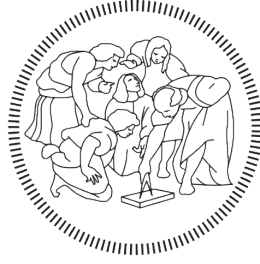


# Aesthetics of the Russian civil resistance

Laureanda: Assel Yertuleva  
Relatore: Prof. Salvatore Zingale



# **POLITECNICO MILANO 1863**

Scuola del Design

Corso di laurea magistrale  
in Design della comunicazione

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«And since politics and the social structure of society are not my specialty, it can be said as a joke that I had mainly aesthetic disagreements with the Soviet government»

Andrei Sinyavsky

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## **Abstract**

In my research, I observe the communication design of modern Russian resistance. I touch on its political background and historical roots. I study the types of communication media, its specifics and main trends, observe political, cultural context.

## **Introduction and thematic field of research**

The thematic field of my research lies between political studies and design of communication. To begin with, I clarify the main definitions that are needed to understand the field of my research: what exactly I mean by civil resistance and aesthetics. After that I'm going to outline the questions and the main topic of the study. Following this I will design the context of the contemporary Russian civil resistance. I will make a short excursion into the history of modern Russian resistance. This will help to understand its origins and context, its causes and purposes. In parallel with this, we will consider what communications were like in different significant years of Russian civil resistance.

After a historical excursion, I will move on to formulate a scientific framework that I will use to describe and analyze the communication strategies of the actual actors of the civil resistance. Having formed an analytical approach and collected tools for analysis, I will pass to analysis of contemporary communication design of Russian civil resistance and on the base of this analysis I will highlight significant aspects of it.

## Main definitions

### What I mean by aesthetics

On the question: «What I mean by aesthetics?» in the framework of my research can be partly answered by the original meaning of the Greek term: αισθητικός (aisthetikos), which means «aesthetic, sensitive, sentient, pertaining to sense perception»), which in turn was derived from αισθάνομαι (aisthanomai) which means «I perceive, feel, sense» and related to αισθησις (aisthēsis) — «sensation»<sup>1</sup>. I will borrow this term as did the Leibnizian philosopher Alexander Baumgarten<sup>2</sup>, for sensory perception (aisthēsis) in order to denote a realm of concrete knowledge, in which a content is communicated in sensory form.

I'm interested in aesthetics which observes what happens in our minds when we engage with aesthetic objects or environments such as viewing visual art, listening to music, reading poetry, experiencing a play, or exploring nature. Specifically study how creators imagine, create, and perform their works, as well as how people use, enjoy, and criticise it. Aesthetics considers why people like some works and not others, as well as how aesthetic objects can affect moods or even our beliefs<sup>3</sup>.

But I would not like to go into the field of evaluating resistance works from the point of view of their high, low, any significance as works of art. I will not be of Arnold Hauser's opinion, that: «High art beat popular art, because of two things: the significance of its content, and the more creative nature of its forms». What I would like to consider is rather closer to how Roger Taylor defined aesthetics for himself, saying that «“Aida” and “The Sound of Music” have equal value for their respective audiences»<sup>4</sup>. My concern is to identify and analyse rather than to criticise. My interests in this research are: what and how is made for the specific audiences.

However, I would like to emphasize my work with importance of unities of form and content. As Hegel said: «Art's task is the presentation of beauty and that beauty is a matter of content as well as form»<sup>5</sup>. In my case, it is important that the form of resistance reflects its message, meaning.

## Definition of civil resistance and its components

In my work I will consider the political type of civil resistance. The civil resistance in Russian society can be viewed as a form of civic participation, which compensate the weakness of communication institutions, and in this sense, useful for conveying information to the authorities about the problems of citizens and for protecting violated rights. As American political scientists D. Cohen and E. Arato pointed out: «The demands of individuals regarding the observance of their fundamental rights will remain unheeded if they are not supported by public discussions, meetings, and, in many cases, social movements practicing civil disobedience»<sup>6</sup>.

The term «civil resistance» given that it has many passive forms, best covers the various manifestations of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in Russia<sup>7</sup>. In the modern political system of Russia, the opposition is divided into systemic and non-systemic. By systemic opposition is meant that this opposition is «within the system». These parties cooperate with the presidential administration, are mentioned in programs or are invited to talk shows on federal channels<sup>8</sup>. They do not set an actual civil resistance agenda, and in this regard, their communication is not of interest to my work.

In my work, as the part civil resistance communications I include works only from the non-systemic opposition, which completely deny the legitimacy of the existing government and show their political activity in the form of «street democracy»<sup>9</sup>.

Besides the politicians belonging to the non-systemic opposition, I include in the civil resistance actors all public and cultural figures, artists, designers, musicians who have weight and fame in Russian society. As well as all the works of unknown authors, but widely spread in the Russian media space.

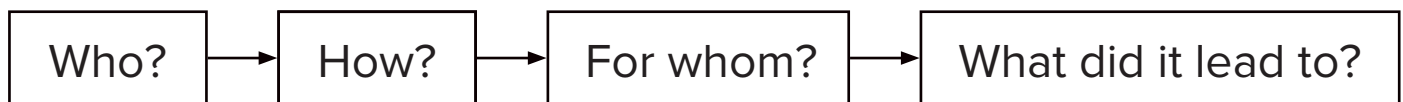
### **The connection between civil resistance and aesthetics**

The concept of «aesthetic» can be widely applied: not only to classical works of art, music, poetry, but also to objects around us, to objects of industrial design, graphic design, fashion objects. You can get aesthetic pleasure from a website or a well-written code or a well-thought-out mathematical formula. In fact, this concept can be applied to any object that a person is able to perceive. See, hear, touch, breathe, feel and analyze. Politics is also a field that can be studied, perceived, participated in and understood. But can it be that we also feel politics? That we have certain feelings about its components? To individual politicians, parties, their program. If we look at the emotions that political actions and their actors evoke in different population groups, we can assume that yes. We feel politics and it can cause us a huge variety of emotions. Concluding my thought, I suppose that I'm going to focus my research on the most emotionally charged area: aesthetics in the civil resistance.

Particularly in Russian civil resistance we see this straight engagement between aesthetic works/items and politics due to the phenomenon which we observed in the definition of the civil resistance. In the situation of weakness of communication institutions, society searches for other ways to express it's feelings, thoughts, proposes regarding what is happening in their country. For this reason the communication design in the political resistance sphere blooms in the contemporary Russia.

## Research question and main topic of the thesis

Personally for me the main question of the research is whether it is possible to study the communication design of modern Russian resistance by scientific methods? Is it possible to systemise this kind of material, structure it and analyse? What kind of instruments should I use? These are the key questions with which I begin my research. In the future, if I manage to make a primary systematisation and analysis of visual, aesthetic data, one could ask the following block of questions. For example, such as:



Where «Who» — are the creators of aesthetic objects and communications in the Russian civil resistance. «How» — are the works themselves and how they are done. «For whom» — is their target audience. «What did it lead to?» — how contemporary civil resistance communicational works evolved through years and at which point did we arrived at the beginning of 2022. But in order to professionally answer the following questions, the Tesi di consolidamento format will most likely not be enough. A deeper analysis will require a larger scale of work.

The leaders of the civil resistance in Russia are public, well-known personalities and organizations, politicians, activists, artists, designers, figures from the media and communications. These people and organizations are in full view. In my research, I will define who are these figures, creators. Then we take the communication content they produce as material for research. This content can be analyzed from a technical point of view, how it is made. With what tools, approaches, in what style and with what message these works are made. Through this type of analysis I figure out the main trends in contemporary Russian resistance and main recipient of these works. As a contemporary period of Russian resistance I take the whole 21 century and In my research we will be able to see evolution of the communication forms which resistance takes.

## Prerequisites

Contemporary Russian civil resistance and the communication design associated with it is a unique phenomenon. And before I go directly to it, I would like to outline its historical and social context.

### **Soviet period: a difficult past and movement towards democracy**

Speaking about the prerequisites for the current political and social situation in Russia, it is impossible to ignore the impact that the Soviet period have done.

What is important to note:

- 1) One-party system. In the 30s, Stalin destroyed the internal opposition in the party, carried out a massive purge in the NKVD and the Red Army.
- 2) Great terror. It's exclusivity lay in the unprecedentedness and scale of the massacres organized by the governing bodies of the Communist Party in peacetime. During the period from 1930 to 1940, more than 8.5 million people became victims of Stalin's social policy. In an atmosphere of terror, the spiritual corruption of the people took place - by lies, fear, duplicity, opportunism<sup>10</sup>.
- 3) Censorship. The system of general political censorship included various forms and methods of ideological and political control<sup>11</sup>. Under Khrushchev, the Soviet Union moved from a system of brutal dictatorship to mild authoritarianism<sup>12</sup>. Under Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the Soviet Union, and then Russia, took the path of democratisation and free market<sup>13</sup>.

