

Thesis: "Guerrilla Art and Protest in Modern Russia"

Suzanne Skaar

MAIS REECAS Candidate 2013

University of Washington Jackson School of International Studies

skaars@uw.edu

REECAS Conference 2013

Table of Contents

Introduction	page 3
Rights, Revolution, and Art: Why Art Matters as a Protest Tactic	page 5
Guerrilla Art Tactics and Protest	page 16
Conclusion	page 26
Appendix	page 27

Chapter 1

Introduction

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. While artists who find success in galleries typically have the opportunity to make a direct impact on viewers long after their own generation has passed, street artists may be considered lucky if their work is up for a week. Within the last ten years, however, the power of street art has been amplified by 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, email, blogs, or newspaper wires. The temporary nature of graffiti and other forms of guerrilla art may also be part of its appeal: because the art is not permanent or guaranteed safety, artists need 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. Guerrilla art is a call to act outside the law that many already find themselves alienated by.

The term guerrilla art encompasses acts or visual pieces which do not rely on permanence for impact and are meant to communicate a political message. My research has taken me down many paths, all in pursuit of justifying guerrilla art as a logical area for scholars to focus on when

¹ See Appendix for examples.

Thesis: "Guerrilla Art and Protest in Modern Russia"

analyzing larger social movements. In Francesca Polletta's work on narrative and storytelling in activist movements, she uses the terms "ellipses" and "click."² The ellipses comes into play when activists make the importance of their cause known to others, then "...": the desired change is effected. The "click" moment is when someone outside the movement understands why they belong inside the movement. Utilizing Polletta's terms, I propose that guerrilla art is simultaneously the predecessor for this ellipses, the trigger of the "click" moment, and a concrete sign that the movement's momentum has begun. I will examine two of the more famous Russian guerrilla art groups, Voina and Pussy Riot, in addition to 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 connection and interplay between the guerrilla artist and the government. I will draw from many sources to show how both guerrilla artists and the Russian government use both Western and Soviet frameworks to justify their actions and aims, and ultimately how the repression of "legitimate" democratic participation increases the need for and relevance of "subversive" or "creative" protest tactics.

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: Narodnyi plakat**. 2012. Moscow: OGI.

Chapter 2

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

While guerrilla art may seem ineffectual in itself to the political scientist, 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. If we look at Soviet history, from the Revolution to the collapse, we can easily see the role that art played in disseminating information quickly to a wide audience. 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 literature to indoctrinate the masses⁴. The fact that image played a strong role in maintaining the political order was a given in the Soviet system. There was a brief space for artists to explore private spheres of interest after the death of Stalin, but the 1960s once again saw harsher measures taken against artists not toeing the Party line⁵.

The collapse of the Soviet Union came after glasnost, when artists and writers were more able to openly express their dissent with the failing infrastructure. The opening of Russia in the 1990s to the West allowed for an exchange of popular culture, albeit largely from the West to Russia. And then, after Putin's ascension to power, artists again were unable to produce and display art in the traditional gallery world without dire consequences. The following is an excerpt from a New

⁴ Multiple sources, including **Iconography of Power**.

⁵ Peterson, Christian Philip. **Globalizing Human Rights: Private Citizens, the Soviet Union, and the West**. p. 17.

York Times article which summarizes a case which preceded the workings of the two more infamous guerrilla art groups, demonstrating this point:

"Yuri Samodurov [...] a former director of the Sakharov Museum, was fined 200,000 rubles (about \$6,500) and Andrei Yerofeyev [...] the show's guest curator, was fined 150,000 rubles (about \$4,800) on charges of inciting religious and ethnic hatred in an exhibition called 'Forbidden Art — 2006,' which displayed works that had been banned by Russian museums. Among the offending works were 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 with what looks like caviar where the figures should be; and a painting of Jesus with a Mickey Mouse head. A work titled 'Chechen Marilyn,' of a veiled woman with her long dress billowing up, was deemed offensive to Muslims."⁶

The idea that citizens of any nation have individual rights and then, subsequently, what those rights are, is rooted in the Western tradition⁷, and even then, abandoned in the West when it no longer serves the purposes of democratic governments. Although the right to free speech is guaranteed under Article 29 of the Russian Constitution, 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):

⁶ 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

⁷ Butler, W.E. Oxford University Press: New York. 1999.

