012 protest were barred from using the open space of the square by large fences and lines of police, and instead corralled into a small space of sidewalk from which the police were easily able to pull them into waiting buses.

Guerrilla art is a logical protest form in Russia because it utilizes rule-violating as a form of collective action in order to challenge the legitimacy of authority. One way is in the distribution of the art, which challenges not only the physical boundaries set by society, but the political and

⁵⁶ <http://rt.com/news/moscow-political-repressions-protest-banned-198/> Published November 12, 2012; accessed January 27, 2013.

⁵⁷ <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>

⁵⁸ The Other Russia. March 30, 2011. <http://www.theotherussia.org/2011/03/30/moscow-police-raid-strategy-31-and-promise-arrests/>

now even technological barricades⁵⁹. While artists such as the recently deceased Pavel 183 found success in spreading their message through a combination of ingenuity, attention to detail, and outright talent, more often than not, the content and quality are secondary: a primary example of this is that the resulting trial of Pussy Riot's incomplete performance came to be a more effective narrative for the Russian protest movements than the actual performance itself.

In creating guerrilla art, one aims to simultaneously challenge the rules and avoid being caught. If one breaks the rules and is not caught, it proves that the government is not as all-knowing or all-powerful as official doctrine would lead a populace to believe and encourages more acts of dissent. Alternatively, depending on how the government chooses to react, getting caught can sometimes produce a win for the movement by producing a call to action through the creation of martyrs. The fact that Pussy Riot was arrested and sent to court helped publicize their performance far more than the actual performance itself would have if permitted to continue. The "conventional" protesters at the Moscow Strategy-31 gathering on July 31, 2012, who went willingly with the police provoked bitter cries from elderly women against the police, and protesters who were dragged unwillingly into buses provided compelling images for waiting photographers. Within hours of the protest, pictures were online, showing police brutality and legitimizing the protesters' arguments against the authorities. It should be acknowledged that the police did not stop photographers or those standing outside the cordoned off protest site from taking pictures, and did not arrest onlookers for standing on the sidewalk between the specified protest site and the police buses. Why were passers-by near the Strategy-31 protest discouraged

⁵⁹ Cohen, Reuven. Forbes online. 11/1/2012.
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/reuvencohen/2012/11/01/russia-passes-far-reaching-internet-censorship-law-targeting-bloggers-journalists/>. Accessed 1/27/12.

from remaining, yet permitted to document the scene? There are a few possible reasons: one reason is that the documented evidence provides proof that choosing to participate will have consequences, while the police will not punish those who follow the rules (i.e., staying out of the public square). Another is that due to the smaller nature of camera phones, the police recognize the futility of confiscating all such recording devices without provoking wider dissent from those who may not have previously wished to provoke the authorities.

Modern Russian protesters have recognized the need for creatively expressing their views as the Russian government has begun to take harsher stands towards those caught "organizing," which now can include acts such as sharing information about a protest on Facebook⁶⁰ and punished by fines and potential jail time⁶¹. New forms of protest have sprung up in reaction to the tightening of restrictions. One such example is "auto marches"⁶², where the protesters agreed to utilize white objects to decorate their cars accordingly, then "marched" along preordained routes one at a time. In this case, protesters are technically not "organized," in that they are not forming traditional columns, and they are not assembling in the traditional sense that would necessitate a permit. In a sense, they broke the spirit of one illegitimate law while simultaneously following the legitimate laws to the letter. In this chapter, I wish to explore the ways in which guerrilla artists attract the attention of fellow citizens and what happens when the message reaches the top of the vertical power structure. We will look at street art and performance art separately, and focus then on the consequences faced by the major art collectives, Voina and

⁶⁰ Gessen, Masha. Law and Disorder. June 11, 2012. New York Times. <http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/11/law-and-disorder/> Accessed April 12, 2013.

⁶¹ Herzenshorn, David. "New Russian Law Assesses Heavy Fines on Protesters." June 18, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/09/world/europe/putin-signs-law-with-harsh-fines-for-protesters-in-russia.html>

⁶² **Azbuka Protesta (ABC of Protest)**, p. 6. 2012.

Pussy Riot. Because Voina has become known for both street and performance art, they will be analyzed in detail toward the end of this chapter.

Street art

Although illegal, street art is used to communicate places and times of the above and other legitimate protests, as well as political blogs online where others can find more information⁶³. I also found evidence of remnants of such political messages painted over while advertisements which have been spray painted in clearly visible areas, complete with addresses and phone numbers, have been allowed to remain. In the area directly surrounding the Moscow Strategy-31 protest 3rd year anniversary site at Triumfal'naya Square, many posters had been ripped from place in the time leading up to the protest, leaving only shreds of paper as evidence, while advertisements for credit and antiques were left up.⁶⁴ In other areas of the city where political messages were removed, it was still possible to discern what they were about if one was actively looking for the signs and had seen similar messages elsewhere.

Artists who find success in galleries typically have the potential to make a direct impact on viewers long after their own generation has passed, but street artists may be considered lucky if their work is up for a week. The temporary nature of graffiti and other forms of guerrilla art can be a strong incentive to encourage artists to take risks to make others pay attention. The risks that leave artists open to punishment by police are the same risks necessary to grab the attention of a public inundated by and immune to advertisements. Street art is a useful tool for populations who do not have practical control over their own environments, whether via fair government

⁶³ Appendix: 5, 6, 10, 13, and 14.