### **Movement in the opposite direction from democracy**

There are different theories about when Russia's rapid development towards democratisation and Europeanisation turned around 180 degrees and led to a new wave of authoritarianism. The Wall Street Journal, April 24, 2007, writes: «Russia has never - neither before nor since - known such freedom as in the Yeltsin 1990s». Yeltsin's successor in 2000 is Putin. And although at first he adhered to the same democratic vector, at certain stages of his reign, the authoritarian nature of his policies began to appear. There were many significant events that revealed the movement in Putin's policy towards authoritarianism. A few of the most significant are: the arrest of Khodorkovsky and the Yukos affair, the reshuffle with Medvedev for the period 2008 and 2012, and the return of Putin to the presidency in 2012. Scandal with fraud in the elections to the State Duma in 2011. Poisoning of Navalny in 2020.

Navalny's arrest upon his return from treatment from Germany and a constitutional amendment in 2021. Attack on Ukraine in 2022. Parallel to critical political events, there is a relentless resistance movement. It manifests itself in rallies, processions, in unrest in social networks, in various artistic and political works of resistance actors.

In the report of the Amnesty International for 2020/21 we see following findings and conclusions<sup>14</sup>: Restrictions on freedom of expression continued. Harassment, prosecution, and physical attacks against human rights defenders remained commonplace. Laws on “foreign agents” and “undesirable organizations” were actively used to smear independent non-governmental organisation. Torture and other ill-treatment remained pervasive, and the number of perpetrators convicted was negligible. Counterterrorism legislation was widely abused, often to target dissent. Proposals to introduce legislation on domestic violence remained stalled in Parliament, while non-governmental organisation reported a sharp increase in domestic violence following COVID-19 lockdown measures. LGBTI people continued to face discrimination and persecution.

By an annual ranking of countries compiled and published by Reporters Without Borders, Russia is on the 150th place from 180 countries by the level of press freedom<sup>15</sup>.

Such trends in the country form the discontent of the population, there is an increase in public activity. These negative tendencies give rise to a feeling of uncertainty about the future, the uncertainty of life prospects, and increase tension in society. All this leads to the emergence of unresolvable conflicts and constantly creates explosive situations.

### Time frame of modern resistance

The time frame of modern resistance in Russia is shaped by the current political and social problems of the country. These problems began already in the 2000s and continue to this day. The domestic political crisis in Russia escalated into a global crisis after the events of February 2022. The most striking bursts of protest activity in Russia have always been associated with specific events in the public and political life of the country.

Timeline of bursts of protest activity:

- 2011-2012 («the Snow Revolution» due to massive fraud in the elections to the State Duma of the VI convocation on December 4, 2011, continued after the presidential elections held on March 4, 2012)
- 2014 (against the war in Ukraine)
- 2017-2018 (anti-corruption protests organized by opposition leader Alexei Navalny)
- 2019 (prohibition of opposition candidates from running for the Moscow City Duma)
- 2020 (rewriting of the constitution, «Obnulenie» (which means zeroing out) the previous presidential terms of Vladimir Putin)
- 2021 (protests in defense of Alexei Navalny: in January 2021, Alexei returns to Russia after being treated for poisoning in Germany, where he is taken under arrest from an airplane, and then the court sentences him to imprisonment)
- 2022 (against the war in Ukraine)



## Historical excursus

In this section, I make a brief overview of the strongest and brightest resistance examples in Russian history in terms of their mass and saturation with aesthetic material. This review includes 2 important historical events: the October Revolution and Perestroika, followed by the collapse of the USSR and the formation of the Russian Federation.



Boris Kustodiev, «Bolshevik» (detail), 1920

## Consistent style of the October Revolution

The October Revolution of 1917 was a significant event for the Russian people and for the world. During this period, from the side of visual communications, we see the unity of style and conceptual message. The Russian avant-garde of the 1920s wanted to instantly transform the world with the power of art, like the revolution that the Bolsheviks talked about. And this common desire united the artists with the winning party.

Avant-garde means «vanguard» in the language of war. In Russia, the avant-garde declared itself in the late 1900s: as a rule, independent, original Russian art is counted from it against the backdrop of two centuries of imitation. The novelty of the avant-garde is not only in ideas, but in the degree of their radicalism, sources of inspiration, and means of expression. The avant-garde relied on medium that were «low» for the educated class: popular prints, primitives, and urban advertising.



Aleksandr Rodchenko, «Dobrolet», 1923



El Lissitzky, «Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge», 1919

### Dominating red color

The symbol of the Bolsheviks was red color and the October Revolution is also called the Red Revolution. The opponents of the revolution were The White Army, which was assembled from the republican-minded liberals and Kerenskyite social-democrats on the left through monarchists and supporters of a united multinational Russia to the ultra-nationalist Black Hundreds on the right. Apart the white color they also used Russian Empire flag the same flag of the Contemporary Russian Federation.

### Union of the ruling party and the avant-garde, expansion to all possible media

After the revolution, the connection between the artistic avant-garde and politics did not stop, but only grew stronger. It was necessary to continue active propaganda in order to



## Union of the ruling party and the avant-garde, expansion to all possible media

After the revolution, the connection between the artistic avant-garde and politics did not stop, but only grew stronger. It was necessary to continue active propaganda in order to strengthen party ideas in society, not to lose the conquered power and build a new way of life in the newly created country. The Russian avant-garde, under the auspices of the ideas of the ruling party, is taking on new forms: cinematic and material (architecture, industrial design, fashion design). In all forms that the avant-garde takes, clean lines begin to prevail, the rejection of intricate ornament and any unnecessary and non-functional element, geometric clarity, color symmetries. This revolutionary art has changed both the idea of the world and the language in which this world is described.



Varvara Stepanova, sketch of a tracksuit, 1923



Poster «Working woman, take a rifle!» 1920s

## Feminism under Bolshevism

Feminism was especially clearly reflected in the communications of the Bolshevik revolutionary propaganda. A noteworthy fact: the February Revolution began with a women's demonstration on February 23 (according to the then changed calendar, March 8), 1917. And in 1921, the Bolsheviks proclaimed the emancipation of women: gender equality, universal suffrage, paid leave for pregnant and lactating women, a guarantee of the possibility of an abortion. And they declared March 8 an official women's holiday. During this period, Alexandra Kollontai becomes the first female minister. Inessa

Armand organizes a women's department in the central committee of the party. At the beginning of the century, great achievements were made for the feminist movement. But at the level of social relations, habits will not change: husbands expect their wives to go to work, raise children and cook dinner<sup>16</sup>. Thus, the women's revolution will not go to the end, but during the reign of Putin, at the beginning of the 21st century, the achievements of the early 20th century will be lost.

## Perestroika and the end of the USSR



«Perestroika» postage stamp, 1988

The country, shocked by the protracted and unsuccessful war in Afghanistan, after a cycle of deaths of the general secretaries of the Central Committee of the CPSU (from November 1982 to March 1985, the country managed to see off three leaders on their last journey) finally saw in 1985 the first young and self-confident

Gorbachev as General Secretary. To replace the Brezhnev stagnation Gorbachev's perestroika comes. During this period, a large-scale movement towards the democratization of the political regime took place in the USSR. At the January plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU in 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev spoke about glasnost, the democratization of the CPSU, and alternative elections. In the same year, a large group of political prisoners was amnestied. In this situation, on May 28, 1988, the first rally was held near the Izvestia building on Pushkinskaya Square in Moscow, in which about 100 people took part. Then these rallies on Pushkinskaya become regular.

In May 1989, the work of the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR began and the whole country watched its broadcast on TV — such congresses, with discussions and alternative voting, have not been since the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks in 1918. The congress was accompanied by mass rallies in Luzhniki, the number of which rose to 100.000 people. Opposition rallies remained at about the same level until August 1991, when at least half a million people came out to defend the new Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, from the putschists.