"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."⁸

To expect that an authoritarian post-Soviet Russia will respect what is seen as Western ideals as the nation works to recoup from a disastrous 1990s experiment with free-market democracy (as encouraged by the West) can be labeled as naive or overly optimistic. 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.

However, the fact remains that many living in Russia are actually fighting for the cause of human rights in itself because they do believe it is the right thing to do, and they are willing to face the consequences of doing so, as can be seen from the work of opposition groups and domestic "watchdog" agencies such as Memorial. Then there are those who may be unwilling to face the consequences but still fight for the cause in ways which are meant to preserve their relative safety. What then is more relevant for the purposes of this research was to study how every day citizens can protest in ways that make the most sense for their own environment: one in which massive protests did not stop Putin from coming to power, but a few guerrilla artists were threatening enough to be sent to labor camps.

⁸ The Russian Constitution. Accessed March 11, 2013.
<http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/ch2.html>

What we can learn from history is that human rights activists do not need to petition their government directly to effect change, although it is an obvious point that having strong domestic support for a cause is beneficial. Christian Peterson writes that human rights activists in the Cold War era was helped greatly by US President Jimmy Carter's assertion that human rights abuses in Russia were directly tied with the effectiveness of peace processes in the West. This meant that US foreign policy makers could not ignore abuses of human rights inside Russian borders as they were connected to international security as a whole.⁹ The Helsinki Accords, then, became a tool for Soviet dissidents to petition foreign governments for assistance when the treaty, signed by the Russian government, was not being honored.

Modern dissidents in post-Soviet countries, in particular Russia, are in a unique position: not only is it necessary to work with outside forces to pressure their own government (due to reasons such as corruption and power networks formed in the Soviet Union), but outside forces (i.e., foreign governments and corporations) have reason to support their cause. 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."¹⁰ An obvious but necessary point is that while altruism is in an actual

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

¹⁰ 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.

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 rights (in this case, property rights) are secure.

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. 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 taking measures that would affect the financial interests of those loyal to him. Furthermore, many scholars, policy analysts, and Russian citizens 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.

One way of securing the nation's stability in the Soviet era was the creation of propaganda as a means of reinforcing the superiority of Soviet idealism over Western hypocrisy. For example, one common theme was to highlight the plight of the oppressed racial minorities of the American empire through the creation of agitprop¹¹, while another was to target the capitalists and bourgeoisie getting fat off the work of the proletariat¹². As the Russian government again controls the mainstream media, and because the issue of human rights is again pushed toward the forefront of Western media coverage of Russia, propaganda to justify its own actions and take attention away from other issues is a major tool of the government. Protesters have directly addressed many of the more ludicrous instances in recent years, such as a video produced by

¹¹ Kalatozov, Mikhail. "Ya Kuba" ("I am Cuba"). MosFilm. 1964.

¹² Lafont.

Medvedev and Putin to show how playing badminton improves decision making skills¹³, and the infamous Greek amphorae Putin was able to quickly find in an area of the ocean floor already scoured by experts and black marketers¹⁴. Much of the propaganda used by the Russian government can be considered libel. (More examples of this will be discussed later.)

So while the Russian government is seeking to create a stable image for foreign investors, governments, and its own citizens, the tactic of guerrilla art makes sense as a relevant dissident tactic. Much like advertising, its aim is to draw attention in public spaces to a specifically tailored message. Chaos and anarchy challenge the government's intended messages of control and stability. When various forms of media help heighten this message in city centers more frequently visited by the foreigners, the fact that the same goals may not be considered as important in smaller, more rural, or more traditionally oriented regions of Russia is often overlooked by foreign audiences.

There are many reasons to support and oppose the current Russian government. Pro-Putin supporters often laud the stability that he has brought to the country¹⁵, while citing improvement in the economic conditions from the growing pains of the 1990s¹⁶. However, the difference between improvements in economic conditions for the every day citizen versus those

¹³ Lure. p. 12

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 10

¹⁵ Al Jazeera staff. "Vladimir Putin: 'A vote for stability.'" March 5, 2012.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/russianelections/2012/02/201222565548103390.html> . Accessed January 27, 2012.