⁶⁴ Appendix 4.

representation or access to necessary resources.⁶⁵ It is a way to communicate with others who may or may not share the same views. It is a way to rebel against a force larger than oneself, whether that force is the government, society, corporations, or maybe just the local community. Sharpies, spray paint, stencils, posters and even stickers may be the only tools for this rebellion, in that they can be used to express dissent while maintaining anonymity (and with it, protection from prosecution or persecution). Street art can be a vehicle for communicating with the masses messages that the mainstream media may not be capable of or willing to project.

One of the more popular themes in political street art in Moscow and St. Petersburg is anti-Putin sentiment.⁶⁶ Putin, as often happens with authoritarian leaders, has become a metonym for everything wrong with Russia, despite his apparent popularity in polls.⁶⁷ This very much ties in with Polletta's ellipses as opposition groups in Russia, despite differences of opinion on a wide range of subjects, may find unity in the common goal of eliminating this leader from power. While many artists express this as their goal, there is no follow up instruction in this cause. The assumption that once Putin is out of power "... real change will occur glosses over all the in-between steps that are required in creating a better society. It was a problem for the new post-Soviet Russia which resulted in the adoption of much of the old Soviet legal system⁶⁸ and continuation of the old power circles as state goods were transferred into private hands, and one could easily imagine similar circumstances would arise once Putin does finally exit the political stage.

⁶⁵ Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁶⁶ See Appendix 13 and 14.

⁶⁷ Zorkaya, 2012. Tables 1.10, p. 11, and 3.32, p. 25.

⁶⁸ Butler.

The most compelling examples of art which I found in the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg worked by using a visual language composed from common cultural knowledge. The first example included in the Appendix is a poster that had been pasted to a wall in Moscow,⁶⁹ in which a white haired official holding the ballot box blocks an outstretched hand holding a ballot. United Russia's official logo is in the bottom right hand corner. The text translates as: "No, stay home. We'll fill them out ourselves." The stance of the main figure, the placement of "NYET" (no) in the upper left corner, and the arm stretched out from the bottom left all play on a famous 1954 Soviet poster by Viktor Govorkov against alcohol consumption⁷⁰. For those who grew up in Russia, this style of propaganda is well-known, and slyly draws a connection between the actions of the modern day authorities and the Soviet leadership. This allegory is strengthened by the charges of international electoral observers that members of the United Russia party are guilty of rigging the March 2012 elections, as attested to by the widespread protests following Putin's "victory".⁷¹ Whereas in the Soviet Union, propaganda was produced to impart the importance of voting as a civic duty⁷², even though decisions were still acknowledged to be imposed from above, the guerrilla artist has chosen to illustrate that citizens no longer need pretend that they have a voice in the elections, if United Russia is allowed to have its way.

⁶⁹ Appendix 1.

⁷⁰ Appendix 2.

⁷¹ Barry, Ellen; Schwartz, Michael. "After Election, Putin Faces Challenge to Legitimacy." The New York Times, March 5, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/06/world/europe/observers-detail-flaws-in-russian-election.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

⁷² Lafont, Maria. **Soviet Posters: The Sergo Grigoran Collection**. Prestel Publishing: New York, 2007. pp. 41, 110, 112.

Another example of street art found in St. Petersburg which directly challenges the government through the use of common cultural knowledge actually takes its symbolism from Western media. Found on Nevsky Prospekt, and shows a Guy Fawkes Mask that was stenciled in red on a previously graffiti-covered wall, in tandem with a website for opposition party "The Other Russia."⁷³ The primary slogan translates to "*Destroy the System*". The Guy Fawkes Mask has multiple meanings. Recently, it was used prominently in the 2005 movie, "V for Vendetta,"⁷⁴ and the symbol is currently used by the hacktivist association "Anonymous,"⁷⁵ as a symbol of fighting a corrupt government or larger political machine, no matter the costs. The significance of using a Western icon as a symbol of protest in Russia can be interpreted as an attempt to place the Russian opposition movement within a larger global uprising. It can also be seen as a challenge based on the message of the 2005 film, in which the rebels succeed in defeating the villains and blowing up the Parliament building as representative of the corrupt government. The mask is meant to convey a sense of power through anonymous rebellion.

In recognition of the limitations of the common citizen who does not have the power and privilege afforded by friends in high places, or for reasons such as family obligations or personal health cannot actively participate in public protest, street art is a highly accessible medium, regardless of artistic skill level. This is not to say that there are not standards among those who practice guerrilla art, and that work completed without skill, forethought, a cohesive message, or beauty will have the same impact on the public as work with such positive (albeit subjective)

⁷³ Appendix 3.

⁷⁴ Portman, Natalie, Hugo Weaving, Stephen Rea, John Hurt, Grant Hill, Joel Silver, Andy Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, James McTeigue, Alan Moore, David Lloyd, and Alan Moore. *V for Vendetta*. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006.

