

BLASPHEMY AS TOOL FOR INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE

**Exploring lineages of religious aesthetics and protest culture in political performance
art through the chronotope of holy foolery**

Case Studies: Oleg Mavromatti, Pussy Riot, Petr Pavlensky

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of History

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2015

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Abstract

This thesis argues that blasphemy can be a tool for institutional critique in political art through the case studies of Oleg Mavromatti, Pussy Riot and Petr Pavlensky. The celebration of artists such as Pussy Riot for their performance work in the global art discourse and the dismissal of the role of blasphemy as a conservative accusation by an oppressive state cannot adequately account for the construction of meaning around the events in Russian culture. Due to a particular formation of liberal Orthodox identity, which is informed by the affiliation of dissidence and religion in Russia and the Soviet Union, the accusation of blasphemy by Orthodox individuals or through federal law functions as a revelation of a larger truth behind a mask of hypocrisy. This thesis deconstructs the presumed universality of the post-Enlightenment notions of institutional critique and constructs a semiotic structure that accounts for seeing blasphemy as a form of institutional critique in the post-Soviet art and culture wars.

Blasphemy becomes a form of critique through the presence of the chronotope of holy foolery, an Orthodox ascetic tradition of institutional critique, anti-authoritarian behavior and a radical imitation of Christ. Artists that are appropriating the topos can be defined by the behavioral and aesthetic characteristics of the historical practice, which are best exemplified in the vitae of St Symeon Salos, a holy fool who committed acts of sacrilege in holy places and against clergy to reveal a larger corruption and feigned religiosity of Christians. The unification of church and state under Vladimir Putin's presidency has fostered the revival of the tradition of institutional critique from within a religious tradition and a competing narrative over secular and sacred space among conservative and liberal Orthodox worldviews that have been defined by the post-Soviet art wars.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was written with the support and advice of many individuals. I would like to thank the CEU History Department for accepting this cross-disciplinary project, and in particular Prof. Karl Hall for his generosity and enthusiasm and Aniko Molnar for her sincere commitment to the students. I am grateful for the Religious Studies Specialization and Prof. Aziz Al-Azmeh for creating a curriculum that has enabled to transform my “intuitions into a knowledge” about religion, and supplemented this metamorphosis with many bottles of wine, cookies and strawberries throughout the year – thank you Esther Holbrook. This work was woven together with the advising of Angelina Lucento and Vlad Naumescu – who have introduced me to the authors that build the skeleton of this thesis, read multiple drafts, and have balanced exceptional critique on the edge of freedom. I thank Ekaterina Piskareva and Nikolai Shevelchinsky, Alexey Sosna, Oleg Mavromatti, Yuri Samodurov and Anya Bernstein for pointing me in, what now appears to be, the right direction. I would like to thank Landon T. Little on behalf of the rogue who has realized that he is a holy fool. I thank my family, Ben and Tatiana, for their love and faith in me.

Dedicated to Giacomo Tagliabue, a fractal serpent in search of definition

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A note on translation

The thesis uses the English term “political performance art.” In the Russian contexts, artists Mavromatti, Pussy Riot and Pavlensky define their performances as “акция” - action- which comes from the art movement АКЦИОНИЗМ - Actionism; Viennese Actionism, Moscow Actionism. I use the English language term because my ambition is to contribute to the global discussion on political art, where terms “political performance art” and “performance” are commonplace significations for the public action of artists.

This thesis uses the English-language term “holy fool,” which is an abbreviation of “holy fool for Christ’s sake.” Foreign language texts on holy foolery typically commence with an aside on the impossibility for an exact translation of the Russian term *yurodivi*. It is important to say here that indeed, this word is part of the Russian daily language, and is referenced to types of behavior, people, characters, and it is not exclusive to the discussion of saints. For emphasis, the thesis will sometimes use the transliterations “yurodivi” and “yurodstvo” in italics. The original Russian for “holy fool” is "юродивый," "юродивый Христа ради" and “блаженный святой”- these have subtle differences, but are interchangeable. The word “holy fool” in the thesis includes all these types of definition. Finally, the Greek words “salos” and “salia,” which are used by S. Ivanov, will be kept in the original and italicized.

Many quotes in the thesis are translated by me from the original language, in most cases from Russian. In all cases, I have included the original quote in the endnotes at the end of the document.

In rare cases, difficulty in translation has necessitated to keep the original word. I keep the original Russian and provide an approximation in English in parenthesis.

Russian Criminal Law Article 282: “Against the ignition of national, racial and religious dispute”:

1. Actions, directed towards the ignition of national, race and religious dispute, the offense of national pride, any propaganda of exclusivity, superiority or inferiority of citizens based on their relation towards religion, national and race belonging, if these acts are made publically or through the use of social media, -

punished with a fine in the amount of five hundred to eight hundred minimal amount of payment or in the amount of salary or other income of the accused for the period of five to eight months, or the limitation of freedom for up to three years, or the taking away of freedom for the time of two to three years.ⁱ

If the churches do have Scribes and Pharisees, then let Christ come when He will and they will say again as of yore, "He has blasphemed". They will always have power and be approved of the people as they formerly were. Thus the truth will be repudiated until the light of the Lord discloses them. If we pass a law to put false prophets to death, certainly Christ Himself will be killed with His followers. They will be done to death before they are recognized. But they ought to be known before they are killed.

"The Grand Inquisitor," *The Brothers Karamazov*

Introduction

On February 21, 2012 five women in colorful dresses and balaclavas walked into the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow and sang a song to the Virgin Mary on the *ambon*¹ of the church while jumping and crossing themselves. Within a few minutes they were chased out of the Cathedral. The recorded version of the performance circulated widely on the Internet as a music-clip by the activist collective Pussy Riot. They called their performance a “punk prayer.”

In the following weeks three women were arrested under Russian Criminal Law Article 282, colloquially known as the law against blasphemy.² A mass reaction to the performance, trials and imprisonment of Pussy Riot ignited in Russia, dividing the politically active parts of the social body into those who agreed and those who condemned the charges against the women. As I witnessed in the August 2012 Moscow demonstration outside the ongoing trial of Pussy Riot in the Khamovniki District Court, the key part to the debate was not only the relationship between the church and state in Russia, but whether the provoking performance was an act of blasphemy.³ In her court statement, Pussy Riot member Tolokonnikova and others pleaded “not guilty:”

We sang part of the refrain 'Holy shit', I am sorry if I offended anyone with this. It is an idiomatic expression, related to the previous verse — about the fusion of

¹ Russian, Altar-space

² The members of the group were arrested under charges of “Against the ignition of national, racial and religious dispute,” and ultimately sentenced under Article 213.2: “premeditated hooliganism performed by an organized group of people motivated by religious hatred or hostility.”

³ This is a discussion that I personally witnessed in Moscow. This discussion is widely available in social media; blasphemy and revelation is best discussed in the work of dissident priests Gleb Yakunin (1934-2014) and Andrey Kuraev. These terms will be defined and unpacked in the thesis.

Moscow patriarchy and the government. 'Holy shit' is our evaluation of the situation in the country. This opinion is not blasphemy.⁴

Upon my return to Chicago the following month, I witnessed a ubiquitous support of Pussy Riot in the local activist communities and the seamless appropriation of the seductive visual language of the group into the context of western protest culture.⁵ In relation to the Russian case, a drastically different reading of the stakes of the action was articulated at protests and celebratory reenactments that popped-up across many American cities.⁶ To their American supporters, the women were embraced not only as secular activists against a religious state, but also as explicitly atheists artists against religion. The nuances of blasphemy, that the court hearings bring up, adding heat to the post-“Caution, Religion!” and “Forbidden Art” ignited art and culture wars, were dismissed.

The terms of appraisal of Pussy Riot outside of Russia connote the make-up of local protest culture, its values and its stakes. However, the lack of differentiation between religion and the church, buttressed by the ideological assumption that the tools of critique must necessarily be secular and hence, atheist, present among the western supporters of Pussy Riot, make precarious bedfellows; this reading of the performance corresponds to the accusation that the Russian, largely pro-Putin opposition to Pussy Riot, which includes the official Russian Orthodox Church, has expressed in the condemnation of Pussy Riot as atheists and blasphemers.