¹⁶ Kramer, Andrew. "Economic Reforms Likely to Continue Under Putin." The New York Times. September 24, 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/25/world/europe/medvedevs-economic-reforms-likely-to-continue-under-putin.html>. Accessed January 27, 2013.

improvements for Putin's circle is one major reason for the opposition's growth. In order to maintain the status quo, it is no secret that the administration has taken steps to ensure power remains in Putin's hands, and that the perks for those who help are far more appealing than the consequences for those who attempt to level the playing field. Even those formerly in positions of power in Russia's private sector, Khordorkovsky being a prime example, have been imprisoned illegally. Journalists who have attempted to report the facts and criticism of Putin in the mainstream media have been killed, disappeared, beaten, and threatened.¹⁷ Citizens attempting to protest via legal tactics such as assembling now face staggering fines and the threat of being labeled protest leaders for spreading news of protests.¹⁸ Elections are admittedly not fair¹⁹, meaning that citizens without a certain level of money or power do not have adequate representation in their government. The best way to draw the Western media's attention to the problems inherent in any situation is to create a scene.

Lawful and unlawful protest as defined and practiced in Russia

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 opposition's 2012 protest to free jailed activists, Russia's own RT News Agency states: "The application to hold the event was rejected

¹⁷ Anna Politkovskaya is but one example.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Adomanis, Mark. "Breaking News: Russian Electoral Fraud Existed Prior to Putin." February 25, 2012. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2012/02/25/breaking-news-russian-electoral-fraud-existed-prior-to-putin/>

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[...]'.²⁰ Despite the Russian Constitution guaranteeing the right to assemble²¹, as Strategy-31 protests (named for the Article of the Constitution guaranteeing the right to assemble) have shown, that right is at the discretion of the government. In addition to denying permits for protests, locations such as Moscow's Triumfal'naya Square have been blocked from use under the auspice of "construction"²², and activist offices have been raided²³. 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.

Western scholars and social activists may be tempted to encourage tactics for social change that work best in democratic societies. F.F. Piven's critique of resource mobilization (RM) theory's tendency to "'normalize' collective protest" provides support for why traditional tactics such as organized rallies, which may have a better chance of working in Western societies with open political structures of opportunity²⁴, may not be as successful in authoritarian countries such as Russia. It is important then also to clarify that the guerrilla art tactics of protest in St. Petersburg and Moscow will not necessarily have the same impact anywhere else in Russia, and may instead alienate potential protesters. "Blurring the distinction between **normative and nonnormative**

²⁰ <http://rt.com/news/moscow-political-repressions-protest-banned-198/> Published November 12, 2012; accessed January 27, 2013.

²¹ <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>

²² Insert relevant photo, taken on July 31, 2012

²³ The Other Russia. March 30, 2011.

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

forms of collective action is the most fundamental expression of this tendency, as if **rule-conforming and rule-violating collective action** are of a piece."²⁵

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 Facebook²⁶ and punished by fines and potential jail time²⁷. New forms of protest have sprung up in reaction to the tightening of restrictions. One such example is "auto marches"²⁸, where the protesters agreed to utilize objects of the color white 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 one law by following another.

For the purpose of understanding guerrilla art as a protest form in Russia, it is also important to recognize rule-violating as a valid form of collective action. The reason why guerilla art and protest are so intertwined in Russia is that guerilla art challenges legitimacy of authority in multiple ways. One way is in the distribution of the art, which challenges not only the physical

²⁵ Piven, Frances Fox and Richard A Cloward. "Collective Protest: A Critique of Resource Mobilization Theory," International Journal of Politics, Culture and Soc&ty, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1991. p.435. http://www.autonomousgeographies.org/files/piven%26cloward_1991.pdf

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Herzsenhorn, 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>

²⁸ **Azbuka Protesta (ABC of Protest)**, p. 6. 2012.

boundaries set by society, but the political and now even technological barricades²⁹. While artists such as the recently deceased Pavel 183 found success in spreading his message through a combination of ingenuity, attention to detail, and outright talent, more often than not, the actual content and quality is 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. The Pussy Riot case is now a concrete challenge to legal boundaries. 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. [This of course ignores the fact 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.]