⁷⁵ Anonymous. anonnews.org.

attributes. The last example in the Appendix⁷⁶ demonstrates that sometimes an amateur artist may fail to even complete a simple message if enough thought is not given to placement, execution, and other factors. However, stencils, photocopiers, and computers allow for the quick, inexpensive duplication of one's own or others' work and ease of distribution in a public setting, meaning that even those who recognize that they will be unable to sustain prolonged participation in the political process may participate in one-off types of guerrilla art actions.

For instance, the traditional roles that women are expected to fulfill as wives and/or mothers make it more difficult (admittedly, not impossible) to participate in society in a way that will make lasting change if they act in accordance with traditional societal mechanisms. Time for political action becomes especially scarce when, on top of these roles, many women must work outside the home to meet basic survival needs. The right to vote on an issue does not necessarily mean that the issue itself is beneficial to the populace at large, or that the choices (e.g., candidates, simple yes or no votes, etc.) given are adequate. Protest art has directly addressed the more ludicrous top-down policies of Russia's "elected" leaders in recent years (such as a video of Medvedev and Putin demonstrating how playing badminton improves decision making skills in order to explain the country wide curriculum change to include the sport⁷⁷). Where policies are made without relevant public input beforehand, protest acts which take less time and make more of an impact through shock tactics, breaking of rules, or challenging social norms may be the only ways women can actually make their voices heard.

⁷⁶ Appendix 15

⁷⁷ Lure. p. 12

Performance Art

Pussy Riot is the most infamous of Russian performance art groups (self-described as a feminist punk collective). Per multiple accounts, two of the three members of Pussy Riot who were arrested were also members of the Voina art collective⁷⁸. (Because Voina has completed work that falls both under street art and performance art, this group will be addressed last.) Pussy Riot formed in 2011, shortly after Putin officially announced he was running for reelection.⁷⁹ Groups like Pussy Riot⁸⁰ have been particularly powerful because they challenge both the Western and Russian perceptions of what revolutionaries look like and how they act. In contrast to Voina's leadership⁸¹, the members of Pussy Riot originally sought to perform under the cover of anonymity (those not arrested are in hiding or have otherwise retained anonymity), concealing identities with balaclavas, and dressed in similar, though not uniform, brightly colored outfits.

Pussy Riot quickly gained global attention due to the February 2012 arrest of three of its members for its performance in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ our Savior. There was nothing significantly shocking about a punk band "praying" to God to drive Putin away,⁸² and as Plutser-Sarnov's illustration regarding "tattoos" on Church walls shows us, some of the earliest guerrilla artists in Russia had their start on Orthodox property. What is revolutionary about the famous

⁷⁸ <http://freepussyriot.org/about>

⁷⁹ Stern, Marlow. "Sundance's Best Documentary: 'Pussy Riot, A Punk Rock Prayer.'" January 26, 2013. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/01/26/sundance-s-best-documentary-pussy-riot-a-punk-prayer.html> Accessed May 5, 2013.

⁸⁰ <http://freepussyriot.org/>

⁸¹ <http://en.free-Voina.org/about>

⁸² Video of February 21, 2011 performance responsible for arrest: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grEBLskpDWQ> and <http://mark-feygin.livejournal.com/90408.html>; accessed January 27, 2012

Pussy Riot prayer is the fact that the performers chose to protest politics in a space typically reserved for religious ceremony, the altar itself, calling attention to the ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the government. The space of the altar is embedded with meaning that centuries of tradition have instilled in the cultural consciousness of the Russian people; regardless of faith, even the Bolsheviks capitalized on this symbolism in propaganda for their own atheistic revolution.⁸³ Because the band's musical instruments were confiscated when they attempted to set up, Pussy Riot never had the chance to do more than "pray", but they did so in a way that challenged the imagery of what women should be in Russian society - meek, maternal, and subservient. Above all, women are not allowed to serve at the altar.⁸⁴ Here, women burst into one of the most significant of the patriarchal religion's buildings, and defied decorum. They kicked, they screamed, and they ran in cartoonish circles, evading the seemingly frustrated security officials.

The government did not admit to punishing the political act of openly opposing Putin; instead, authorities counter-framed the protest in a way that punishing the collective was a matter of protecting religious feelings⁸⁵.

"According to their indictment, their trial promised to be a decisive moment in the history of Christianity; officially, they were being tried for hooliganism, but the

⁸³ **Iconography of Power.**

⁸⁴ Lerner, Mike; Maksim Pozdorovkin. *Pussy Riot - A Punk Prayer*. Roast Beef Productions. 2013.

⁸⁵ Gutterman, Steve. Reuters, Moscow. "Russia to Rework Bill on Offending Religion." <http://www.euronews.com/newswires/1802962-russia-to-rework-bill-on-offending-religion/> Herszenhorn, David. "Anti-Putin Stunt Earns Punk Band Two Years in Jail." *The New York Times*, August 12, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/18/world/europe/suspense-ahead-of-verdict-for-jailed-russian-punk-band.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

mumbling prosecutor clarified that they stood accused of 'insulting the entire Christian world.'"⁸⁶

Women were attempting to stand up to a much larger political and societal force, but they were sent to prison for "inciting religious hatred".