What governs these discrepancies in visual translation and what are the ethical limits of *mistranslation* at play in these two divergent notions of secularism and scopic regimes?

⁴ Narizhnaya, Khristina. "Pussy Riot Trial Nears Verdict in Moscow." *Rolling Stone*. N.p., 07 Aug. 2012. Web. 02 June 2015. <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/pussy-riot-trial-nears-verdict-in-moscow-20120807>>.

⁵ See for example: "Pussy Riot Solidarity Rally in Chicago." YouTube video, 3:57. Posted by "The Video Catalyst Project," August 18, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aaa8-KlOzcw>

⁶ See for example: Peaches DJ Set Chicago." YouTube video, 0:35. Posted by "Peter Winkler," October 7, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SnN0y-BGtjY>

These questions are at the inception of this inquiry into political performance art, institutional critique, religion and blasphemy. The self-serving western embrace of Pussy Riot as a secular stance for the freedom of expression in repressive Russia falls nimbly into the seductive theoretical embrace of contemporary postcolonial discourse, which plays a leading role in defining the politics of representation in global art and forms the skeleton of the scholarship on visual translation. From the epicenter of the discourse on the periphery, contemporary Harvard postcolonialist Homi K. Bhabha specifically speaks to the nature of cultural appropriation and identity formation that dismisses difference of the cultural *other* in favor of sameness⁷. However, this thesis will distance itself from the above-mentioned discourse on the deconstruction of representation outside of native context, and will attempt to situate and construct a local context that can account for a particular way of seeing blasphemy in art in post-Soviet Russia. More specifically, this thesis will attempt to link the accusation of blasphemy with the experience of revelation by a select audience of Russian supporters of the political art in question.

The western reading of Pussy Riot celebrates the action itself, while the supporters of Pussy Riot at home are largely such *despite* the action. The Russian supporters are mobilized by the accusation of blasphemy, which for them reveals a larger hypocrisy. To which extent is there a relationship between the two poles: is blasphemy against the sacred capable of metamorphosis into sacred revelation? Blasphemy is a transgression against the Church-prescribed boundaries of the sacred that aims to redraw the line between sacred and profane. The specificity of the translation and mistranslation of Pussy Riot and its political

⁷ See for example: Bhabha, Homi K. *The Other Question*. (1983) and *The Location of Culture* (1994)

stakes in Russia lays in the discrepancy of the role of blasphemy in the public sphere in these two cultural contexts, traditions of institutional critique and notions of secularism.

In Russia, the charges against Pussy Riot and other artist accused of blasphemy have unfolded in relation to the degree to which they were seen as “spitting into the soul of Orthodox people.”⁸ As opposed to positioning the artists as “protesting atheists” that are accused of breaking the law or committing blasphemy - by a religious state, I pick up on one type of voice present among the diverse Russian supporters of these artists: that the blasphemous actions have uncovered a larger truth under a veil of hypocrisy. Going against what the artists themselves often claim – Tolokonnikova says that her opinions are not a form of blasphemy – I am interested in exploring how the evocation of blasphemy can become a form of institutional critique. The blasphemous performances are perceived as a critique the institutions of the state and church and their supporters.

In the context of post-Soviet art and culture wars, blasphemy is always an accusation. In the history of Christian religion, the accusation of blasphemy uniquely points the judgmental finger back at the accuser. However, such a semiotics finds no home in the established theoretical constructions on global art and politics that can contextualize the support for the artists in question. In my choice of approach, I pick up specifically where the

⁸ “Spitting in the souls of Orthodox People” is a popular term for religious offense and blasphemy: In relation to “Careful, Religion!,” see: “Samodurov, Yuri. “Sakharovskii Centr Protiv RPC: Nas Predali.” Grani.ru. February 05, 2010. Accessed June 02, 2015. <http://grani.ru/blogs/free/entries/174785.html>. (Russian), as a term in relation to Pussy Riot, it was made famous by Moscow police chief Vladimir Koloko’tsev. See: “Aktsiyu Pussy Riot Glava Politsii Schel Plevkom v Svoyu Dushu.” *Rusnovosti*, March 28, 2012. Accessed June 2, 2015. <http://rusnovosti.ru/posts/194816>. (Russian), in Tannhäuser: Otcherednoi Plevok v Dushu Russkogo Naroda.” *Novosti*, February 26, 2015. Accessed June 2, 2015. http://www.ansobor.ru/news.php?news_id=5485. (Russian)

⁹ The term “protesting atheist,” coined by Yuri Samodurov, pertains to the dispute on identity in the post-“Careful, Religion!” culture wars.

post-Enlightenment, secular and neoliberal reading fails - an understanding of political art I attribute to the supporters of Pussy Riot in western activist communities. In this thesis, I trace how the accusation of blasphemy can be read in the tradition of religious reform within Orthodoxy. If blasphemy can be a tool of dissent, then the evocation of blasphemy by the artists is crucial to the political meaning of the act as a public event. Through reference to Christian ethics, the judgment of the artists by the alliance of the federal law and self-identified Orthodox people, reverses and points to the corrupt state of church-ordained religion in Russia today and the hypocrisy of its members.

This thesis demonstrates that lineages of protest culture and Orthodoxy in the arts have roots outside the post-socialist context. The oppressive nature of the Soviet regime proved fertile ground for the unlikely unification of Orthodox radicalism, insanity and dissidence into a shared system of protest values. Furthermore, the unification of the Orthodox church with the communist state in 1943 created an underground, catacomb Orthodox movement, a movement that draws together both dissidents, artists and religious practitioners under a common desire for a particular kind of freedom. This is an unlikely allegiance from the western point of view, and I would argue that it is still at play in the post-socialist cultural sphere today. The transformation of blasphemy into revelation is experienced by individuals that affiliate religion with dissent, and whom scholar Irina Papkova identifies as “liberal Orthodox.” The chapter **Institutional Critique in the Art and Culture Wars** is dedicated to this discussion.

This thesis aims to construct a metaphorical lens for the discussion of legally reprimanded political performance art in contemporary Russia that appropriates religious aesthetics and is accused of blasphemy. Historically, reform within Orthodoxy is associated

with the enigmatic figure of the holy fool- *yurodivi* - a radical, uniquely Orthodox form of canonized ascetic sainthood and method of anti-authoritarian institutional critique. Holy foolery is a behavioral paradigm that is marked by subversive and scandalous behavior in order to provide the public with spiritual guidance. In affinity to Christ, possession by the Devil and *salia* partake in the topos of holy foolery. The Greek term *salia* means the feigning of madness. *Salia* is the key behavioral characteristic of holy foolery, a practice inspired by the Biblical passage of I Corinthians 4:10: “We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised.” *Salia* is “the revelation of the contradiction between the great Christian truth and superficial reason and moral codes for the sake of mockery of the world.”¹⁰

The chapter of the thesis, **Holy Foolery as a Behavioral Paradigm** is dedicated to the anti-authoritarian Orthodox practice of *yurodstvo*. The chapter links the history of the practice to an engagement in institutional critique from within a religious tradition. With an emphasis on change and malleability, the chapter traces this religious form to its roots in Egypt, and argues for the gradual separation of the topos from its canonical form of church-ordained sainthood. This separation results in a prolific appropriation of the behavioral characteristics of *yurodstvo* – *anti-vainglory*, *salia*, *kenosis*- in the realm of culture. Lastly, the chapter demonstrates the affinities between the cultural avant-garde and holy foolery through their generative acts of blasphemy and negation.

This thesis is both the development of a method for engagement with blasphemy from within a religious tradition and an application of this method to case studies of artists,

¹⁰ “Fedotov, G.P. *The Russian Religious Mind*. Vol.2. The Middle Ages. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966

whose work has been considered in relation to the Russian criminal laws against the ignition of religious hate: Oleg Mavromatti, Pussy Riot and Petr Pavlensky. The chapters 3,4, and 5 are dedicated to three case studies. The case studies explore the work of three artists – Oleg Mavromatti, Pussy Riot and Petr Pavlensky. The work of each artist/group has been subject to Russian Criminal Law and has consequently been discussed in the context of blasphemy in Russia; In a 2000 action, Oleg Mavromatti crucified himself in front of the Ministry of Culture and was sentenced under Article 282. In 2010 the artist, living in exile, created a virtual trial of his case and promised to perform death via electrocution if deemed guilty by the online voters. In 2012, the collective Pussy Riot performed a punk-prayer in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior; consequently two of the women were sentenced to two years in penal colony under Article 213. St Petersburg actionist Petr Pavlensky has performed various actions that involve the infliction of physical pain on the body in public and sacred spaces and has been numerously accused, but never sentenced, of breaking the criminal law of the Russian Federation.