²⁹ 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.

Chapter 3

Guerrilla Art: Tactics and Consequences

While in St. Petersburg and Moscow in the summer of 2012, I found many examples of street art being used to communicate places and times of these and other protests, as well as political blogs online where others could get more information. I have also found evidence of remnants of such political messages buffed 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. 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 saw similar messages elsewhere.³⁰ In this chapter, I wish to explore the ways in which guerrilla art attempt to attract attention of fellow citizens and what happens when the message reaches the top of the vertical power structure.

Street art

Street art is a useful tool for populations who feel as though they have no practical control over their own environments.³¹ 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

³⁰ See Appendix for examples.

³¹ Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

government, society, corporations, or maybe just the local community. Sharpies, spray paint, stencils, posters and even stickers can be tools for this rebellion. In governments where citizens do not have direct access -- or even the mirage of direct access -- to authorities for the sake of contributing to decisions, guerrilla art may be the most useful tactic, in that it provides anonymity (and with it, protection from prosecution or persecution) and 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 I found while documenting street art in Russia was anti-Putin sentiment.³² 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 adopting of much the old Soviet legal system³³ and continuation of the old power circles as state goods were divvied into private hands, and one could easily imagine similar circumstances would arise once Putin does finally exit the political stage.

In recognition of the limitations of the common citizen who does not have the power and privilege afforded by friends in high places, street art is a highly accessible medium. Those who do not have the power, time, or money necessary to enter politics can utilize street art to their

³² See Appendix.

³³ Butler.

advantage, regardless of artistic skill level. Stencils, photocopiers, and computers allow for the quick, inexpensive duplication of others' work 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 actions. For example, the traditional roles that women are expected to fulfill as wives and 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. 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 given (e.g., candidates, simple yes or no votes, etc.) are adequate. Even in the Soviet Union, propaganda was produced to impart the importance of voting as a civic duty³⁴ despite the fact that decisions were acknowledged to be imposed from above. Actions, which take less time and make more of an impact (by shock, breaking of rules, or challenging social norms) therefore may be the only ways women (not to mention oppressed minorities) can actually affect society.

Performance Art

Groups like Pussy Riot³⁵ have been particularly powerful because they challenge both the Western perceptions and Russian of what revolutionaries look like and how they act. There was nothing significantly shocking about a punk band "praying" to God to drive Putin away.³⁶ What is revolutionary about the famous Pussy Riot prayer in the Cathedral of Christ our Savior is the

³⁴ Lafont, Maria. **Soviet Posters: The Sergo Grigorian Collection**. Prestel Publishing: New York, 2007. pp. 41, 110, 112.

³⁵ <http://freepussyriot.org/>

³⁶ Video of February 21, 2012 performance responsible for arrest:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grEBLskpDWQ> and
<http://mark-feygin.livejournal.com/90408.html>; accessed January 27, 2012

fact that the performers chose to protest politics in a space typically reserved for religious ceremony, calling attention to the ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the government. The space of the altar itself 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.³⁷ As 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. 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.

The government did not admit to punishing the political act of openly opposing Putin; instead, authorities reframed the issue as a matter of protecting religious feelings³⁸.

"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 mumbling prosecutor clarified that they stood accused of 'insulting the entire Christian world.'"³⁹

³⁷ **Iconography of Power.**

³⁸ 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

³⁹ 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.

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

Meanwhile, freedom of speech was only one framework the 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 two were 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 rightness of their punishment, pitting motherhood against religion and comparing "hooliganism" and real crime. While the government's harsh sentencing of the performers showed preference for Putin's own ego and the strength of the Church, protesters took up the "Pussy Riot" chant. More importantly, this dialogue has become international, and the agents who are in a position to help, whether they will or not, have heard the message.

Guerrilla Artists and the Russian Legal System

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**.⁴⁰ Here we will examine the legal charges, punishment, and public reaction in regards to the collectives Pussy Riot and Voina.