While freedom of speech was the primary framework the Western media used to tell the story, in many articles, the focus has been shifted to the roles these women have in their personal lives -- not as artists, but rather that two are young mothers separated from their very young children for a non-violent, physically non-destructive act. In the population, there was now the discussion about the justness of their punishment, pitting motherhood against religion and comparing "hooliganism" and real crime.⁸⁷ A year later, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, still approves openly of their punishment, despite subordinate Russian Orthodox clerics' supposed forgiveness⁸⁸, and continues to attack feminists in general as "unmarried women who have no understanding of the importance of family life". However, by supporting the sentences of the remaining two imprisoned women, Patriarch Kirill himself seems to ignore the importance of family values and the mothers' essential roles of "rearing children".⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Ioffe, Julia. "Pussy Riot v. Putin: A Front Row Seat at a Russian Dark Comedy". The New Republic. August 6, 2012. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/politics/105846/how-punk-rock-show-trial-became-russias-greatest-gonzo-artwork#> . Accessed January 27, 2012.

⁸⁷ This will be explained shortly.

⁸⁸ Radia, Kirit. "Russian Orthodox Priests Forgive Punk Rockers Pussy Riot." ABC News. August 18, 2012. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/russian-orthodox-priests-forgive-punk-rockers-pussy-riot/story?id=17035530#UYbqIs1dqk> Accessed May 5, 2013.

⁸⁹ "Patriarch Kirill Says Feminism Is 'Very Dangerous.'" Radio Free Europe. April 10, 2013. <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-patriarch-kirill-feminism-dangerous/24953581.html>

The first major act of Voina, however, did not result in such lengthy jail sentences even though it involved actual defacement of a public bridge. "Artists" worked together to paint a 60 meter representation of a phallus on the St. Petersburg Liteinyi Bridge, waiting until just before the nightly raising of the bridge to allow ships to pass. In this way, once the bridge was raised, the image would point at the local FSB headquarters⁹⁰, highlighting the connection between Putin and his KGB past, and drawing similarities between the authoritarianism of the Soviet Union and modern day Russia. They are not the only artists who have sought to publicize wrongdoing by Putin and the FSB: prior to her murder in 2006, Anna Politkovskaya more eloquently explained the dangers posed by FSB under Putin and a complicit judicial system:

"The shroud of darkness from which we spent several decades during the Soviet era trying to free ourselves is enveloping us again. More and more stories are heard of the FSB using torture to fabricate cases to suit its ideological needs, implicating the courts and the prosecutor's office as its accomplices. This practice is now the rule rather than the exception. We can no longer pretend that the occurrences are random.

"The implication is that our constitution is on its deathbed, in spite of the guarantees intended to safeguard it, and the FSB is in charge of the funeral arrangements."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Sturdee, Nick. "Don't raise the bridge: Voina, Russia's art terrorists." April 12, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/apr/12/Voina-art-terrorism>

⁹¹ Politkovskaya, Anna. **Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy.** Holt Paperbacks, New York: 2004. p. 41.

What makes their message novel is that they used the system's own routine against the regime. Paying attention not only to the location, but the schedule of the bridge, they were able to ensure their message made an impact through the incorporation of time and the city's daily norms. In order to understand the ensuing Voina's subsequent path, in particular why Voina members are still free and two members of Pussy Riot are still in prison, it is appropriate to discuss both groups' work in the context of how guerrilla artists impact and are impacted by the current Russian legal system.

Guerrilla Artists and the Russian Legal System

Here we will examine the legal charges, punishment, and public reaction in regards to the collectives Pussy Riot and Voina. Those guerrilla artists caught practicing in Russia may be found in violation in a variety of ways under the Russian Criminal Code, **Section IX, Crimes against Public Security and Public Order: Chapter 24, Crimes Against Public Security.**⁹²

At first glance, the charge of vandalism may seem the most obvious and just code for authorities to use when prosecuting guerrilla artists. In reaction to the Liteinyi Bridge incident, the vandalism code was used to determine sentencing, and the group was fined 2,000 rubles (\$67).⁹³ The 2010 painting only lasted a few hours, but it has received more than 100,000 views via social media (combining the tallies from multiple versions of video footage of the night), and the group received the 2010 Innovation Prize from Moscow's National Center for Contemporary

⁹² <http://www.russian-criminal-code.com/PartII/SectionIX/Chapter24.html> (Accessed February 9, 2013)

⁹³ Barry, Ellen. "Artist Playing Cat-and-Mouse Faces Russia's Claws." January 21, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/europe/22Voina.html>

Arts, for which they were awarded 400,000 rubles (approximately \$13,240).⁹⁴ Not only did the award for this single act of vandalism more than compensate for the supposed penalty, in reality, the resources to pursue the common vandal are so few, or the priority among police is so low, that even many businesses take to using graffiti as advertising. In Moscow and St. Petersburg, one can find several instances of businesses, which have taken to directly spray painting their business information, including address and telephone number, on sidewalks and other building walls.⁹⁵ The cost of paying for legitimate advertisement space in a public setting, such as billboards, buses, in metro stations, is much higher than the cost of spray paint and hiring an individual or sending an employee out to the surrounding neighborhood with a stencil, particularly if the police will not punish the corporate perpetrator of this crime. In order to act as a realistic incentive to stop public embarrassments of the government from taking place, those seeking to provoke a strong government reaction through art are charged not with vandalism, but hooliganism.