## Underground crawled out and roamed

There was an underground art in the USSR that was in opposition to the censorship policy of the Communist Party. During the Brezhnev period, this art felt the opportunity to freely go out to the public, form associations, and receive exhibition spaces. But the opposition of this underground art has become even more noticeable. The artists felt freer, saw examples of how people are no longer imprisoned for



Joanna Stingray and Sergey Kuryokhin in studio 50a of the gallery «Assa»



«March 8, 1990» (pictured is Vladislav Mamyshev-Monroe), photo by Sergey Borisov

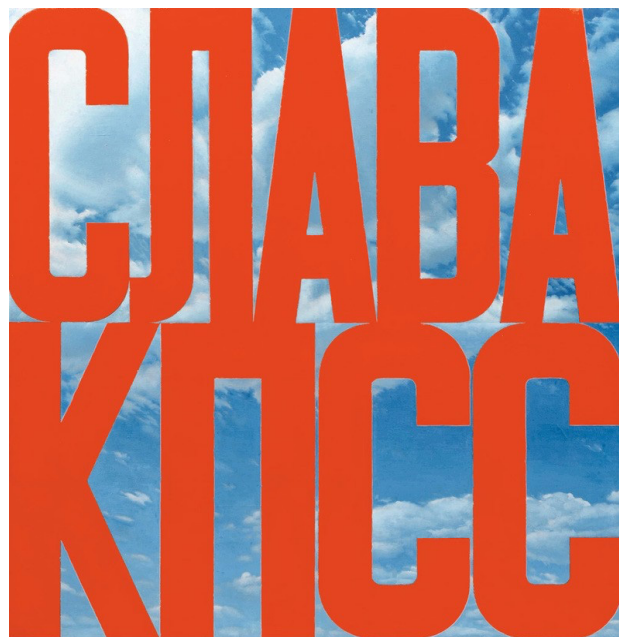
speaking out, and began to express their opinions brighter and louder. During this period, we see a surge in the creative environment and a great variety in the form and content of their works. This is social art, and conceptualism, and actionism, and music, and even the very life of artists. Bohemia, who felt freedom and permissiveness, also in her own way, by one style of life, put herself

in opposition to accepted norms. For the first time, taboo topics began to be openly touched upon, and the country seemed to be appeared for all to see. Cultural figures «bare» her and showed all her accumulated social and political problems.



## Historical allegory / Sots Art

There was a deep pattern in the fact that historical allegory became a symbol of political change. In the 1970s, it was not customary to talk openly about the politics of the past, and historians attribute this, among other things, to the impossibility of coming to democratization in those years. It is believed that the cleansing of society from lies and violence was artificially interrupted, which means that bringing this process to the end will make the repetition of political terror completely impossible. In perestroika, such a phenomenon as Sots Art appeared - pop art in the Soviet style. In the West, artists reflect on the consumer society. And in the Soviet Union over a catastrophic shortage of consumer goods.



Glory to the CPSU II, Erik Bulatov, 2002–2005



Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid  
«The Birth of Socialist Realism»

Sots Art was engaged in the reinventing of slogans, propaganda clichés and images. From this approach, a historical allegory was born, seasoned with a large share of humor. Stalinist aesthetics and the aesthetics of the Communist Party were ridiculed, it was caricature art. Also, the colossal role of verbal images in the aesthetics of Sots Art brought it closer to the world tradition of conceptual art, which was based on the position of the American artist Joseph Kossuth that «art exists only in the form of an idea».

## In the beginning was the Word

As we said earlier, Russian art ceased to imitate Europe and found its artistic expression in the late 1900s. A little earlier than painting, Russian literature made its breakthrough, creating the philosophical novel of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky — a great form that had no correspondence in world literature. In Russian culture, verbal art occupies a special role, and in the context of protest communications, in addition



Demonstration on Red Square in 1968, on the banner «For your and our freedom»

to classical forms, it takes on a musical form, the form of anecdotes and short, bright, easy-to-remember slogans. The refrain of Viktor Tsoi's song revolved in everyone's head: «Change, we are waiting for change». And «For your and our freedom», first written on a banner at a demonstration on Red Square in 1968 against the entry of troops into Czechoslovakia, did not lose its relevance in subsequent years.



Viktor Tsoi in the finale of the film «ACCA», 1987

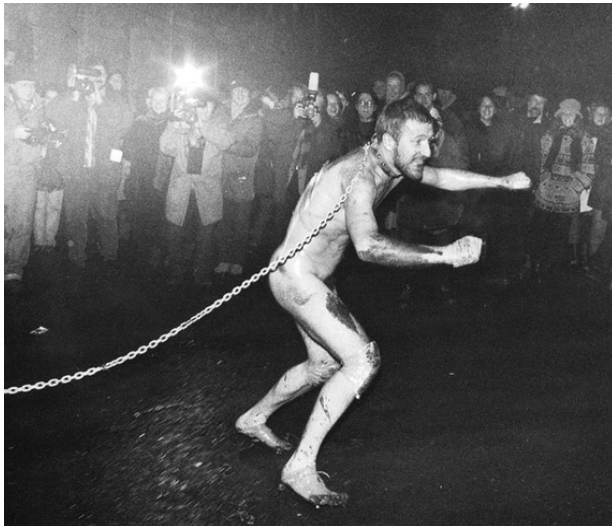
## Music

The area where the underground managed to overcome its elitist character and become truly mass was rock, which made independent art a central part of youth culture. Rock forms the non-conformist thinking of the younger generation, «shakes the foundations», creates a scale of values

that is clearly irrelevant to the Soviet ideology. The cradle of the revolution becomes the cradle of Russian rock. «Aquarium», «Alisa», «Kino», «Zoo» - the work of these groups and their leaders is gaining unprecedented popularity. It is worth noting the literary

roots in this music, in Russian rock the poetic basis of the songs was much more important than in American or European.

But music affects a person not only through the meaning of words, but also emotionally, with its sound. Viktor Tsoi's song «I Want Changes» greatly raised the spirits of its listeners and inspired the younger generation to change. In addition to Tsoi, Soviet punks like the groups «Automatic Satisfiers», «Civil Defense», «Second Echelon», Yuri Shevchuk prepared the country for perestroika and actively expressed their civic position. Rock in perestroika is the stronghold of the avant-garde, it is the desire for change, to the rhythm of the new time.



Oleg Kulik, «The Mad Dog performance»,  
Moscow, November 1994

### Actionism

In parallel with rock, actionism developed in the USSR. These were the brightest artistic expressions in Moscow since the early 1990s. They were political and social in nature, and distinguished by their radicalism. The goal of actionism is to attract attention and draw it to specific problems. Highlight individual phenomena, exciting society to the maximum. This was the first wave of actionism, followed by the second and third in the late 2000s and to our days, and we will still see his legacy.

Later the aesthetics of Sots Art turned from a radical artistic breakthrough that updated the language and philosophy of art into the property of commerce, and its leaders began to change their artistic style and largely fell out of the focus of public attention. Ended by the beginning of the 1990s and an incredible surge of Russian rock.



## Instruments and approach

### What types of communication do I cover?

would like to observe in my research communication/aesthetic types of works such as:

- Modern media (memes, video on YouTube, mediactivism etc);
- Graphic design (journal covers / posters / manifestation banners / illustrations);
- Activism;
- Street art and public art;
- Text / Poetry / Music / Video clips;
- Fine Art;
- Fashion (clothes / jewellery / etc).

As a result, I consider all forms of communication that the resistance in Russia takes. In this case, I am not limited to the type of communication, but I filter out works according to the principle of their significance for the Russian public media space. In the next section, I will look at the principles by which I determine the significance of the work.

### By what principle do I determine the main actors of the civil resistance? How I select the material?

To determine the significance of a particular figure for the Russian resistance, I use the following methods:

- I use Medialogy ratings. Medialogy is a company that developed an automatic real-time monitoring and analysis system for mass media and social media. I use it's ratings and reports about Telegram and Youtube channels, Instagram and Tiktok bloggers, most cited newspapers and journalists for 2021 and 2022. I sift out among them those who are associated with protest activities in Russia and include them in my research list;
- The next step is to go through the content of the most cited opposition newspapers and the articles of the most cited opposition journalists for who they write about and what events are significant for the civil resistance;
- In parallel with this, my list of case studies includes all those who are mentioned by professional experts in their works and articles related to my subject;
- After the initial selection, I verify the significance of a particular protest actor by the number of subscribers in those accounts that he uses to communicate with his target audience. I also take into account the number of reposts and likes on publications related to the work of civil resistance actors.

## Material basis

As we will see in the Case Studies section, when analyzing trends in the field of modern Russian resistance, all communication has moved for the most part to the Internet, as the only free platform in the Russian information space. On the one hand, this is a specific, on the other hand, a global phenomenon, which allowed me to collect the entire body of material that was necessary for my research.

## Analysis approach

The analysis of works is based on classic questions<sup>17</sup> that can be divided into 3 categories: content/meaning analysis, technical description and emotional context. This analysis will help me to define works and in consequence arrive to the answers to my research questions and conclusions which can be made on the base of it.

### Meanings

1. What theme or themes do we find? What is it about?
2. Which items are used and what role does they play in Russian and global culture and society?
3. What sociological, political, economic or cultural attitudes are reflected in the work?

### General technical description

1. Which media is used? In which context the work is done?
2. Form, composition, colours, text, voice, montage analysis

### Description of emotional context

1. What is the general ambience? What mood does it create? How does it do this?
2. What language is used? Does it essentially provide information or does it try to generate some kind of emotional response? Or both? What techniques are used by the copywriter: humor, alliteration, definitions of life, comparisons, sexual innuendo, and so on?