⁴⁰ <http://www.russian-criminal-code.com/PartII/SectionIX/Chapter24.html> (Accessed February 9, 2013)

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 first major act of Voina, in which a 60 meter representation of a phallus was painted on the St. Petersburg Liteiny Bridge in a way that when the bridge was raised it would point at the local FSB headquarters⁴¹, the code was used to determine sentencing, and the group was fined 2,000 rubles (\$67).⁴² The 2010 painting itself 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 Arts, for which they were awarded 400,000 rubles (approximately \$13,240).⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ In order to act as an actual incentive to stop such 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

⁴¹ 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>

⁴² 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>

⁴³ Sturdee.

⁴⁴ See Appendix.

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."⁴⁵ This is the charge level 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 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."⁴⁶ The actual sentence handed down to Maria Alekhina, Yekaterina Samutsevich, and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova was two years in federal prison labor camps.⁴⁷ Samutsevich was released in October 2012 on appeal, while Tolokonnikova has already been hospitalized, complaining of fatigue and exhaustion from being worked too hard.⁴⁸

The charge of "aggravated hooliganism" was used in the government's fight against Voina as well.⁴⁹ In the case of Voina, however, actual footage of destruction of property by Voina activists

⁴⁵ <http://www.russian-criminal-code.com/PartII/SectionIX/Chapter24.html> (Accessed February 9, 2013)

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ 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/>

⁴⁸ 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>

⁴⁹ 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>

has been posted on YouTube, by the activists themselves. In a video entitled "Pomog pebenky - pomog strane," also known as the "Palace Revolution Act,"⁵⁰ the group can be seen flipping a police car onto its top as "a commentary [...] on police corruption"⁵¹. 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".⁵²

Additional charges for members of Voina have been filed using Article 319⁵³: "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."⁵⁴

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

⁵⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uBQBtncmec> . Accessed

⁵¹ Barry.

⁵² <http://en.free-voina.org/about>

⁵³ <http://en.free-voina.org/about>

⁵⁴ <http://visalink-russia.com/criminal-code-russian-federation.html>

international warrant for Vorotnikov's arrest, issued in July 2011.⁵⁵ Vorotnikov also is charged using 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,⁵⁶ which was allegedly deployed in "self-defense" after the activists' son Kasper was attacked by police.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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

⁵⁵ <http://en.free-voina.org/about>

⁵⁶ Sturdee, Nick. "Voina: Russia's Robin Hoods." Index on Censorship. November 29, 2011. <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2011/11/russias-robin-hoods/>

⁵⁷ Chernov, Sergey. "March to Smolny." April 6, 2011.

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

⁵⁸ <http://visalink-russia.com/criminal-code-russian-federation.html>

Human Rights by imprisoning them for using their right to free speech.⁵⁹ 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."⁶⁰ 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).⁶¹ International actors have stepped in on behalf of both groups. For instance, international graffiti artist Banksy stepped in to pay bail and legal fees for Voina⁶², and multiple Western media outlets and spokespeople, such as Madonna⁶³, have advocated for Pussy Riot's release.

⁵⁹ 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/>

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ NTV documentary. "Anatomi Protesta. Gruppa Voina." March 15, 2012.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WQFt1qVjc4>

⁶² BBC. December 13, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11982984>

⁶³ 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>

Conclusion

In order to mobilize a younger, more West-oriented population, it makes sense to play to the pop-sensibilities of a group that has grown immune to advertisements and blatant government agendas presented as unbiased news. New technology aids in the disbursement of guerrilla art, which does not necessarily depend upon organizing large groups of people to make a mass impact. Yet the real driving force for guerrilla art is the government itself as it continuously seeks to close avenues for criticism and public participation in politics. The current generation of art activists has shown that by using a combination of paint, social media, wheat paste, and brightly colored balaclavas, it can still initiate and maintain a public dialogue that challenges the legitimacy of the Russian government's actions.

Appendix

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.

Figure 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 bottom right hand corner. The text translates from Russian to English 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 of course the arm stretched out from the bottom left all play on the 1954 Soviet poster by

Viktor Govorkov against alcohol consumption. (The original poster featured a younger man eating a meal instead of guarding a ballot box.)⁶⁴

Figure 2



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,"⁶⁵ and by the hacktivist association "Anonymous,"⁶⁶ 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 on a previously graffitied wall, in tandem with a website for opposition party "The Other Russia." July 14, 2012. Nevsky Prospekt. St. Petersburg.