The most vague and infamous of the codes which can be used by Russian authorities to punish violators is the hooliganism clause. According to Article 213 in part, "Hooliganism [is] a gross violation of the public order which expresses patent contempt for society, attended by violence against private persons or by the threat of its use, and likewise by the destruction or damage of other people's property."⁹⁶ This is the charge leveled successfully against Pussy Riot, despite lack of threat of violence against a private person, or in the case of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, actual damage of physical property. However, because this act was committed by "a

⁹⁴ Sturdee.

⁹⁵ Appendix: 8 and 9.

⁹⁶ <http://www.russian-criminal-code.com/PartII/SectionIX/Chapter24.html> (Accessed February 9, 2013)

group of persons, a group of persons in a preliminary conspiracy, or an organized group," in connection "with resistance to a representative of authority or to any other person who fulfills the duty of protecting the public order or who prevents violation of the public order," they could be punished for their actions "by compulsory works for a term of 180 to 240 hours, or by corrective labour for a term of one to two years, or by deprivation of liberty for a term of up to five years."⁹⁷ The actual sentence handed down to Maria Alekhina, Yekaterina Samutsevich, and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova was two years in federal prison labor camps.⁹⁸ Samutsevich was released in October 2012 on appeal, while Tolokonnikova has already been hospitalized, complaining of fatigue and exhaustion from being worked too hard.⁹⁹ In response to the government's narrative that the artists are being punished according to law, the artists and others have countered by framing the current judicial process in the historical context of Stalin's Show Trials.¹⁰⁰ In doing so, they provide a simple metaphor, which, relying on the collective memory, calls into question the justness and legitimacy of both the government and its supposed counterbalance, the courts.

The charge of "aggravated hooliganism" was eventually used in the government's fight against Voyna's later work.¹⁰¹ In the case of Voyna, however, actual footage of destruction of property by Voyna activists has been posted on YouTube, by the activists themselves. In a video known as

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Watercutter, Angela. "Pussy Riot Appeals Convictions for 'Hooliganism' to European Human Rights Court." February 7, 2013. <http://www.wired.com/underwire/2013/02/pussy-riot-human-rights-appeal/>

⁹⁹ Hsieh, Steven. "Is the Russian Prison System Working Pussy Riot Member to Death?" February 1, 2013. <http://www.alternet.org/world/russia-prison-system-working-pussy-riot-member-death>

¹⁰⁰ Lerner, Pozdorovkin.

¹⁰¹ Sturdee, Nick. "Don't raise the bridge: Voyna, Russia's art terrorists." April 12, 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/apr/12/Voina-art-terrorism>

the "Palace Revolution Act,"¹⁰² the group can be seen overturning a police car onto its top as "a commentary [...] on police corruption"¹⁰³. For this act, members Oleg "Vor" Vorotnikov and Leonid Nikolaev were "incarcerated in St. Petersburg from November 2010 to February 2011 on charges [under] article 213 part 2 of the Russian Criminal Code".¹⁰⁴

After their release, additional charges for members of Voina have been filed using Article 319¹⁰⁵: "Insult of a Representative of the Authority", whereby:

"Public insult of a representative of the authority during the discharge by him of his official duties, or in connection with their discharge, shall be punishable by a fine in the amount up to 40 thousand roubles [approximately \$1320], or in the amount of the wage or salary, or any other income of the convicted person for a period of up to three months, or by compulsory works for a term of 120 to 180 hours, or by corrective labour for a term of six to twelve months."¹⁰⁶

According to Voina's official website, group members Vorotnikov and his wife, Natalia Sokol, had their documents confiscated by Russian officials, and are now homeless in Russia in an attempt to protect their parental rights to their child, Kasper Sokol, born in 2009. They are prevented from traveling abroad not only due to the lack of official papers, but by an

¹⁰² Voina. "Pomog rebenku, pomog strane." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uBQBtkmec> . September 22, 2010.

¹⁰³ Barry.

¹⁰⁴ <http://en.free-Voina.org/about>

¹⁰⁵ <http://en.free-Voina.org/about>

¹⁰⁶ <http://visalink-russia.com/criminal-code-russian-federation.html>

international warrant for Vorotnikov's arrest, issued in July 2011.¹⁰⁷ Vorotnikov is also charged under Article 318, "Use of Violence Against a Representative of the Authority," related to his and other Voina members' participation in a St. Petersburg rally on March 31, 2011, in which video footage shows that he and other Voina activists doused police with bottles of human urine,¹⁰⁸ which was allegedly deployed in "self-defense" after the activists' son Kasper was attacked by police.¹⁰⁹ Depending on whether the defendant's actions are classified in the first sense of Article 318, "[use] of violence that does not endanger human life or health, or threats to use violence against a representative of the authority, or his relatives, in connection with the discharge by his official duties," or the second, the "use of violence endangering the lives or health of the persons referred to in the first part of this Article," sentencing ranges vary from "a fine in the amount up to 200 thousand roubles [\$6,620], or in the amount of the wage or salary, or any other income of the convicted person for a period up to 18 months, or by arrest for a term of three to six months, or by deprivation of liberty for a term of up to five years" all the way up to ten years per charge.¹¹⁰ Given that Vorotnikov is facing multiple charges, and Sokol is facing up to ten years if found guilty of violating Section 2 of Article 318, the Russian government's case for terminating their parental rights is even stronger.