## Specifics of Russian resistance communications

### The literary genre

Russian culture is very rich in works of the literary genre. There is such a catchphrase: «The great and mighty Russian language», first used by Turgenev in the 19th century and still widely used — it perfectly characterises this specificity of Russian culture. Including in the communications of the resistance, the form of Russian literature prevails. But in the modern context, it is transforming and very variable.

### Slogans and catchphrases

Literature in the arsenal of opposition writers, like Dmitry Bykov, turns into catch phrases indispensable for protest, like: «Don't rock the boat, our rat is sick» (Putin used the phrase about «rocking the boat», and he is meant by the rat). In the photo on the right, we see the writer himself with the above-mentioned phrase on the poster, at a rally in 2012.



One of the main visual components at resistance rallies is posters with slogans. One of these slogans became especially famous and popular: «You don't even imagine us!» (on the photo on the right). Its author is Pavel Arsenyev, a young poet and philologist. In Russian the word «представляете» have different meanings: imagine, have an idea and represent. Thanks to this play on words this slogan has several meanings: 1 — about the crisis of representative democracy: «you are not our representatives», 2 — «you have no idea what we are capable of», 3 — your ideology (the ideology of power) is designed so that it does not see us (the younger generation of the author of the slogan) , we are excluded from your system of ideological representations.





«Monstration», mass art action in the form of a demonstration with slogans and banners 2012

Researcher Boris Eikhenbaum, analyzing the campaign speech of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, rightly noted that in his campaign speech, almost consistent slogans, there is always an emotional tone. Of course, we are not talking about shouting something when we gather in city squares, but we are talking about the fact that this form of utterance presupposes some emotional compression already

within itself. Therefore, the form of the slogan is so important for modern protest. Also, literature in all its glory in modern expression finds itself in a new poetic genre — rap. We will analyze this phenomenon as one of the most popular forms of communication of oppositional ideas later.



## Opposition text in fashion

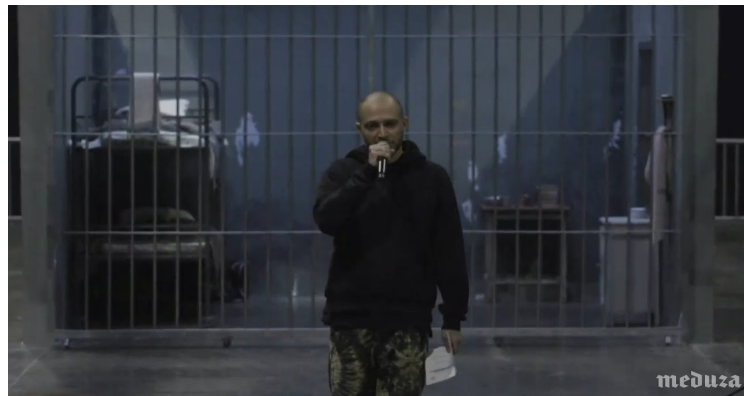
Very often, texts, individual phrases, lines and numbers of laws, according to which repressive measures are applied, become part of fashion, spread on clothes and accessories. In the example on the left: PROTESTORE T-shirt. On it is written the text «20.2.» - this is an article for violating the established procedure for organizing or holding a meeting, rally, demonstration, march or picket. PROTESTORE write about their activities: «This is our, and now your way to boldly resent and share, and not experience what is happening around you alone. This is another peaceful form of protest. Wearing our t-shirt or sweatshirt, you spread the idea, make others think, and ultimately change reality».



On the right is a decoration with the «Foreign Agent (in Russian Иноагент, “Inoagent”)» tag from the AUGUST brand. This is a reference to the situation regarding laws on «foreign agents» and «undesirable organizations» which were actively used to smear independent non-governmental organization. Here is what the brand writes about this pendant: «We believe that if there are a lot of items with this word, then the negative context may decrease, and the “shameful” status will depreciate. We will send the profit from the sale to two «foreign agents» - the Violence.Net center and the Meduza, independent news website.

## Political prisoners and Russian resistance communication

Support for political prisoners is becoming a separate area of activity for artists-activists. Since the mid-2000s, trials of cultural figures have become commonplace, and participation in rallies, pickets, exhibitions and concerts in support of them has become a regular activity for cultural figures. On the right is a



frame from the #сядьзатекст (go to jail for the text) action in support of Yegor Zhukov, 19.09.2019

## Drop of drugs as an instrument of political repression in Russia

In 2009, were illegally dropped drugs to the organizer of the Novosibirsk «Monstrations» Artyom Loskutov. As a result of the unfolding international campaign in his support, the imprisonment that threatened Loskutov turned into a penalty. Legislative article 228<sup>18</sup> of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation: «Illegal acquisition, storage, transportation, manufacture, processing of narcotic drugs, psychotropic lesions or their processing ...» is nicknamed «People's article». More than 100.000 people are judged by it every year. This article was to fight the opposition and objectionable journalists<sup>19</sup>. In such cases, there are always serious inconsistencies and violations that arise that drugs can be dropped.





Совместное заявление редакций «Ведомостей», «Коммерсанта» и РБК о деле Ивана Голунова

6 июня по подозрению в покушении на сбыт и производство наркотиков был задержан специальный корреспондент отдела расследований издания «Медуза» Иван Голунов.

Мы приветствуем выбор судом более адекватной, чем заключение в СИЗО,

6 июня наш коллега-журналист, корреспондент отдела расследований «Медузы» Иван Голунов был задержан по подозрению в сбыте наркотиков и в течение 30 часов в одиночном заключении. Большая часть этого времени ему и его адвокатам не давали поговорить с родными и вызвать адвоката. После предъявления обвинения он был заключен под домашний арест. Голунов много писал о коррупции и темной стороне бизнеса, не раз выходя на улицы и свой адрес. Голунов отразил свою вину, его друзья и коллеги считают, что возбуждение уголовного дела — это попытка запугать журналиста и врасплох вывести его профессиональной деятельностью. Мы, редакция «Ведомостей», требуем беспристрастного и открытого расследования дела Голунова, параллельной проверки обоснованности его задержания и законности проведенных с ним следственных действий. Мы считаем, что возмещение гонимой требованной принизиловало уважение к журналистскому сообществу России, что и для всего российского общества и страны. Мы требуем соблюдения закона воле и для всех.

6 июня в Москве был задержан по подозрению в сбыте наркотиков и впоследствии помещен под домашний арест журналист Иван Голунов. Появление самого уголовного дела и обстоятельств задержания Ивана вызывают много вопросов, в том числе к соблюдению законов

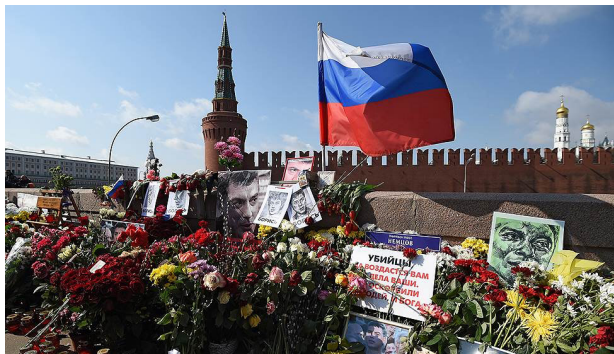
As an example, I would like to cite the criminal case against the journalist of the Meduza publishing house, Ivan Golunov, initiated on June 6, 2019. It received a great public outcry, led to protests, and for the first time in history, 3 of the most important publications in Russia: RBC, Kommersant and Vedomosti are published on June 10 with the same inscription on the front page - «I / We are Ivan Golunov». «I/We» means that everyone is involved, especially the journalistic community, that Ivan Golunova is me, this is us. This wording will then become one of the symbols of protest and will be used in other actions against unfair justice (for example, I/WE Furgalo, etc).

**Sacrifice and heroism**

In the case of the Pussy Riot action, the first in modern Russian history for which the authors received a real prison term, the artist does not just become a harbinger and catalyst for social processes. He acts as a hero who goes out into the streets

## Aesthetics of the Russian civil resistance

one on one against the system and sacrifices himself — a victim of long-term social transformations, the basis for which he lays the foundation for his artistic gesture aimed at changing social relations and mechanisms.



A memorial to Boris Nemtsov on the Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge, regularly guarded by activists

And this gesture of self-sacrifice is manifested not only in the case of a conscious artistic action. Thanks to the brutal suppression of any opposition activity by the authorities, anyone, a journalist, a politician, just a media personality who expresses his point of view, becomes a victim of repression. Thus, anyone who does not agree with the official agenda in the country takes a courageous step.