I suggest that the historical roots of dissent within the tradition of Orthodoxy are revealed in the cases of “blasphemous,” “hateful” and “insane” political performance art through the public discussion around these events. **Blasphemy as Tool for Institutional Critique** will construct a framework for seeing “religious hate” as a secular, institutional critique within a religious tradition of dissent through the chronotope of the holy fool.

Methodology

In the 1930 and 1940s Soviet philosopher and literary scholar Mikhail M. Bakhtin developed four essays on the nature and evolution of the European novel. In his essay

‘Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,’ Bakhtin develops the concept of the chronotope as a means for engagement with persistent metaphors in the European novel, metaphors that have themselves become detached from the folkloric traditions that birthed them. The term “chronotope” originally comes from Einstein’s “Theory of Relativity” and literally means “time space.” Bakhtin was obsessed with time and space in relation to the self, an obsession shared by Soviet intellectuals of the 1920’s, who were reading Bergson and Einstein.¹¹ Bakhtin introduced the term chronotope as “a unit for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented.”¹²

In other words, the term is borrowed by Bakhtin to develop on the more limiting idea of metaphor as a category of literature, and to expand the concept to constitute a certain subversive “inseparability of time and space.”¹³

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope¹⁴.

Bakhtin’s objective is to create a category for engagement with symbols, metaphors and behavioral paradigms that continue to be inserted into literature – and by extension into all culture - through the inertia of tradition, and “continue stubbornly to exist, up to and beyond the point at which they had lost any meaning that was productive in actuality or adequate to later historical situations.”¹⁵

¹¹ Clark, Katerina, and Michael Holquist. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984, 278

¹² *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 278

¹³ Bakhtin, M. M., and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, 84

¹⁴ *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 84

¹⁵ *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 85

By finding a way to engage with the novel, Bakhtin found a way to engage with reality and to indirectly critique and subvert the oppressive nature of his reality through a methodology of architectonics. “Bakhtin argues that particular chronotopes are the defining or dominant features of persons, periods, and works of art,” however, Bakhtin scholars acknowledge the applicability of his method beyond literature. For Bakhtin, literary texts exemplify the trove of past chronotopes; authors of literature replicate their view of the world and thus they are “ineluctably forced to employ the organizing categories of the worlds that they themselves inhabit.”¹⁶ Novels are not passive - they hide metaphorical devices that enable seeing and finding meaning in the world from the critical distance of fiction. Through this same logic, one infers that Bakhtin was also modeling his worldview in his highly innovative academic writing and through his writing, finding tools to remake his historical moment.

My work will attempt to discuss art, politics and religion. Situating art, and in particular political art, in a religious tradition is admittedly complicated and problematic. However, a chronotope is a useful method – it is bridge between two worlds - the world represented and the source of representation: it stresses the discrepancy between “given” and “conceived” while at the same time bridging this. The chronotope also defines the genre and establishes the boundaries between the various intrageneric subcategories:¹⁷ There is the adventure time chronotope, the everyday life, and biographic time chronotopes - each with their own variations and subgenres, such as “satirical –ironic time” of Ovid and “stoic-autobiographical time” of St Augustine’s *Confessions*. The relation between the chronotope and the new context is dialectic - it is expressed in the way that a certain convention controls

¹⁶ *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 278

¹⁷ *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 280

the individual hero, and how the individual struggles against this control. “The cultic aspect of the chronotope is present in Christian hagiography as well, where metamorphosis is encountered as conversion experience.”¹⁸ It is in the way that the chronotope becomes more than the novel, revealing the relation of the novel to both the author, history and reality, that Bakhtin becomes relevant for the discussion of performance art in this inquiry, and the chosen methodology for engagement with the elusive subject.

Bakhtin is difficult as he is fascinating. Bakhtin scholar Katerina Clark labels his approach as “perverse and personal,” and his conception of poetics as extremely broad: “He looks at genres not just in their narrow literary context but as icons that fit the world view of the ages from which they spring. Genre is to him an X-ray of a specific worldview, a crystallization of the concepts particular to a given time and to a given social stratum in a specific society. A genre, therefore, embodies a historically specific idea of what it means to be human.”¹⁹

My discussion of holy foolery and its appropriation is rooted in the conviction of change and adaptability of metaphors and identities. Bakhtin’s method is imbued with a similar fascination between stasis and change, which he conceptualizes as existing simultaneously; this way of thinking allows Bakhtin to see affinity in issues that to others see as mutually exclusive. Through the chronotope as method for an engagement with a very open notion of “genre,” one deciphers and accounts for the presence of certain metaphors that appear to be completely foreign to the historical present, but which can connect the historical present with another, hidden tradition. For Bakhtin, the “hidden” tradition that he

¹⁸ *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 283

¹⁹ *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 275

explores is the folkloric carnival, in which the figures of the fool, the rogue and the clown have leading roles. In this thesis, it the Orthodox tradition of holy folly – *yurodstvo*- will be understood along Bakhtinian lines.

How exactly does the chronotope apply to this work? Bakhtin scholars Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist state that the chronotope is "a unit of analysis for studying language according to the ratio and characteristics of the temporal and spatial categories represented in that language". Specific chronotopes are said to correspond to particular genres, or relatively stable ways of speaking, which themselves represent particular worldviews or ideologies. To this extent, a chronotope is both a cognitive concept and a narrative feature of language.²⁰

Specifically, the statement that “Pussy Riot are contemporary holy fools,” which has been evoked in certain pro-Pussy Riot discussions in Russian media, and from which my analysis stems, must not be taken literally, but as a function of a larger chronotope, which constitutes a genre that can be deciphered by a particular scopic regime. I propose to consider the chronotope as a method for the engagement with contemporary Russian performance art that appropriates religious aesthetics and is considered blasphemous. Bakhtin’s method allows to engage with a tradition that is seemingly foreign to performance art – the religious tradition - and to bridge this tradition with contemporary protest culture. Holy foolery, like the folkloric tradition of the carnival that Bakhtin reveals in European literature, has been separated from its historical tradition and functions as a behavioral paradigm. Similarly to how laughter in narrative can be a signifier for the chronotope of the

²⁰ "Introduction" in Bakhtin, M. M., Michael Holquist, Vern McGee, and Caryl Emerson. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

carnival for Bakhtin, I argue that blasphemy partakes in the chronotope of holy foolery.

On a final note, Clark and Holquist in their text on Bakhtin, who they categorize as a philosophical anthropologist, write that “what is difficult about Bakhtin is the demand that his way of thinking makes on our way of thinking, the demand to change the basic categories that most of us use to organize thought itself. In order to know Bakhtin, we must modify the skills that we have developed for coming to know *anything* previous to our encounter with him.”²¹ Bakhtin challenges the norms of post-Aristotelian systematic thinking in the West and must be read with a subaltern sensitivity of the “primitive” psychosis that is lacking sequential knowledge:

The centrifugal forces urge stasis and resist becoming, abhor history, and desire the seamless quiet of death. The Zoroastrian clash between these powers is enacted at many different levels, as in the interplay between electromagnetic, chemical, and thermodynamic forces in the physical cosmos, the human body, and the universe of subatomic particles.”²²

Bakhtin’s life and method is an attempt to understand the dialogue between these binary forces.²³ As a committed Marxist, Bakhtin singles out the novel as his personal hero” of a “special kind of force” for an event in history: “the novel is a kind of epistemological outlaw, a Robin Hood of texts. Because the fundamental features of any culture are inscribed in its texts, not only in literary texts but in its legal and religious ones as well, “novelness” can work to undermine the official or high culture of any society.”²⁴ In my work, political performance art has a similar resonance and social dimension – I single out political performance art because it has a special, revolutionary force which acts through the

²¹ *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 5

²² *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 8

²³ Clark and Holquist clarify that for Bakhtin ‘dialogue means the communication between simultaneous differences.’ *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 8

²⁴ *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 276

placement of the body in the stasis of power. In this thesis, I hope to articulate and liberate some of that force.