It has recently been announced that lawyers on behalf of Pussy Riot are suing Russia in the European Court of Human Rights, due to Russia's violation of the European Convention on

¹⁰⁷ <http://en.free-Voina.org/about>

¹⁰⁸ Sturdee, Nick. "Voina: Russia's Robin Hoods." Index on Censorship. November 29, 2011. <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2011/11/russias-robin-hoods/>

¹⁰⁹ Chernov, Sergey. "March to Smolny." April 6, 2011.

<https://chtodelat.wordpress.com/tag/Voina-art-group/>

¹¹⁰ <http://visalink-russia.com/criminal-code-russian-federation.html>

Human Rights by imprisoning them for using their right to free speech.¹¹¹ There is a great chance of winning their case in the European Court, but according to their lawyer, Pavel Chikov: "[...] the European Court is not the key mechanism to seek their prompt release."¹¹² The case against Voina is much tougher, in that there is documented evidence of actual destruction of government property and much more flagrant violation of moral codes (for example, organizing an orgy in the Moscow Zoological Museum to protest Medvedev's election).¹¹³ While both groups original work was meant for a Russian audience, international actors have stepped in on behalf of both groups. For instance, international street artist Banksy stepped in to pay bail and legal fees for Voina¹¹⁴, and multiple Western media outlets and spokespeople, such as Madonna¹¹⁵, have advocated for Pussy Riot's release.

¹¹¹ Watercutter, Angela. "Pussy Riot Appeals Conviction for 'Hooliganism' to European Human Rights Court." February 7, 2013. <http://www.wired.com/underwire/2013/02/pussy-riot-human-rights-appeal/>

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ NTV documentary. "Anatomi Protesta. Gruppo Voina." March 15, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WQFt1qVjc4>

¹¹⁴ BBC. December 13, 2010. "Banksy Supports Voina, Controversial Art Group." <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11982984>

¹¹⁵ Rosenberg, Liz. "Madonna shows support for Pussy Riot at Moscow Concert -- video." August 8, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/video/2012/aug/08/madonna-pussy-riot-moscow-video>

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Over the course of this essay, we have examined the modern guerrilla art of St. Petersburg and Moscow and its connections with larger social movements and the Russian government. We have developed a brief overview of art and power in the broader context of Russian history. And for the purposes of this study, we have briefly touched upon the Russian government's reaction to the artists and protesters.

We have compared guerrilla art and "traditional" methods of protest. Whether traditional movements such as Strategy-31 can attract new participants, and whether their tactics of straight-forward assembly for assembly's sake have lost their novelty are valid concerns. At a certain point, do such tactics reach new audience members through regular participants' devotion to their cause? Or as is more likely, do these tactics encourage burnout due to the "free rider" problem¹¹⁶: active protesters receive more punishment and little gain while those for whom they protest may continue with their daily routines. In order to mobilize a broader population that includes the younger activists at home and abroad, it makes sense to play to the pop-sensibilities of a population that has grown immune to advertisements and blatant government agendas presented as unbiased news. New technology aids in the dispersal of guerrilla art, which now does not necessarily depend upon organizing large groups of people or having access to inordinate financial resources to make a mass impact. Yet the real driving force for guerrilla art is the

¹¹⁶ Olson, Mancur. **The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups.** Harvard University Press: 1965. p. 64

government itself as it continuously seeks to close avenues for criticism and public participation in politics.

If guerrilla art's success is measured purely in terms of the publicity generated for the political message, with the idea that outside forces or those with power will then work to further the political cause, then multiple Russian guerrilla artists and groups can be considered to have succeeded. What's exceptional about both Voina and Pussy Riot is that they used Russia's own official resources against the authorities in order to attain bittersweet victories for the movement at great cost to themselves. The current generation of art activists has shown that by using a combination of tools such as paint, wheat paste, social media, and brightly colored balaclavas, it can still initiate and maintain a public dialogue that challenges the legitimacy of the Russian government's actions.

Future Inquiries/ Research

Because this is an ongoing issue, it will be interesting to see not only what becomes of both the Voina and Pussy Riot collectives, but who else rises to carry their torch and how the government reacts in response. While it is my plan to continue to document Russian street art and to interview the artists behind public political expression in Russia, there is much room for analysis in the field of art and protest in Russia. Since I began my research, Russian guerrilla artists have gained much notoriety abroad. While public attention is one purpose of guerrilla art, it has also meant that the Russian government has adapted in tandem with their ascent to quell other guerrilla artists who may wish to follow in their footsteps. However, because many participants

from the traditional protests of 2012 still remain in prison and new laws are sure to spring up to punish future protesters, guerrilla art will still be a logical option for those who feel they must express their opposition to the system.

I am not so optimistic that guerrilla artists, protesters, or Western supporters will succeed in convincing figures such as Putin to loosen control over the Russian government and reinstate legitimate democratic mechanisms, such as local elections, in the near future. However, if the current opposition movement continues to work to mobilize its constituents through the introduction of narratives counter to those sanctioned by the government, ... Only time will tell, but history has a long list of individuals who defied the odds to make the impossible a reality.