And those who take a courageous step systematically and regularly, as individuals, become images of resistance, its heroes. Thus, the murdered politician Boris Nemtsov and journalist Anna Politkovskaya became heroes of the opposition. Journalist Slavina from Nizhny Novgorod, who died by self-immolation. The most famous example of a self-sacrificing opposition politician is, of course,



Graffiti with Alexei Navalny and the inscription «Hero of the New Time» (a reference to Lermontov's work «A Hero of Our Time»), April 28, 2021, St. Petersburg

Alexei Navalny, who was tried to be poisoned, and after treatment in Germany, he returned to Russia and was immediately imprisoned from the plane.



## Women against patriarchy

Also a separate phenomenon in the Russian resistance is the large presence of the female contingent and the female agenda.



Poster caption: «I'm not afraid», 2021

## Women at rallies

Unsanctioned rallies (not officially approved by the authorities) are often a dangerous action for its participants; one can easily end up in custody and/or be beaten up by riot police. A logical consequence follows from this — unsanctioned rallies are most often attended by young and middle-aged men. But Russia shows other statistics. According to a survey of a group of researchers and White Counter volunteers<sup>20</sup>, about 55% of men and 45% of women attended the uncoordinated rally on January 23, 2021. Political scientist Ekaterina Shulman connects this phenomenon with the demographic situation in the country and draws attention to the fact that the presence of women at the rally brings a peaceful image and plays into the hands of resistance: «A woman cannot be beaten according to moral standards in our patriarchal society. They still beat them (meaning cases of brute force being used against women by law enforcement agencies

at unauthorized rallies), but it looks especially terrible and attracts attention»<sup>21</sup>.

### The feminist movement against power as a manifestation of patriarchy

The agenda put forward by the feminist community is very active in the information field. This, in turn, is connected with the phenomena that I mentioned in the political prerequisites and which the art critic and curator Oksana Sargsyan writes about: «... the re-gendering of Putin's Russia is due to the tightening of economic conditions of life. As a result, the struggle for survival intensifies (survival of the fittest). This contributes to the spread of



Feminist group Pussy Riot during the «Punk prayer» in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior February, 2012



machismo and the strengthening of sexist sentiments in society, gives rise to the persecution of sexual and national minorities. The reduction of social guarantees leads to the displacement of women from the public sphere, the insecurity of motherhood, the adoption of a law that complicates the abortion procedure, a return to patriarchal morality and the standards of a patriarchal family. It is not surprising that in the field of political representations, it was feminists who turned out to be the face of the opposition and put up such powerful resistance to the Russian president that they turned out to be an alternative to Putin's authoritarian regime»<sup>22</sup>. Right: graffiti by Gandhi, 2015, St. Petersburg, the inscription: «Raped? Give birth! God will help».



## Youth of resistance

The period of Vladimir Putin's rule in Russia — from December 31, 1999, not counting the «castling» with Dmitry Medvedev, to our time (spring 2022) — is more than 22 years. A whole generation was born, grew up and became independent, which did not see another president, except for Putin. The current president will turn 70 in 2022. With the generation that now takes an active life



Photo from the rally, 05.12.2018

position (studies at the university, works, makes plans for the future), the president has a difference of half a century. As we have seen earlier, opposition activists express the opinion that the current government does not even represent them, does not represent who they are, does not represent the interests of this new active generation in politics and has no idea what they are capable of. I would like to take a closer look at this aspect of contemporary Russian resistance.



Photo from rally, 31.01.2021

### Unscared generation

Lawyer Sergey Badamshin linked the readiness of the protesters to resist the police at the rallies in 2021 with the fact that nine years have passed since the time of the Bolotnaya case and «a new, fearless generation has grown up». It «did not fall under the repressive machine and does not know the measure of responsibility for such acts, so it happened»<sup>23</sup>, the lawyer believes.

### Information independence and new authorities

The most noticeable distinguishing feature of the youngest Russians is active use of the Internet and social networks. By 2016, the Internet as a source of information overtook television among the youth<sup>24</sup>.



Yuri Dud at the GQ Man of the Year award ceremony 09.11.2019

The journalist and video blogger Yuri Dud (a journalist and interviewer with clearly oppositional views to the current government), practically unknown to the older generation, enjoys the same authority among the young audience as Kiselev and Pozner (journalists from the official news channel). A similar situation is observed in relation to politicians whom the young «trust most of all».

Typically, politicians who are among the most popular (Vladimir Putin, Sergei Shoigu, Sergei Lavrov or Gennady Zyuganov) enjoy noticeably less support among the youngest than in the country as a whole. Compared with people of the older generation, young people trust them almost 2 times less often.

Navalny entered the top ten politicians who enjoy the trust of the population, having no access to federal television channels. In the youth environment in September 2018, the politician overtook Sergei Sobyenin and Pavel Grudinin in popularity, taking sixth place in the general list. Against the backdrop of an aging political elite, Navalny looks modern and speaks to his young supporters in an understandable language. On the right: Navalny with his son during treatment for poisoning in Germany.



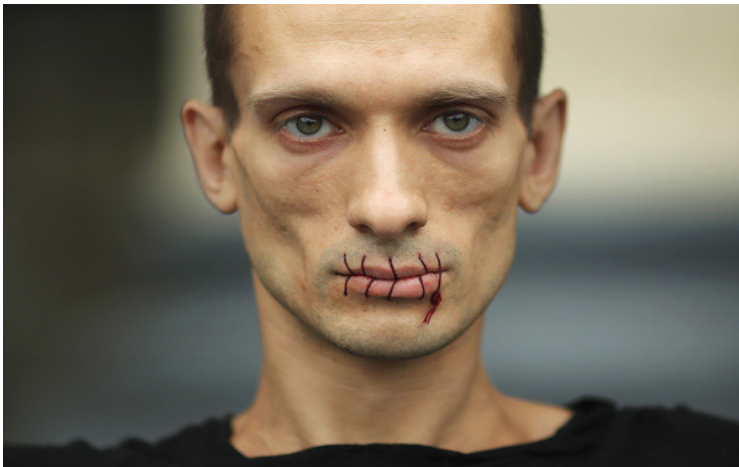
### The attitude of young people to the USA and the West

Young Russians differ from representatives of the older generations in their assessments of the United States and the West: young people treat America and Europe better. The exception was the short periods of the greatest confrontation between Russia and the West - autumn 2008 and spring-summer 2014 (the Russian-Georgian war and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict), when the moods of young people were pulled up to the moods of the rest of the population, but then quickly returned to their original positive condition. Now the difference in views between those who are not yet 25 and who have already crossed the 55-year mark has reached its maximum. For example, the youngest have a positive attitude towards the United States 3 times more often than the elderly (60% versus 20%). Moreover, positive attitudes towards the US and the West among young people are growing, while attitudes among the elderly continue to deteriorate.

Germany, the USA and other European countries are a role model for them (Levada Center obtained such figures in the course of a survey of young residents of the largest Russian cities, conducted jointly with the Boris Nemtsov Foundation)<sup>25</sup>.

## Main trends

### Variety of forms of manifestation: where does it come from



Petr Pavlensky during a solo picket in support of Pussy Riot

#### Lack of other legal forms of communication with the authorities

As can be seen from the list of Russian resistance communication forms that I will be reviewing (section Instruments and approach), we observe a great variety of these forms. As I already mentioned in the description of civil resistance, in Russia legal forms of protest are subject to repression and are often impossible, in this regard, individual

acts of artistic resistance are increasingly becoming expressions of the protest energy of society. This is one of the reasons why we see such a richness and variety of opposition works. Here I cite as an example the action of Petr Pavlensky in defense of Pussy Riot, which he held on July 23, 2012. Having sewn his mouth shut, he stood for an hour and a half in front of the Kazan Cathedral, holding a banner «Pussy Riot's performance was a reenactment of the famous action of Jesus Christ (Matt. 21:12-13)». The activist group Pussy Riot was on trial for the action they had previously held in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior.





Monetochka, «Burn» (2019), single cover

### Reality provokes artists

It is also impossible not to take into account that artists, creators, in the broad sense of the word, all those who create various works and are engaged in creativity, do not exist in a vacuum. Resistance is a reaction to reality, a demonstration of one's point of view and one's feelings. Circumstances dictate content and form. Petr Pavlensky, a famous action artist, said: «The more difficult the situation in the region, the more new forms of art can be born there»<sup>26</sup>. On the cover and in the content

of the song «Burn» in 2019, we see the singer Monetochka's unambiguous reaction to the burning forests of Siberia summer 2019.