Literature Review

This thesis is conceived in conversation with the publication *Is Critique Secular?, Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (2009),²⁵ which features theorists Wendy Brown, Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood and Judith Butler, who come together to deconstruct the normative notion of critique as a practice that necessarily emanates from a secular tradition that reinforces post-Enlightenment values of the Euro-American West: “Western academy is governed by the presumptive secularism of critique, and that is with this governance that we must begin. Unseating governance of this sort is the very signature of political, social and cultural critique; it targets what is presumptive, sure commonsensical, or given in the current order of things.”²⁶ My work is an attempt to extend the problematic of the “presumed secularism of critique” in the western academic and intellectual milieu to the post-Soviet context through an engagement with debates over blasphemy in Russia since the first election of President Vladimir Putin (2000).

The volume *Is Critique Secular?* is conceived as a response to the Danish cartoon scandal of 2005, which the scholars take as inception point for an inquiry into the epistemology of the underpinning notions of religious offense, free speech and blasphemy in the Euro-American and Muslim identity formations. Saba Mahmood’s contribution “Religious Reason and Secular Affect” is particularly relevant for this work’s methodology,

²⁵ Asad, Talal, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood. *Is Critique Secular ? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. Berkeley: Townsend Center for the Humanities, University of California, 2009.

²⁶ *Is Critique Secular ? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, 8

as Mahmood effectively constructs a hermeneutic for the “way of seeing” blasphemy for religious Muslims.

Mahmood’s work has theoretical affinities to the debate expounded in this thesis, however, I am distancing from the postcolonial discourse that the position of the authors articulates in *Is Critique Secular?, Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (2009). Along Saba Mahmood’s lines, the western audience’s embrace of Pussy Riot positioned them as secular activists against a religious threat. However, while the western identity is reinforced through its stance against anti-modern Muslim values in Mahmood, in the case of Pussy Riot, their difference and otherness is eliminated, and they are appropriated for their ideological “sameness.”

For the chapters dedicated to the work of the artists Mavromatti, Pussy Riot and Pavlensky, I concentrate on a single action and its public reaction, which combine to constitute what I define as an “event.” Although these artists partake in the history of Actionist art – such as Moscow Conceptualism and the school of Viennese Actionism, as well as Body Art and Political Performance, my study will not concentrate on framing them in given art historical literature. In affinity with WJT Mitchell and Jim Elkins, this thesis discusses ways of seeing and attempts to construct a lens for the engagement with blasphemy. The footage of the artists’ performances is available online, and the debates around the work are vastly available on social media, the radio and blogs. The case studies will feature an extensive visual analysis of the given action and I will concentrate on public reactions that constitute a “religious” reading and debates over the presence of blasphemy in the work. Because I am interested in the religious tradition, my references and argumentation is admittedly selective: due to various constraints, an exhaustive reading of the diverse

positions on the given works has been impossible.

Anthropologist Anya Bernstein's body of work has been influential in this thesis. In particular, I reference "Caution, Religion! Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post-Soviet Art Wars"²⁷ and "An Inadvertent Sacrifice: Body Politics and Sovereign Power in the Pussy Riot Affair."²⁸ In the first publication, Bernstein discusses the "Careful, Religion!" and "Forbidden Art!" trials, which she terms as "post-Soviet art wars." Her research into the topic is situated against the theoretical framework of "religious" and "secular" rationalities, as is widely discussed by Talal Asad (also in this thesis), and instead she proposes "scopic regimes produced by sociohistoric transformations in Russia and the Soviet Union" and how these create and affect "local understanding of material culture and notions of the free human subject." In a way that is evocative of Saba Mahmood's work (in this thesis), Bernstein discusses the affective nature of icons and domain of visual piety to position the possibility of moral offense in the subject that sees "blasphemous" work. I differ from Bernstein in that my interest is ultimately in blasphemy as a device for critique that is capable of revelation. In the second publication, Bernstein looks at Pussy Riot with reference to sovereignty and the female body, and she is interested in how Pussy Riot "participants become vital sites for the enactment of sovereignty for a wide range of citizens." Bernstein looks at terms such as the human, the body, creations of the sacred and sacrifice, influential for my work, but she ties these terms to a different set of objectives than those of my inquiry through privileging an analysis of "the erotic" and "the corporeal" in the public gaze on Pussy Riot.

²⁷ Bernstein, A. "Caution, Religion! Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post-Soviet Art Wars." *Public Culture* 26, no. 3 74 (2014): 419-48.

²⁸ Bernstein, Anya. "An Inadvertent Sacrifice: Body Politics and Sovereign Power in the Pussy Riot Affair." *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 1 (2013): 220-41.

The history of dissent within Orthodoxy is explored through the history of the holy fool tradition in the case studies and in the chapter **Holy Foolery as Behavioral Paradigm**. I rely on the scholarship of Sergey A. Ivanov *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* (2006)²⁹ and the hagiographies of Byzantine and Russian holy fools, such as St Symeon Salos, St Basil, St Nikolai and St Andrew, which are explicated in Ivanov's work. I appropriate the terminology for the characteristics of holy foolery from G.P. Fedotov's *Russian Religious Mind* (1966),³⁰ expanding where necessary on Fedotov's more conservative reading of the terms. Lastly, I draw from scholars D. S. Likhachev and A.M. Panchenko's *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi* (1984),³¹ which is a multi-disciplinary scholarly engagement with laughter and foolish behavior in Russian history. Critically, *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi* positions holy foolery as inherently performative, and separates holy foolery "as a way of life" from holy foolery "as a single action." Blasphemy is not directly addressed in these three texts, and I extend their analysis to demonstrate how the transformation of blasphemy into revelation is a signifier for the topos of holy foolery.

Recent literature on the appropriation of the holy fool topos is vast, primarily in the fields of Literary studies, Film and Slavic studies. For both analysis and methodology, this thesis fits in with Priscilla Hunt and Svitlana Kobetz exemplary conference publication *Holy Foolishness in Russia: New Perspectives* (2011),³² a compilation of articles on the role of the holy

²⁹ I read Ivanov both in Russian and in English, but the quotes follow from the English edition. Ivanov, S. A. *Holy Fools in Byzantium and beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Ivanov, Sergey. *Blazhennue Poxabi. Kul'turnaja Istorija yurodstva*. Moscow: Jaziki savjanskix kul'tur, 2005. Russian. Ivanov, Sergey. *Vizantijskoe Yurodstvo*. Moscow, 1994. Russian.

³⁰ Fedotov, G.P. *The Russian Religious Mind*. Vol.2. The Middle Ages. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966

³¹ Likhachev, Dmitri S., Alexandr Panchenko, and N. V. Ponurko. "Smekh v Drevnej Rusi. 1984. <http://ec-dejavu.ru/>. Accessed June 2, 2015. http://ec-dejavu.ru/j/Jurod_Panchenko.html.

³² Hunt, Priscilla and Svitlana Kobetz, eds. *Holy Foolishness in Russia: New Perspectives*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2011.

fool both within the history of religion and through its consequent evocation as a behavioral paradigm. In the publication, scholar Laura Piccolo writes on the appropriation of the holy fool topos in Russian performance art and concentrates on the work of the Russian group Blue Noses. Piccolo frames the Blue Noses appropriation of holy fool aesthetics as a case of parody and humor. In this thesis, I distance myself from the term “parody” because of the focus on the political stakes of the actions that the artists in question perform. The stakes of contemporary political performance art are articulated in relation to contemporary politics in Russia, which differ from the socio-political context of the 1990’s in which the Blue Noses - and other Actionists, such as Oleg Kulik, Brenner and Avdei Ter-Oganian - performed.