Appendix

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs were taken by the author between the dates July 15 and August 3, 2012 in Moscow and St. Petersburg. All artwork photographed is in a public space; the political artwork has been displayed anonymously. Photographs may not be reprinted without permission.

1



Poster pasted to wall in Moscow, July 30, 2012. A white haired official holding the ballot box blocks a hand holding a ballot. United Russia's (Putin's party) official logo is in the bottom right hand corner. The text translates as: "No, stay home. We'll fill them out ourselves." The stance of the main figure, the placement of "nyet" in the upper left corner, and the arm stretched out from the bottom left all play on the 1954 Soviet poster by Viktor Govorkov against alcohol consumption. (See Appendix 2)

2

The original poster by Govorkov: a Soviet citizen is shown refusing an alcoholic drink.



117

¹¹⁷ V. Govorkov's work is widely distributed, but can be found in the following:
Lafont, Maria. **Soviet Posters: The Sergo Grigorian Collection**. Prestel: New York. 2007. p.
156.

3



Guy Fawkes Mask. Translation:
Destroy the System
Other Russia
drugorus.ru

The Guy Fawkes Mask is used prominently in the 2005 movie, "V for Vendetta,"¹¹⁸ and by the hacktivist association "Anonymous,"¹¹⁹ as a symbol of fighting a corrupt government or larger political machine, no matter the costs. Here the Guy Fawkes Mask is stenciled in red, in tandem with a website for opposition party "The Other Russia." July 14, 2012. Nevskii Prospekt. St. Petersburg.

¹¹⁸ Portman, Natalie, Hugo Weaving, Stephen Rea, John Hurt, Grant Hill, Joel Silver, Andy Wachowski, Lana Wachowski, James McTeigue, Alan Moore, David Lloyd, and Alan Moore. V for Vendetta. Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006.

¹¹⁹ Anonymous. anonnews.org.

4



Section of wall in Moscow's Triumfal'naia Square on day of Strategy 31 protest, July 31, 2012, two hours before protest was set to start. Many of the lower posters have been cleared away, leaving advertisements in place.

5



Translation: "May 6, 3:00 p.m. March of Millions. Oktyabr'skaia Metro." Stenciled in black on building near Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; documented August 2, 2012. Evidence of the same stencil was found in other locations in Moscow as well, though buffed.

6



Stencil, St. Petersburg. Advertisement for political blog *grouper.livejournal.com* and protest action on March 11. Photographed on July 2012.

7



Stencil of pig in police officer's hat, with the Russian slang word for "cop" in the place of the teeth, spray painted in black on wall in Petrogradskii District. St. Petersburg, July 18, 2012.