## What media and how they have transformed over the years



Alexei Navalny on the cover of Afisha in 2013

### Traditional media

As we could see from the historical digression, in the 20th century protest moods and ideas spread in different ways: through posters, leaflets, radio, cinema, classical literary form. We are already seeing the use of urban space, in fact the birth of graffiti. All these communication carriers remained in service with the Russian resistance in the future. But in the second decade of the 21st century, the presence of new forms becomes bright: social networks are replacing printed publications, and art is being digitized, actionism is complemented by media activism. Thus, for example, the Afisha magazine, which reflects all aspects of the life of the Russian capital, including the opposition,

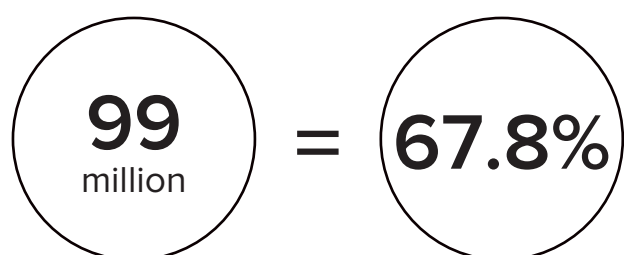
which has been published in print since 1999, ceases to be published in print in 2015.

### Digitisation and social networks

In parallel with the deterioration of the political and social situation in the country, in Russia, as well as throughout the world, the presence of social networks in people's lives is developing. And along with social networks, Russians get an alternative channel for communications. In 2007, YouTube comes to Russia, gradually starting to replace television, many independent journalists go to this platform. In 2008, the social network Facebook announced the launch of a Russian-language version of the site.



By the beginning of the 2020s this process covered almost all of Russia, as well as almost all social and age groups. The formation of meanings and styles, the establishment of social ties and the actual organization of political actions have completely moved into the virtual space. Instagram is following Facebook and YouTube. And in 2021, TikTok is being politicized<sup>27</sup>, after the detention of Alexei Navalny. The TikTok audience is actively participating in the dissemination of information about the rally in support of the politician and against corruption.



In Russia, 99 million social media users, or 67.8% of the population (data as of January 2021)<sup>28</sup>

A large presence of digital forms and genres of demotivators and photo-toads typical of the Internet spilled onto the streets during the mass protests of 2011-2012. On posters, we see mostly either this type of images or text slogans. Russia, with odious motivational Soviet posters, turned out to be a particularly fertile ground for demotivators.



Poster: «You called us, so we came», rally 2011

Also indicative of the influence of the Internet space and communications in its new formats is the case of mass protests in 2017-2018<sup>29</sup>. On March 2, 2017, an anti-corruption investigative film by Navalny's team «He is not Dimon to you» (Он вам не Димон), about Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev and his property, is released on the Youtube platform; as of the beginning of January 2022, the film has more than 44 million views.



The yellow duck became a symbol of anti-corruption protests in 2017-2018, filmed in the reservoir of the Medvedev estate

After a lack of response from the authorities, Navalny called for anti-corruption rallies, which subsequently took place from March 26, 2017 to May 5, 2018. According to Meduza and OVD-Info<sup>30</sup>, from 50.000 to 98.000 people took part in the protests in 154 cities.

### Media activism

A new genre appears, media activism — these are the same artistic and political actions, but in the virtual space. This form allows you to reach a much larger audience. At the same time, it is no less risky, today in Russia you can get a prison term for commenting on social networks. At the same time, in the media space there is a chance to remain anonymous. But in such cases, the artist or activist renounces authorship, and his work becomes popular.



Slava Ptirc, «No Freedom to the Enemies of Freedom», for the NFT auction in support of the repressed independent publication Meduza, 2021

## What media are the most common and popular

The most popular communication forms of resistance in Russia are memes, rap, graffiti and art activism. Each of these forms reaches mass distribution in the Russian media space. And in this section, we will analyze how and why this happens.



Alexey Merinov, caricature

This is a refrain that goes through the art and life of a Russian person, we fight through laughter. First, you need to get rid of the sacredness. What is funny is never scary again. And if it's not scary, then you can win. Thus, memes in Russia are also a kind of conceptualism. Erica Chenoweth, an American political scientist who studies the effectiveness of non-violent resistance, wrote in one of her speeches about the need for this kind of manifestation of dissent: «Because it made the regime look completely ridiculous. Then everybody knows how silly it is. So ultimately you know that overtime of these low-risk actions that put people into position to be more confident to vote “No”. It shows that you are not alone

### Humor, memes and conceptualism

Memes are a global phenomenon, but on Russian soil they are especially native and historical. In Soviet times, the genre of political jokes was very common. Also, the previous forms of art, which were characterized by opposition, sots art, conceptualism, are about laughter, mocking the authorities and the country, politics.



Meme: «Robin Put: steal from the poor, give to the rich». The author of the meme was fined by the court for 40.000 rubles under the article about «disrespect for the authorities», 15 January 2021



you are not alone so when there's a sort of strategic opportunity or moment around which people can unite, they know that people are going to show up»<sup>31</sup>.



Protesters with brushes on the action on January 23, 2021 after the release of the film «Putin's Palace», in which a golden brush bought for 700 euros was mentioned, and after that it became a meme

Another interesting nuance in the Russian information space is the fact that the content for memes is provided by the authorities themselves. The objects of communication design produced by protesters usually appear as a reaction to specific actions of the authorities, or as a reaction to new information about this authority that revolts people. This is often an answer, a mockery, like a distorted mirror.

A vivid example of such media was the clip of Alexander Gudkov and the pop group Cream Soda «Akvadiskoteka». The clip appeared after Navalny's arrest and the release of his film «Putin's Palace». In the description, the authors clearly stated their position: «Aqua disco is cool, but not when someone is in prison. We are for a free competitive environment in any business. We are against restricting the freedom of innocent people».



Alexandr Gudkov and the pop group Cream Soda, Cover for the clip «Akvadiskoteka», 2021

At the same time, the musicians, commenting on their work, note the dominant role of humor: «It's just a hefty meme that sits in your head and it's impossible to get rid of it in any other way than to create something else» (Vadim Seleznev, producer of the Chicken Curry production ).



### Music is the new poetry

If we remember the protest period of Perestroika, rock was the music of the resistance. Rock is also present in modern protest, but the niche of mass protest music has been occupied by rap and hip-hop genres. Also, musicians often go beyond genre boundaries and work at the intersection of different styles.



Cover of the Noize MC video «Everything is like all people have» (2019)

But if we take the most popular contemporary music genre, rap, we see that for the Russian context the text in it and its meanings are of great importance. Also important is the visual continuation of the song - a music video, which in the hands of opposition musicians turn into a mouthpiece for conveying ideas.

### Didn't want to but were involved

The works are not always intended to express dissent, they can simply be an act of self-expression, not related to the social or political agenda. But sometimes these works and / or their creators get involved into the field of protest because of the reaction to them from the authorities. That is, the government itself, with its repressive approach, places the works and their creators in opposition to it, and for this reason they become part of the resistance in Russia. And as a result, individual works and events are gaining even more fame because of the scandal around them. The famous artist Artyom Loskutov spoke on this topic: «We are going to do something like this again — we will not evaluate it as a provocation, as a step against the state, as something illegal, but it will turn out the same»<sup>32</sup>.

As an example, I want to cite the loudest and most paradoxical case from the music industry. Rapper Morgenshtern is a very famous person in the Russian-speaking media space. It ranked second on Spotify in 2020, won in the Forbes Russia, «30 under 30» nomination.



Clip cover Cadillac, 9 July 2020

The work of the rapper has always been provocative, but the topics that he touched on did not go far beyond the classic topics of rap artists: he sang about his financial success, about popularity with girls, about his creative path and did not show clear political positions, did not raise the social agenda. But unexpectedly for everyone, the figure of the rapper was placed in a political context due to accusations of drug trafficking by the head of the Investigative Committee, Alexander Bastrykin, on the federal TV channel<sup>33</sup>. After that, he immediately left Russia and went to Dubai. In forced emigration, Morgenshtern continues to talk about his personal life in his songs and videos, but now it is political in nature, due to the repressive actions of the authorities themselves.

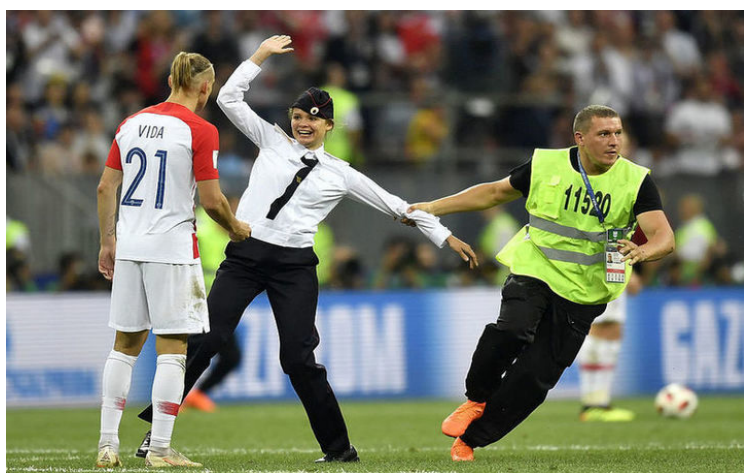


Clip frame «12», 13 March 2022

His last work, the video for the song «12» is a statement on the theme of the war in Ukraine. Although he does not explicitly mention in the video, whose fault this war was unleashed, but even before that, the apolitical musician spoke out on a topic that it was already indecent not to speak out in the Russian media space.