The concept of parody as a signifier for carnivalesque, foolish behavior is derived from Mikhail Bakhtin.³³ Bakhtin is interested in literature in the Middle Ages, in particular the folkloric literature that tends toward satire and parody, and how certain types in this genre develop and transform through to their presence as subdued characteristics and devices in the great European novel. Bakhtin discusses how certain types – such as the rogue, fool and clown metamorphose and become “clownishness”- experiential, behavioral categories and forms of allegory. Laughter, among other grotesque, bodily activities, are signifiers for this liberating tradition. In my work, I appropriate Bakhtin’s methodology of the chronotope, but argue against the inherent presence of parody in the tradition of foolery. The appropriation of the holy fool topos by the artists in question is a political stance, and as opposed to “liberation” from structures of power, it produces the opposite - police investigation, prison and exile. My analysis of Bakhtin is indebted to Katerina Clark and

³³Bakhtin, M. M., and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Clark, Katerina, and Michael Holquist. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984.

Michael Holquist, whose scholarship I draw on for understanding of Bakhtin's more elusive concepts.

In discussing the role between the holy fool and the avant-garde, I draw on Mikhail Epstein's work on Russian postmodernism, avant-garde and the role of religion in Russian culture.³⁴ Epstein is a scholar on Russian culture, whose work largely focuses on tracing the counterparts and roots of certain western concepts in Russian culture. In my analysis, I will put forward Epstein's original engagements with concepts such as "avant-garde," "conceptual art," "anti-art" and "negation," which he discusses only in terms of physical art-objects and not performance, and extend them where suitable to my work. The objective is less to appropriate Epstein's methods and terms, but more to give an example of a leading contemporary scholar working with western terms vis a vis a Russian religious tradition, who understands the "religious" in art not in terms of representation of devotional objects (which does not make the art in question religious *in essence*), but as another, complex relation to the sacred.

Blasphemy is referenced throughout this thesis: it is a term that is relational to the context of the accusation, and as Brent Plate writes in *Blasphemy: Art that Offends* (2006),³⁵ "is prone to the endless changes in religious meaning and through power mongering."³⁶ There is also no single definition of "revelation" that I rely on, but I understand it generally as a "revelation of a larger, hidden truth," which can be caused by blasphemy. The discussion of blasphemy relies on various sources that are both directly referenced in the text and which

³⁴ Epstein, Mikhail. *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

³⁵ Plate, S. Brent. *Blasphemy: Art That Offends*. London: Black Dog, 2006.

³⁶ *Art That Offends*, 34

have made the foundational reading. To start, Bruno Latour's and Peter Weibel massive *Iconoclasm* (2002),³⁷ discusses the various iconoclasm in art, but does not feature a single Russian artist. In close proximity to this inquiry is anthropologist Anya Bernstein's publication on blasphemy in Russian "art wars" and in the Pussy Riot affair.³⁸ Direct quotes and discussion on blasphemy come from Plate's *Blasphemy: Art that Offends*, a book which also starts with the Danish cartoon case and discusses blasphemy in the aesthetic-religious context of monotheistic traditions with generous reference to contemporary art (none Russian). Lawton's *Blasphemy* (1993)³⁹ is a compilation of case studies that address blasphemy as a textual event - something that happens through the function of language in relation to a text-based tradition. Several of my definitions are derived from this text.

Lastly, the political context of Russia and the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and politics is drawn from political scientists Irina Papkova,⁴⁰ Zoe Knox⁴¹ and Nikolai Mitrochin⁴² and their most recent publications on the subject. The thesis relied heavily on the statistical information on the role of Russian Orthodoxy from Papkova, and narrates through her analysis of "fundamental" and "liberal" Orthodoxy and its sources in the Soviet Union. It must be noted that significant background information came from the writing of dissident priests Gleb Yakunin and Andrey Kuraev, as well as personal correspondence with Moscow-based Father Tarasii on the subject of ROC, the KGB and

³⁷ Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel. *Iconoclasm*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.

³⁸ Bernstein, Anya. "Caution, Religion!: Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post-Soviet Art Wars," Global Secularisms Conference, New York University, 2013.

Bernstein, Anya. "An Inadvertent Sacrifice: Body Politics and Sovereign Power in the Pussy Riot Affair." *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 1 (2013): 220-41. doi:10.1086/673233.

³⁹ Lawton, David A. *Blasphemy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

⁴⁰ Papkova, Irina. *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

⁴¹ Knox, Zoe. *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia After Communism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

⁴² Ikolia Mitrokhin. *The Russian Orthodox Church: Current State and Pressing Problems (Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov': Sovremennoe Sostoianie i Aktual'nie Problemy)*. Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrevnaie, 2004.

dissidence.

1 Holy Foolery as Behavioral Paradigm

1.1 Introduction

The journey of the holy fool commences in Coptic vernacular narratives and is canonized in Byzantine hagiography. Meandering through secular and sacred culture, the holy fool makes his literary debut in Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* as Nikolka the Fool - transposed by Mussorgsky into an opera of the same name, and appears most recently on the big screen in Pavel Lungin's 2006 film *The Island*. The canonization of holy fools is suspended by the Orthodox Church in the XVIIth century; the above mentioned instances of appropriation of the holy fool paradigm reference the tradition explicitly, with both the hagiographic saints and fictional characters being Orthodox and stylized specifically to the tradition of holy foolery. In the course of this chapter, I will seek to demonstrate how the multifaceted development of the tradition itself allows for multiple interpretations, where explicit identification with Orthodoxy can become secondary to the function of the topos.

This chapter traces the development of holy foolery from its Byzantine roots as a canonical Orthodox Church form of sainthood into its separation from the official tradition into a behavioral paradigm and topos for appropriation in culture. The history of holy foolery will be narrated from the seminal text by Sergey Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, with the aim of shedding light on the complexity and adaptability of the tradition from its roots in Hebrew and Greek culture. An engagement with hagiographies of holy fools, in particular the vitae of St Symeon Salos, will be used to explicate the key characteristics of holy foolery, as defined in G. Fedotov's *Russian Religious Mind*⁴³ and D.

⁴³ Fedotov, G.P. *The Russian Religious Mind*. Vol.2. The Middle Ages. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966

Likhachev's and A. Panchenko's *Smekh v Drevnei Rusi*.⁴⁴ The last part of the chapter focuses on the affinity between holy foolery and Russian postmodernism, in which Mikhail Epstein argues that holy foolery can be seen as a conceptual form of art⁴⁵.

1.2 Byzantine and Early Rus Holy Foolery

Yurodstvo connotes the feigning of insanity, and in the Christian church tradition, it is exclusive to an imitation of insanity for higher spiritual purposes. This definition has undergone significant metamorphosis, and Sergey Ivanov, in his book *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* traces the development of *yurodstvo*. Ivanov's inquiry commences with Middle Eastern and Greek attitudes towards the performative and insanity in the narratives of Hebrew prophets of Old Testament. He claims that despite the many differences, "the image of the God-chosen man, despised by the stupid crowd, is definitely borrowed by the Christian holy fool from the Jewish prophet."⁴⁶ Ivanov demonstrates how the paradoxical behavior of figures Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel can be seen as precursors to holy foolery, as the behavior of the prophets bears marks of the signs of madness, and this madness highlights the problem of public reception in distinguishing a true prophets from the false. However, whereas the Hebrew prophet always bears the marks of his sanctity, a *yurodivi* cannot be revealed as saint until his death. Furthermore, while a prophet is chosen by God, holy foolery is an individual decision and responsibility.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Likhachev, Dmitri S., Alexandr Panchenko, and N. V. Ponurko. "Smekh v Drevnei Rusi. 1984. [Http://ec-dejavu.ru/](http://ec-dejavu.ru/). Accessed June 2, 2015. http://ec-dejavu.ru/j/Jurod_Panchenko.html

⁴⁵ Epstein, Mikhail. *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

⁴⁶ *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 15

⁴⁷ *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 11-12

The idea that true wisdom is hidden under the guise of stupidity is a Hellenistic influence on holy foolery, and it is most influentially expressed in the Cynic tradition. The influence of the Cynics on Christianity is multifaceted, however, for the purposes of the development of holy foolery, the aesthetic affinities play a leading role: the first full hagiography of a holy fool, St Symeon Salos, depicts behavior that is modeled on the great Cynic Diogenes, who sat in a barrel and talked to dogs. “The uninhibited conduct of the Cynical philosopher,” writes Ivanov, “is a way of achieving greater freedom. The Cynic exposes superficiality and casts down false idols not in the name of any divinity but by the authority that he asserts over his own wisdom.”⁴⁸

The passage from St Paul, who wrote before the time of holy fools, is understood to be the call for foolishness, which is juxtaposed to Jewish and Greek systems of thought:

Hath God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greek foolishness; [...] but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise [...] If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God.⁴⁹

The above passage is very significant for the molding of the practice of holy foolery, and it continually serves as its theoretical justification. Holy foolery can be recognized as a sacred form by the close readers of the Bible, thus actively distancing the close readers from those who “feign” spirituality. Of course, the Bible provides many counter-hierarchies to holy foolery, such as religious piety, which is favored by the official church. The schism between

⁴⁸ *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 17

⁴⁹ 1 Cor.1:20, 22-23, 27; 3:18-19.