8

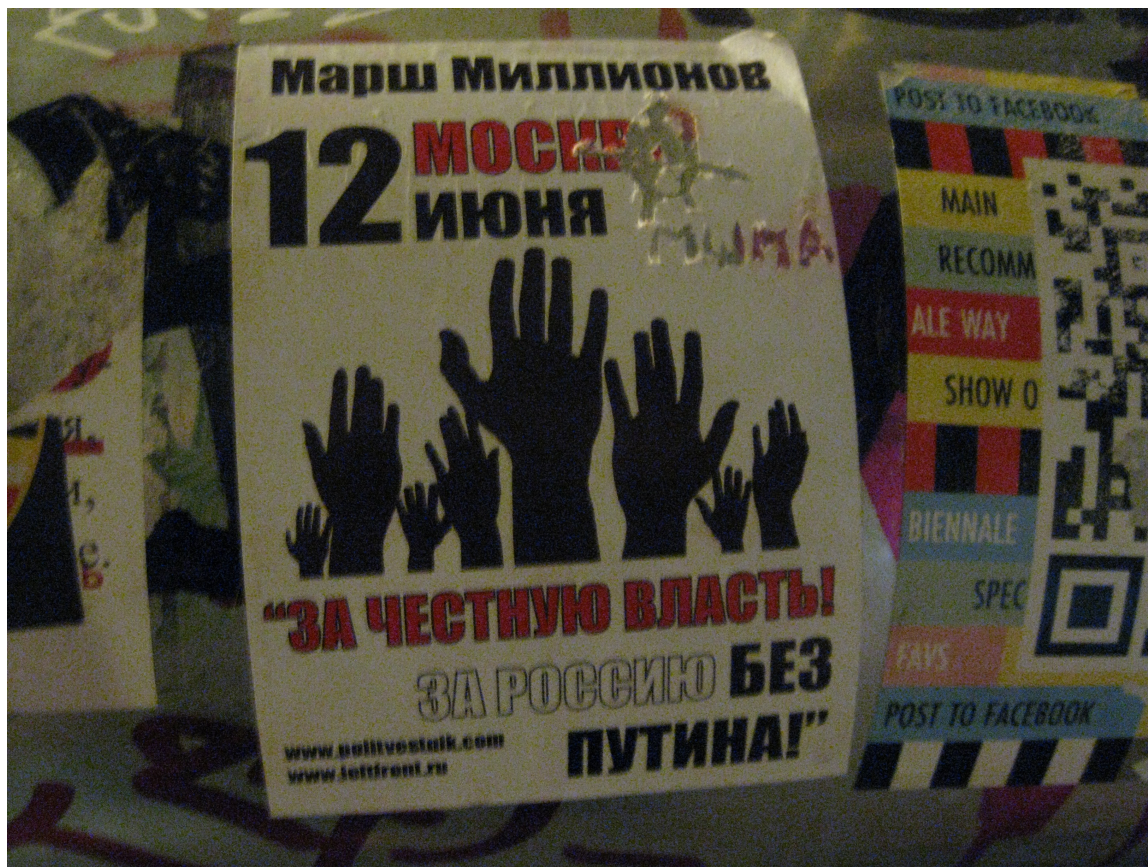


9



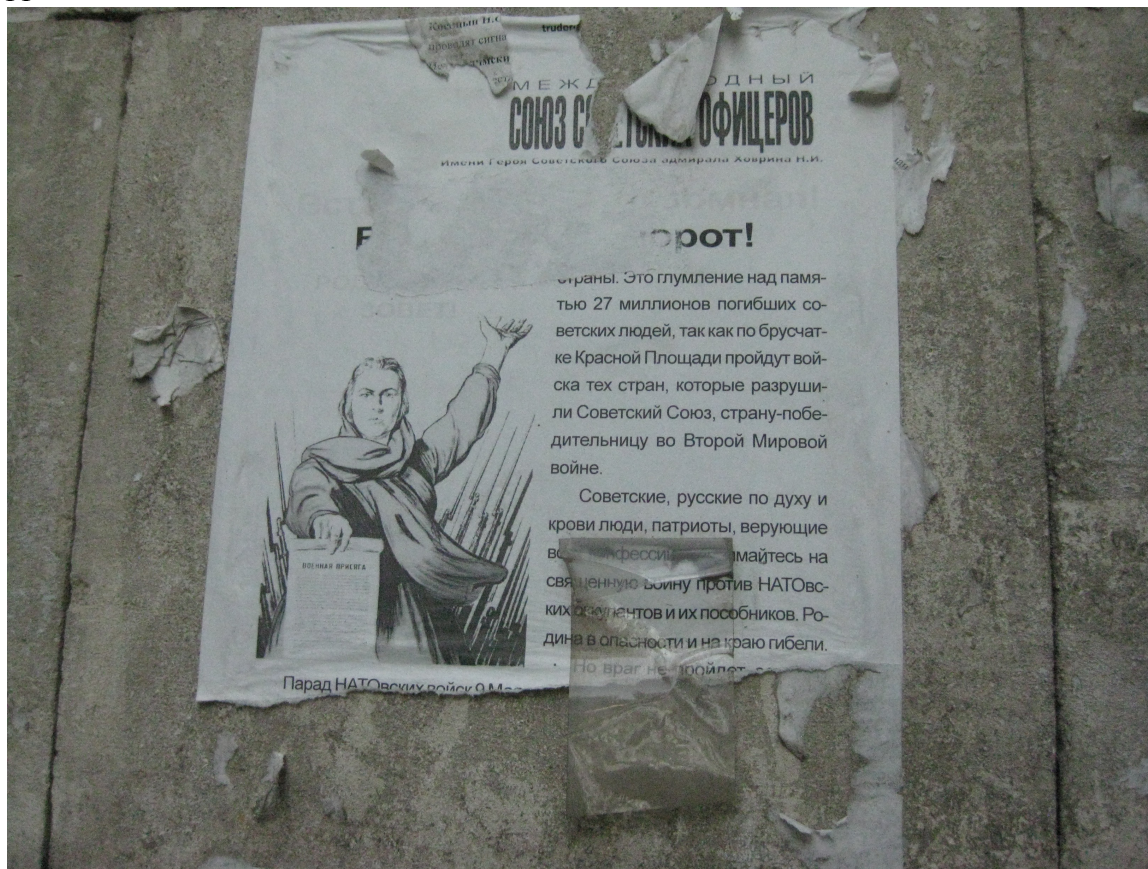
Pictures of advertisement spray painted on ground for the purpose of business in Moscow.

10



Translation: "March of Millions. Moscow, June 12. 'For clean power! For Russia Without Putin!' July 27, 2012. Vinzavod Art Complex. Anarchy symbol scratched into upper right corner after it had been posted.

11



Anti-NATO protest sign, uses text from Communist Party's website¹²⁰ which in part reads: "Rise Up, Great Country! The Enemy is at Our Gates!" and the well-known Soviet propaganda poster of Mother Russia calling on her citizens to fight for the Motherland.

¹²⁰ cprf.ru

12



Anti-WTO poster pasted on outdoor electrical box near Moscow State University, July 30, 2012.

13



Top of picture: ripped flier for the Strategy-31 Protest Movement website. the bottom right sign pasted on the pole is one of many examples of anti-Putin pieces. Found July 23, 2012, a few blocks away from Red Square, Moscow.

14



These stenciled pieces were found directly adjacent to the stencil of the Guy Fawkes Mask on Nevsky Prospekt.

The stencil on the left is of Putin's face crossed out, with the imperative "get out" beneath it. To the right is a sign for a protest that occurred in St. Petersburg on June 8 at 7 p.m. and the location for the starting point (BKZ - Bolshoi Concert Hall).

15



Graffiti started but not completed in the entrance to subway station in St. Petersburg, most likely indicating the approach of a guard or potential authority figure. Found July 19, 2012.

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