Next, I want to give a few examples of the songs of these musicians and the number of views of their videos on the YouTube platform in order to get an idea of the popularity of this medium as a message of opposition ideas:

Vasya Oblomov «Life is getting better» (2018) — more than 2 million  
Face «Humorist» (2019) — more than 74 million  
Noize MC «Everything is like all people have» (2019) — more than 25 million  
IC3PEAK «March» (2020) — more than 41 million  
SPLEEN «Pass this on to Harry Potter if you meet him» (2020) — more than 4 million  
Shortparis «Moscow speaking» (2021) — more than 1.5 million  
Oxxxymiron «Beauty and ugliness» (2021)— 5th place in the world ranking of Spotify<sup>34</sup>



Pussy Riot Action, «The Policeman Enters the Game», World Cup 2018

### Art activism

It is believed that a hybrid of art and political activism — activist art — originated in America in the mid-1970s. According to one of its early theorists and curators, Nina Felshin: «activist art is characterized by the innovative use of public spaces to address socially significant topics and galvanize communities into action»<sup>35</sup>.

Protest art activism, which includes elements of self-sacrifice and self-torture, echoes the tradition of «Viennese actionism», with the destructive works of Rudolf Schwarzkogler and Otto Mühl, as well as with the artistic tactics of «Moscow actionism», with the animal behavior of the «man-dog» Kulik and antisocial antics of Brener, whose work I touched upon in a historical digression. But the Viennese and Moscow actionism spoke of total disunity and the existential



Pavel Pavlensky and other artists, action in support of Ukraine, February 2014, St. Petersburg

abandonment of man. On the contrary, today's art activism promotes community, solidarity and mutual assistance.

### Cognitive terrorism

Art activism sets itself the initial goal of drawing maximum attention to specific problems in the society in which it operates. Mikhail Gronas called the techniques of art activism «cognitive terrorism»: that is, artists achieve similar media effects with the help of symbolic violence to those that terrorists manage to



Activist Kado, «Blinded Russia with blood on her hands», September 2014, against the war in Ukraine

achieve with the help of subjective violence (Slavoj Zizek's term). Thus, even if art activism may not be loved, and not be popular among the masses, its goal in any case is to achieve maximum media coverage and reach out to the maximum possible number of people.



## Street art

Street art, which, in the context of the Russian resistance, is illegally placed by artists in the urban space (outside of this oppositional context, it could be placed legally). These can be graffiti, stickers, posters, stencils, and even small ceramic objects, which are united by the function of information partisanship: through them they convey their ideas to casual viewers. As a rule, city authorities are actively fighting



Grffiti portrait of Maria Kolesnikova, inscription: «For your and our freedom», St. Petersburg, September 8, 2021

street art, destroying it more active, the more current political agenda is presented in the work. Due to such an instant reaction from the authorities, street art objects often gain the necessary media distribution, become even more visible.

## Street as an art space and Red Square as a place of attraction



Art group Yav, «Patience», Russia

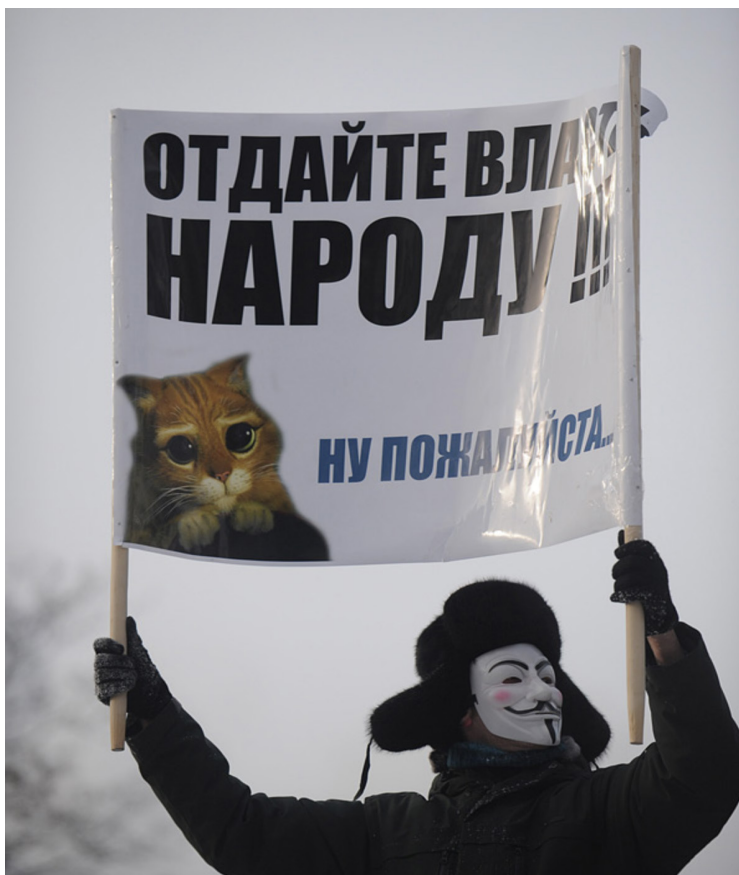
The street as an unconventional unauthorized space is becoming the main arena of artistic expression today, and the authorities, which react to them with forceful repressive measures, are the main audience that creates the necessary media effect for them. Red Square in Moscow is becoming one of the central platforms for artistic expression. It is the symbolic space of the focus of the Russian power and at the same time a powerful resource for activism. Any appeal to this space gives a constant media resonance.

## Aesthetics of the Russian civil resistance

One of the most high-profile actions of recent years on Red Square was the performance «Fixation» by the artist Petr Pavlensky in February 2014. The naked author nailed his scrotum to the Kremlin paving stones with a nail. According to the artist, this action can be seen as a metaphor for the «apathy, political indifference and fatalism of modern Russian society», which «was taken by the balls».



## Influence of world mass culture



Posters from a rally in Moscow in 2012.  
Text: «Give power to the people!!! Oh please»

Attributes of mass culture have repeatedly become symbols of protest in different countries, and Russia, as part of the global world, is not the exception<sup>36</sup>. At demonstrations, we see people wearing Guy Fawkes masks. This mask entered modern popular culture through the film «V for Vendetta», where it was worn by the protagonist, who fought against the totalitarian regime in the alternative history of Great Britain. In general, on self-made posters during rallies in Russia, we often see famous cartoon characters and characters from films / TV shows.

## From Diversity to Consolidation in 2022



The hashtag #nowar, the most common on a black background in the Russian media space

In the resistance to the current regime before the protests of 2022, we can notice both the diversity and heterogeneity of the protesters' communications. Most of the protests were related to local problems that were not able to unite Russians throughout the country. The image of the «beautiful Russia of the future» differed radically among different categories of Russian society. Many were dissatisfied with the status quo, but sought opposite results. Some celebrities, including

popular vloggers and rappers, attended the Moscow protests, but none of them took the lead or gave a clear idea of what to aim for<sup>37</sup>. In the situation of protest in 2022, we notice the consolidation of all social forces around one common problem — the war in Ukraine. The protest unites around 2 simple ideas: «No to war» and «Down with Putin» — as an image of the only reason for this war. The protest movement had a specific common goal, gradually uniting the style as well. The style of the Russian resistance becomes military — it is brutal, even more straightforward.

Brutality is manifested both in visual images and in literature. Posters at rallies, statements of media personalities become emotionally charged, and these emotions are far from positive and pacifist. In verbal resistance, swearing appears — like the language of war.



## Aesthetics of the Russian civil resistance



The action of feminists «Give birth to meat» at the military registration and enlistment office of the Leningrad region



Anti-war action of the art group «Party of the Dead», on the signs on the right: «We don't leave our people (only their corpses)», «Russians don't bury Russians», on the left: «Mothers! Your kids are fake», 07.03.2022



## Color in protest, white and black

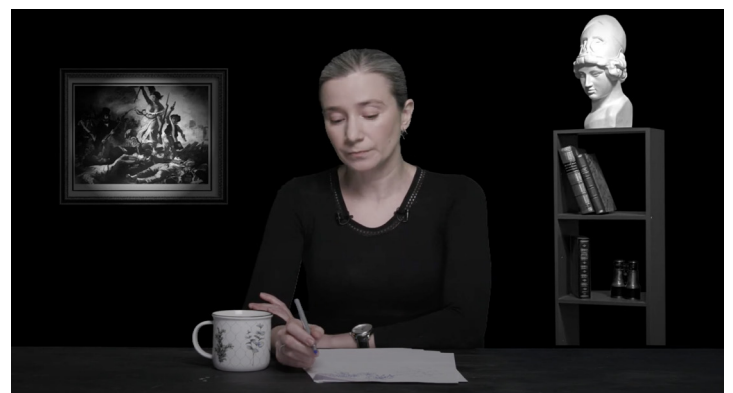
In actions, rallies, and up to revolutionary forms of resistance, symbolism and color play an important role, as one of the manifestations of this symbolism.