Ivanov comments on how the passages on foolery from Paul’s writing have been misinterpreted; when Paul turns to the Corinthians and speaks of himself as being a fool, he is being ironic, for he knows that he is in fact “wise in Christ.” Ivanov highlights that Paul knew nothing about the practice of holy foolery and did not foresee it. (*Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 20)

these two readings of the Bible is simmering throughout the history of Christianity⁵⁰ and continues to cause dispute around the globe today.

St Paul's passage indirectly comments on the impossibility to know God's will with human reason, and points to the idea that a Christian who says to know God's will, must necessarily be false. The above passage is a call to an irrational engagement with the world, which is based on the debasement of one's own ego, in order to engage with a supreme, divine will. Paradoxically, in Christian thought, the engagement with the will of God is actually an exercise in the highest form of freedom. This sense of freedom and choice are central to holy foolery, and distinguish it from the traditional prophets. Unlike the inner moral freedom of the Cynics, the Christian freedom of will is granted by God, and the exercise in freedom of the holy fool is sacralized, qualifying him as a saint. The connotation of the exercise of freedom to the highest degree as a sacred act will have profound consequences on the way political performance artists detained by the law are seen in an Orthodox context of post-Soviet Russia, where the distinction between church-ordained religiosity and anti-authoritarian, ethics-based spirituality play out dramatically in what anthropologist Anya Bernstein terms "post-Soviet art wars."⁵¹

Completely outside the development of conventions of the official Church, in the early Middle Ages, and especially in Rus', holy foolery merges with prophetism.⁵² However, in stark difference to the classic prophet, who is overcome by the Holy Spirit, the holy fool

⁵⁰ Ivanov provides the most early traces of the debate by referencing the IVth century *Liber graduum*, a treatise on the distinction between "righteous" (those who strictly observe the law) and the "perfect" (those who overflow with abundance and virtue) Ivanov provides the most early traces of the debate by referencing the IVth century *Liber graduum*, a treatise on the distinction between "righteous" (those who strictly observe the law) and the "perfect" (those who overflow with abundance and virtue). The latter are despised as they humble themselves, and are "foolish for Christ's sake." Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond, 28-29

⁵¹ Bernstein, Anya. "Caution, Religion!: Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post-Soviet Art Wars," Global Secularisms Conference, New York University, 2013.

⁵² *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 24

maintains his identity and mind intact. Possession by the devil and possession by the Holy Spirit are hard to distinguish; a complicated and unresolved relationship with insanity emerges due to the fact that the insane were classified as demonically possessed since Byzantium.⁵³ In a 4th century text, *Liber graduum*, the problem of qualifying the type of madness is expressed with an attempt at a solution:

Now I will explain to you about the madman. If you see that he despises himself, that he has neither house nor wife nor wealth, nor even clothes or food except for the day, then say: "This is for me, this is what I must imitate." And when you see that in his insanity he converses with everybody, and makes it a rule not to be angry or abusive and to despise the worldly, wise, say: "This is for me, this is madness of the Apostles." But if you see that he tells lies or utters prophecies, or commits fornication, or talks nonsense, say: "This is not for me." The world ridicules madmen for their madness, for they cannot tell who is mocking them and who respects them, and so they will converse in the morning with the man who beat them the previous evening. [...] If you see that the madman is impelled by his madness, and that somebody is saying to him "go and commit fornication," or "steal," or "blaspheme," – and that he does this out of foolishness, then do not be like him; for you are told to "be foolish" not with regard to heavenly wisdom but with regard to early conceit.⁵⁴

To which extent is this distinction transferred as the holy fool tradition develops and popularizes the Orthodox tradition of ascetic behavior? How does it become more complex, when holy foolery is labeled as a form of madness in the USSR? In contrast to the above clarification, St Paul's writing, as I have argued before, is precisely a call to foolishness with regard to heavenly wisdom, which is beyond reason. Furthermore, St Symeon Salos commits each of the above mentioned tropes of "not to do" of the *Liber graduum*, and the hagiography demonstrates the intentionality behind this behavior as a disdain for all earthly rules in order to provoke human judgment and reveal hypocrisy. Petr Pavlensky, a political

⁵³ Ivanov comments on how the passages on foolery from Paul's writing have been misinterpreted; when Paul turns to the Corinthians and speaks of himself as being a fool, he is being ironic, for he knows that he is in fact "wise in Christ." Ivanov highlights that Paul knew nothing about the practice of holy foolery and did not foresee it (*Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 20).

⁵⁴ *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 28-29.

Liber graduum, ed. M. Kmosco, Patrologia syriaca I.3 (Paris, 1926), col. 751.

performance artist who has been labeled as “insane” for his work on numerous occasions, further conflates the distinction between madness, possession by the devil and sanctity. Through this analysis, one can conceive the extent to which the tradition remains paradoxical and interpretive, unruled by official prescription, even of the more generous kind as the *Liber graduum*.

The tradition of holy foolery finds its first true contextual home in the monastic tradition of Egypt, which develops in the 4th century. Monasticism, through its withdrawal from the world and self-abasement, was seen as a kind of “foolery.” A Desert Father remarks that “the Egyptians conceal the virtues which they possess and display the vices which they lack; the Syrians and the Greeks show off their virtues which they lack and conceal the vices which they possess.”⁵⁵ These distinct Christian virtues of monks in Egypt are combined with a novel behavior – aggression- in the figure of the early holy fools. Aggression is not found in the apostolic tradition, but it can be drawn from a more direct imitation of Christ and his frequent bouts of aggressive behavior in the New Testament. It is important to note that the holy fool tradition is not an imitation of God-the-father, but explicitly an imitation of the life of Christ from the Gospels. Hence, holy fools are “fools-for- Christ.”

The Syriac word *salos* represents this new combination of foolishness (*moria*, Greek) with mockery (aggression); the once-secular word is first applied in a religious context to anchorite monks in Egypt and Palestine.⁵⁶ The anchorite monks (*boskomenos*) in cenobitic

⁵⁵ *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 30.
De vitis partum libri VII, PL 73, col. 1035.

⁵⁶ Ivanov writes that the etymology of *salos* is unclear and that ‘the most widely accepted theory is that it derives from Syriac *sakla*, which renders the Greek *moros* in the Syriac version of the Epistle to the Corinthians. “ The word *salos* first appears in the Egyptian collection *Lausiac History* by Palladius. *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* , 32-39

monasteries practiced what they came to see as the highest Christian virtue – renunciation of the will. The monk elders, in instructing their initiates, were known to provoke sinful behavior, which Ivanov refers to as “carnavalesque.”⁵⁷ The concept is derived from the seeming absurdity in many pronouncements of God’s will upon his people (particularly found in the Old Testament, such as Abraham’s intended sacrifice of his son).

The narratives of foolish, provocative behavior of “secret saints,” which revealed the sanctity of the world and the presence of God’s will, were popularized in the IV - VIth centuries in the region,⁵⁸ much before these became part of official hagiographies of holy fools. The presence of the above listed cross-cultural influences is embodied in the first full hagiography of a holy fool, St Symeon Salos, whose *vitae* defines the genre and becomes the model of behavior for holy fools across generations and territories, and the traces of which can certainly be seen in post-Soviet performance art.