⁶⁴ Govorkov's work as featured in the following:

Lafont, Maria. **Soviet Posters: The Sergo Grigorian Collection**. Prestel: New York. 2007. p. 156.

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ Anonymous. anonnews.org.

Figure 3



Section of wall in Moscow's Triumfal'naya 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.

Figure 4



Translation: "May 6, 3:00 p.m. March of Millions. Oktyabr'skaya 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.

Figure 5



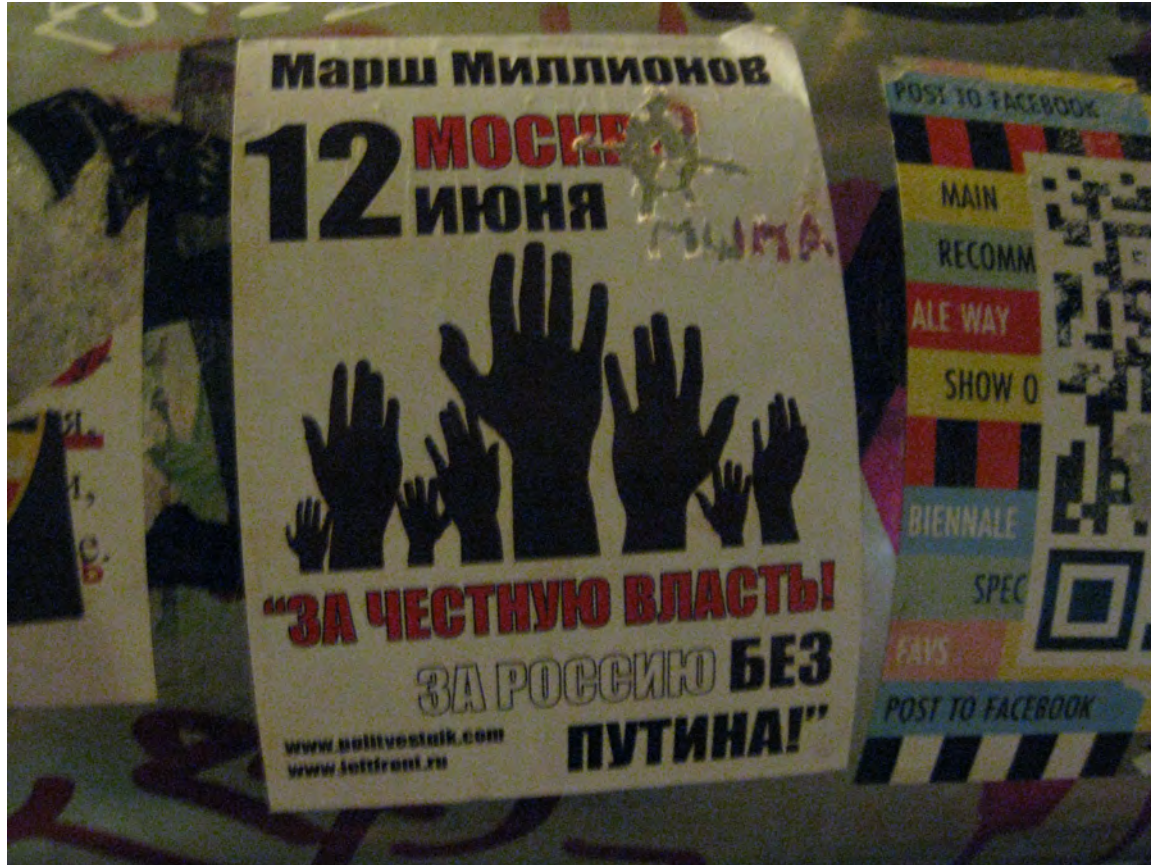
Stencil of pig in police officer's hat, with the Russian slang word for Cop in the place of the teeth, spray painted in black on wall in Petrogradsky District. St. Petersburg, July 18, 2012.

Figure 6



Picture of advertisement spray painted on ground for the purpose of business

Figure 7



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.

Figure 8



Anti-NATO protest sign, uses text from Communist Party's website⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁷ cprf.ru

Figure 9



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



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.

Figure 10



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 - Oktyabrsky Concert Hall).

Figure 11



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.