The white color, as a massive symbol of Russian resistance, appeared during the 2012 rallies. In Moscow, as part of the action «For Fair Elections», a flash mob «Big White Circle» was held, during which several tens of thousands of people, holding hands, closed the Garden Ring with a human chain. Each of the participants in this action was tied with a white ribbon.

In the case of these protests, the white color symbolised the struggle «For honest government!», for purity and transparency. But the white color did not go beyond its medium, the ribbon, and did not become widely used in the communication works of resistance participants in Russia until its appearance in the new flag of Russia proposed from the resistance in 2022.

In the communication works of the Russian resistance in 2022 I notice another color dominating in communication works of the Russian resistance: black. This is due to a new unifying reason for the protest: the war in Ukraine. Black: This is the color of sorrow. The Russians mourn for their close people, who are dying from their own army, and mourn for their ruined future. This is mourning for Russia, which is falling apart before our eyes.



Frame from the live broadcast of Ekaterina Shulman «Black February» 27.02.2022

## Transformation of the national flag

Political scientist Ekaterina Shulman, in her program «Not news, but events» on March 17, 2022, drew attention to the importance of symbolism and the flag as a manifestation of this symbolism: «You should never underestimate the importance of the symbolic in politics. The flag is a spectacular symbol that survives centuries and crosses distances. It cannot be forgotten and should be easy to reproduce. The fewer pixels you need to create an image, the more effective that image is».

On the territory of Russia, the flag has been transformed more than once. The White Army used the imperial flag (1883-1917), which was then used during the putsch by Yeltsin and later became the flag of the Russian Federation.



During the Soviet era, the flag was red with a star, hammer and sickle on it. The red color in general plays a big role in the symbolism of Russia. This is the image of power, strength, the image of the red terror, and Red Square, which symbolizes totalitarian power in modern Russia.



During the 2022 protests, the red stripe is cut off from the flag. Thus symbolically getting rid of the bloody past and present. With hope for a non-bloody future. Together with the flag, the Russian people seek to reinvent Russia. And here we see again the white color as dominant, as hope for the brighter future.



## Image of absolute evil



«You can only be afraid of your own fear», NFT art by Brickspacer, 21.01.2021

The image of Putin as the main symbol of key political and social problems in the works of the Russian resistance was very active even earlier. We see memes, posters with him, graffiti and digital works with the image of Putin. But after the events of February 2022, when Vladimir Putin, as the Supreme Commander of the Russian Federation, unleashed a war in Ukraine, this image became even more vivid and understandable for more recipients. The figure of Vladimir Putin is now a figure of absolute evil. Thus, we get a specific image on which all anger and discontent is concentrated. In such a situation, I would like to draw attention to two types of protests: emotional and rational.

## The emotionality of the new consolidated protest



DDT video cover for the song «Where am I»,  
26.03.2022

In a situation of military conflict, relations within the country are also heating up. In relation to what is happening, one gradually does not remain indifferent, and the division into one's own / someone else's begins, a watershed occurs. There is also a general loss, a lack of understanding of what is happening and how the Russians ended up in such a situation — completely

isolated from the outside world, morally and economically. In the communication works of the new round of resistance in Russia in 2022, there is no image of a «bright future», there is an image of absolute evil and a specific enemy. There is a common specific goal, but there is no further agenda behind this goal. Doctor of Psychology, Olga Gurevich, described 2 types of protest: «Path 1 is the emotional path. I see that the position of my group is unfair. I believe that this injustice is caused by some external reasons beyond my control. They attacked me, they don't give me anything. And by «they» can be understood anyone, everyone who is not us. And in this case, I experience anger, and I take part in collective actions in order to realize this anger. That is, anger pushes me to resist. Another path associated with social identity is a more calm, more deliberate path. And it starts with the fact that, having realized that my group is being treated unfairly, I see that there are many of us. That is, I see people who are similar to me, with the same interests, and I begin to believe in the so-called collective efficiency. I believe that there are many of us, together we can do something. This is not an act of despair, this is not an act, in general, of anger - this is quite such a move, associated with faith not even in our own, but in our strengths»<sup>38</sup>.



## **The refutation of the arguments**

There are several interesting theses, questions, phenomena that I did not touch in my research. Below I will give a few of them.

### **Comparison of communication design between resistance and power**

The authorities in Russia are actively promoting their ideas, and it would be interesting to compare the communication works from the authorities with the communications of the resistance. For example, one of the niches it occupies is the military theme. This is the aesthetics of the Second World War and victory in it. Also a very striking phenomenon was the branding of the pro-government group «Z». Propaganda of official power has many interesting examples of the forms of conveying the meanings it needs.

### **Communications of modern resistance in post-Soviet countries**

Strong protest movements took place in many countries of the post-Soviet space, such as: Kazakhstan, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan. It would also be interesting to study and compare the aesthetics of modern resistance between Russia and other countries with which it shares a common past. Then it would be interesting to make a comparison with culturally more distant countries.

### **Conducting surveys**

In this study, I collected visual materials and conducted analysis based on my own observations and on the basis of existing research in my field of interest. This study did not include surveys that could be conducted on different target audiences in Russia in order to obtain new, interesting data on their perception of resistance communications.

### **Cultural details**

Is there a national idea in the resistance? How is European and Asian present in our culture? It would also be interesting to do a more detailed analysis of the historical background and cultural codes in modern Russian resistance.

### **More detailed analysis of the works and identification of the target audience**

In my research, I touched on the main trends in the communications of modern resistance in Russia, but it would also be interesting to look at communication works in detail and identify their target audience based on how these works are done.

### **Communication Efficiency**

If we proceed from the premise that communication design is about effectively conveying an idea and achieving a result, then how effective are the communications of Russian resistance actors? What results do they want to achieve and are they achieving them?

## Results of the research and the contributions

When I started my thesis, my idea was to combine two of my favorite topics: aesthetics and politics. And the main question was whether it is possible to study the material of interest to me by scientific methods? That is, to select key examples of the communication design of modern Russian resistance, structure it, and subject it to analysis. To trace its origins and prerequisites, the main trends. It turned out that it is possible. For me personally, this is the main conclusion and contributions to the culture of the project.

This time I covered the general trends in the communication design of modern Russian resistance. Based on the material I have studied, we have an idea that the main target audience of resistance is the younger generation. From an aesthetic point of view, a large presence of the literary genre is noticeable in the works, in connection with the text-centricity of Russian culture. We see a large presence of a female contingent and a female agenda in the modern Russian resistance. We see a large variation in the styles and messages of resistance communications throughout the 21st century, and we see the prerequisites for its style consolidation in early 2022.

Also in the course of my research, I discovered interesting topics that I listed in the refutation of the arguments. The work on this thesis opened up a whole huge baggage of new material that has not yet been studied by science. In a more detailed study, or series of studies, one could explore these interesting aspects of the intersection of communication design and political, social, cultural processes in the modern world.

My research provides a vector of potential scientific work and potential deeper and more interesting discoveries that can be made based on the analysis of communication work in general, and resistance work in complex political situations in particular.

## **The contributions to the culture of the project and to the design of communication**

In my research, I showed through analysis of communication design a broad and general idea of the state of resistance in contemporary Russian society. My research shows the evolution of communication design and the potential for its development. I have collected and characterized completely new content, which is certainly relevant not only in the context of Russia's internal processes, but also in the context of global processes as well. The conclusions of my research give hope to the modern progressive society for the final consolidation of the Russian resistance.

## **Epilogue**

It is very important for me to add gratitude to my scientific advisor, Savlatore Zingale, scientific editors, Alexander Shmulik Lartsev and Olya Egorcheva, father, mother, Seryozha Klado. If it weren't for the people around me who supported me, helped me with the topic of scientific work, helped me start it, understand what I generally want to achieve with my work, helped me understand the vast sea of topics and material, helped me with tools and approaches. If not for my supervisor and editors, my family and friends, this work would not exist. Thinking globally, all my scientific work, how I started it and how it was done, is based on relationships, communications, feelings, interactions between people. The works that I systematized and analyzed are statements, expressed feelings, aspirations that the authors want to convey to their friends, acquaintances, entourage, other participants in the civil resistance in Russia, for its potential participants, for their fellow citizens. In a global sense, this is the desire for communication. To the dialogue, which unfortunately currently does not exist between the ruling power and the citizens of its country.



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