1.3 Holy Foolery as Behavioral Paradigm

In the seminal work on Orthodox saints, *The Russian Religious Mind*, Georgy Fedotov speaks of holy foolery as a uniquely Orthodox form of paradoxical asceticism that can be represented by several behavioral characteristics, which define the topos: being against vainglory, *salia*, and *kenosis*. In this component of the chapter, I will define these terms and give a brief introduction to Rus’ holy foolery. I will then consider the visual and contextual inheritance of these three behavioral characteristics as exemplified by the *vitae* of St Symeon

⁵⁷ *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 40

⁵⁸ Ivanov gives many anecdotes of such precursors to holy foolery, see Chapter I in *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*

of Emesa,⁵⁹ which will figure in the case studies of Pussy Riot, Oleg Mavromatti and Petr Pavlensky. Although a larger work would consider the function of the topos more critically, the chapter will focus on bringing out the affinities between the foundational principles of holy foolery as defined in Fedotov's *The Russian Religious Mind* in relation to select performance work of the artists.

Fedotov's behavioral paradigm of the holy fool is exemplified in the classic vitae of St Symeon of Emesa. The vitae of St Symeon, a Syrian saint who lived in the first part of the sixth century, is the first full hagiography of a Fool-for-Christ. This vitae becomes a model for later Byzantine and Russian hagiographers, as the practice of holy foolery itself spreads through the Orthodox world, climaxing in the sixteenth century Moscovite Rus'. The vitae was written by the seventh century Cypriot bishop Leontios of Neapolis, who relied on paterikon-style vernacular narratives from Syria. Some scholars argue that Leontios modeled St Symeon's hagiography on two prototypes – Diogenes of Sinope and Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ At that moment in history, as the chapter subsection above has narrated, holy foolery as a practice became widespread in Egypt, Syria and Ethiopia.

The canonization of the saint points not to the uniqueness of the case, but to its growing popularity as a cultish behavioral pattern.⁶¹ The development of holy foolery as a practice and as a hagiographic narrative underscores the development of canonical behavior that marks holy foolery from other ascetic practices: men and women choose to become

⁵⁹ St Symeon of Emesa is often spelled St Simon. In literature, he is interchangeably referred to as Symeon Salos, Symeon-Fool-in-Christ, Holy Fool Symeon, Symeon from Emesa. In this work, I will refer to him as St Symeon.

⁶⁰ Krueger, Derek, and Leontius. *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

⁶¹ *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 29. "Egypt remained the acknowledged model for the type of self-abasement from which holy foolery was later to evolve. As one of the desert fathers put it: the Egyptians conceal their virtues which they possess and display the vices which they lack; the Syrians and the Greeks show off the virtues which they lack and conceal the vices which they possess."

fools for Christ through the reenactment of the behavior in the hagiographies of holy fools. As a result, the vitae of St Symeon the fool became the model for multiple further hagiographies, and also, in fact, particular actions were re-played in hagiographies as a means of gaining legitimacy in the Orthodox canon. Vernacular narratives of holy foolery predate the hagiographies, and they continue to exist side by side with the hagiographies of canonized saints. In most cases, the canonizations and the writing of the hagiography occur after the death of the saint, because holy fools tend to keep their true, holy identity hidden. In the case of St Symeon, narratives of his miracles start to emerge after his death.

St Symeon's pathway to holy foolery is marked by a desire for extreme asceticism. He leaves a monastery after two days and lives in the desert as a *boskoi* – a hermit who feeds on insects. After twenty-nine years, St Symeon feels that his actions save no one but himself, and decides to leave the desert to “by Christ's will set off and mock at the world.”⁶² The traditional asceticism of the desert saints travels from seclusion in the desert into the city – bustling with market places, pleasure houses and bathhouses - traditional domains of the devil. Furthermore, the “mocking of the world” and laughter itself are classic tools of the devil, which the holy fools appropriate.⁶³ These territories and methods are meant to contrast sharply with the pious ideal of Christian sainthood. Holy fools must always be despised for their provocative behavior, and they are often mistaken for “workers of the devil” and deemed satanical by clergymen. Therein lies the paradoxical nature of holy foolery: through the appropriation of the devil's methods, we see a divine will that is revealed through mockery, profanity and abuse.

⁶² *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*. Bruxellis: Soci    Des Bollandistes, 1909. 76.25-6

⁶³ See Likhachev, D.S. *Istoriya Pojetiki Russkoj Literaturi*. St. Petersburg: Aleteia Press, 1977. Russian.

The holy fool does not preach, but reveals a higher-order truth through the upturning of conventions and provocation. D. S. Likhachev remarks that the carnivalesque motto of holy foolery is to act in the church as if it were a pub, and in the pub as if it were a church. The mask of insanity is a method for more profound truth telling, as well as a means for achieving inner humility. For holy fools, their “sinful” behavior is justified by their inner perfection and immunity from sins, which they hide from the world by feigning madness - *salia*. When St Symeon reaches Jerusalem, he prays that “his deeds remain hidden right until the day of departure from life, so that he may avoid earthly praise.”⁶⁴ He then commences to assault people and to be assaulted by them in turn. While some of the *salia* and assaults are performed for the concealment of personal spirituality and virtue, other deeds are performed for the salvation of others through hidden, paradoxical messages.⁶⁵ The didactic message of holy foolery plays out through acts of public self-humiliation that serve to provoke the Christian values of the Orthodox public and to disprove any notions of put-on righteous piety. The addressees of the mockery of the Salos - proper Christians - historicize and reinforce the competition over piety-based and foolishness-based forms of Orthodox virtue, a debate traced back to the IVth century in *Liber graduum*.⁶⁶

In the city of Emesa, St Symeon goes on to engage in various activities that he intentionally subverts to receive near-death beatings and public humiliation. He gets a job selling beans, but gives away all of the product for free, smashes wine-pitchers, throws stones and dirt at people and has numerous encounters of sexual assault.⁶⁷ As a holy fool, St Symeon has the unique ability to lead himself and others into sin for hidden didactic

⁶⁴ BHG 78.23-5

⁶⁵ BHG 83.16-18

⁶⁶ See footnote 5 in this chapter

⁶⁷ “Holy Scandal” in *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*

purposes: for example, St Symeon walks about naked and forces women to touch his genitals. Most problematically, however, the narrative of St Symeon progressively leads to his engagement with profanity in the sacred sphere – acts of blasphemy and sacrilege. Foreshadowing St Basil's infamous destruction of icons with a hatchet in the sixteenth century to reveal a hidden symbol of the devil under the paint, St Symeon threw rocks into a cathedral and danced on the *ambon*. The presence of blasphemy and sacrilege in canonized form of holy fool behavior is of explicit importance for our discussion of blasphemy in political performance art.

Sacrilege and blasphemy become powerful didactic tools in the hands and in the body of the holy fool. The redeeming qualities of the sacrilege committed by St Symeon or other holy fools are rarely made explicit in the hagiographies. The miracles and the meaning behind the seemingly foolish acts are understood to be revealed gradually and over time. Perhaps this paucity of direct engagement with holy revelation connotes the mystery of the Divine Will. Nonetheless, hagiographies are explicit in that all the acts of the holy fools serve to reveal a hidden truth. By extension, it is implied that acts of sacrilege serve to reveal an even larger truth, or divine revelation. The ability to reveal truth through seemingly profane behavior is critical to the saint's legitimacy, and is what separates a holy fool from a mere jester or insane person, bringing him closer to the methods of contemporary political performance art. The engagement with sacrilege in the divine territory of churches, and towards icons and clergymen, is a form of institutional critique from within the Orthodox tradition that marks the holy fool as a dangerous anti-authoritarian figure. It is for this

reason that the Moscow Orthodox Church discontinued the canonization of holy fools in the seventeenth century.⁶⁸

In the continuation of this study, I will engage with the actions of St Symeon in the city of Emesa as illustrations of Fedotov's three constituents of the holy fool topos, and suggest cases of appropriation in performance art.

Against Vainglory

Fedotov defines this aspect of holy foolery as "ascetic taming of vainglory, which is always dangerous for monastic asceticism. In this sense holy foolery is a feigned madness or lack of morality for the purpose of the distancing abuse (Rus: *ношение*) from people."⁶⁹ In Orthodox culture, the sin of pride and vanity is seen as the most insurmountable. The holy fools pretend to be insane because it keeps them from becoming vain in their piety and spiritual achievements: it is a form of humility. Through this act, an individual can partake in the highest Christian virtue: the renunciation of the will.⁷⁰ Whereas for monks, asceticism can take the form of depravation of the body, for the performative holy fools, one of the methods of fighting pride is the public degradation of the body. In both cases, this evokes total annihilation of the ego and of individual will power through the body. In relation to the

⁶⁸ It is important to note that in Rus' holy foolery develops into several, almost mutually exclusive subgenres: holy foolery as extreme, overt piety, holy foolery as aggression, holy fool as pathetic and lame, and female holy foolery are distinct in their practice and behavioral form. However, for the purposes of this inquiry, I focus on the feigned madness, aggression and anti-authoritarian nature of the paradigm as expressed in Ivanov and Fedotov; However, further study into holy foolery does discuss other forms of behavior, which do not involve blasphemy, etc., but it is outside the scope of this work.

⁶⁹ "Holy Fools" in *The Russian Religious Mind*. My translation.

⁷⁰ Ivanov comments on the monastic practice of annihilation of the will, and the role this played in the establishment of holy foolery: "After taking the vow of obedience, monks endeavored to fulfill even the most absurd, humiliating, or temptation-filled injunctions of their spiritual mentors. So long as the latter acted with their disciples' knowledge and assent, one cannot call their behavior provocative, and hence it was not, in a strict sense, holy foolery. Yet the two do share the notion of deliberately, for edificatory purposes, leading others into sin, and it similarly raises the question of whether righteous behavior must adhere to standard norms, or whether one can do evil in the cause of good." *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 39-40

overcoming of vainglory, the hagiography of St Symeon highlights the saint's lack of concern for the social conventions of bodily functions in the public sphere:

He was as if incorporeal, so he saw no unseemliness in anything; weather in people or in nature. Often, when his bowels demanded the performance of their regular needs, he would squat there and then, in full view, in the middle of the square, without any embarrassment whatever. By acting thus, he wanted to persuade everybody that he was out of his natural mind.⁷¹

The seeds of anti-authoritarian critique are sown into this early gesture of the Salos. The 1994 performance of Alexander Brener reenacts this act of public defecation in his action *Plagiarism* in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. Brener kneels in front of a Van Gogh painting and defecates in his pants while screaming “Vincent! Vincent!” The body, degradation of the body, and profanity are operative aesthetics to the oeuvre of the political performance artist. Brener's other works include simulating intercourse in front of a Pushkin statue in Moscow, public masturbation, and the vandalism of a Malevich painting in a museum by painting a “dollar” sign on it (Brener was imprisoned for this action for a year). To what extent if there an affinity between the action of St Symeon and Brener's *Plagiarism* that goes beyond the visual reenactment of the gesture?

Both Symeon's and Brener's actions are achieved through personal degradation. The degradation is felt on the level of an individual: they perform a universally private, embarrassing act in public. In St Symeon's case this is done frequently, as a habit, whereas Brener performs the action once, in a museum and into his pants. However, this gesture gains meaning because of the social identity that the two figures represent beyond their individuality, being a saint and an artist. Both these social identities correspond to stereotypes of purity and beauty that the act undermines: according to social expectation, a

⁷¹ BHG 82.13-17

saint performs miracles while an artist creates beautiful art. Instead, they create excrement. The action undermines and pokes fun at the institutions to which the saint and the artist implicitly seek to belong- the church and the museum. It also undermines their own belonging to these legitimizing institutions.

Salia

The Greek term *salia* means the feigning of madness. Fedotov derives this behavioral characteristic from the biblical passage of I Corinthians I-IV: “The revelation of the contradiction between the great Christian truth and superficial reason and moral codes for the sake of mockery of the world.”⁷² The gradual development of the *salia* from the Egyptian monastic traditions is exemplified in the etymology of the word *salos*, as the Greek signifier for Fools-for-Christ. Building on the affinities between holy foolishness and Greek Cynic tradition, as well as the function of jesters in the western world, Ivanov focuses on the linguistic association of holy foolishness with insanity, which incorporates into itself the didactic-provocative behavior of spiritual elders in monasteries. *Moria* was the word used to describe regular foolishness, including the kind of clowns and jesters, and *salos* comes from the Syriac into Greek, and is used to describe foolishness that is aggressive and provocative.⁷³ *Salos* became the term for ‘a holy man who hides his holiness behind the mask of a *moros* (fool).’⁷⁴ When *salos* traveled to Russia, it was translated as *yurodivi* – which has an etymological similarity to the Russian word *urod* – a freak, either from nature of through

⁷² “Holy Fools” in *The Russian Religious Mind*

⁷³ *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 32-33. Ivanov discusses the etymology of *salos* at length. He highlights the disputed sources of the word, and its various translations into Syriac, Greek and Coptic. The word first appeared in the Egyptian collection *Lausiac History* to signify “people who are afflicted in the mind.”

⁷⁴ *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, 37

malice. The aggressive acts of holy fools have hidden “benefits,” “but the external scandal is great and this effect is precisely what was aimed at.”⁷⁵

In consideration of the appropriation of the holy fool chronotope in contemporary political performance art, the feigned madness for the sake of revelation is of crucial importance, because of the sentencing and imprisonment of artists as colloquial “blasphemers” by the Russian criminal law for “ignition of religious hate.” As the vitae St Symeon shows, one of the distinct features of the scandalous behavior of holy fools is the evocation of blasphemy and sacrilege – profane acts in sacred spheres. This blasphemy serves to uncover a larger truth, but it can also serve to point at the superficiality of visual significations of Christian virtues, and finally it is a way to emphasize that Christians should not judge others. It is important to keep this analysis in mind, given that individuals who explicitly consider themselves “devoutly Orthodox” propose that artists such as Pussy Riot be stoned to death.⁷⁶ Another question that this line of inquiry raises, is the degree to which the blasphemy, intentional for holy fools, was intentional for the artists in question.

For the purposes of this study, I highlight how the transformation of sacrilege into revelation is one of distinct legitimizing features that make a fool into a saint. It is also among the most direct links to the legacy of Christ, who acted aggressively in the Hebrew temple and was accused of sacrilege by the Pharisees. The hagiography of St Symeon of Emesa, which is full of profanity, has several instances of true sacrilege in a holy space:

The day after his arrival in Emesa, on Sunday, he gathered nuts and went into a church at the start of the service, throwing nuts and extinguishing the lamps. People

⁷⁵*The Russian Religious Mind*, 318

⁷⁶ Such commentary is abundant on social media over the course of the Pussy Rit trial and imprisonment. For example, see: Екатерина Самуцевич освобождена в зале суда.” YouTube video, 3:24. Posted by “novayagazeta,” October 10, 2012.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJzDeeEUA5k&feature=player_embedded

tried to expel him, but he leaps onto the *ambon* and started throwing nuts at the women. He was ejected with great difficulty.⁷⁷

Among the most problematic aspects of holy foolery is the engagement with sacrilege through a seeming hateful behavior towards places of worship, icons and monks. In fact, it is told that St Symeon is particularly hated by monks. Scholarship on holy foolery understands this practice as the revelation of a greater social evil: a larger sacrilege, one frequently committed by the church itself. In the case of St Symeon, his actions fall into a pattern of poking fun at people's presumed righteousness and piety: he throws nuts at the lamps and leaps onto the *ambon* so as not to let people think too highly of themselves, to show that merely looking "pious" and going to church is not enough.⁷⁸ This discussion of *salia* as behavioral form demonstrates the intimate relationship between *salia* and blasphemy. Modeling their behavior on Christ, blasphemy is intentional for both holy fools and political artists, but it is not conceived as a "blasphemy," but as a form of critique and revelation.

Kenosis

Fedotov defines the third characteristic of holy foolishness as the "serving of the world as a unique parable, which is made incarnate not through words or actions, but through the strength of the Spirit, spiritual commandment of the identity, which is frequently prophetic (Rus: *нппоучество*)."⁷⁹ The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the body is termed *kenosis*, a Greek theological term referencing self-emptying for the reception of divine will. The physical side of the spiritual process of this self-emptying can involve pain, starvation and suffering.

⁷⁷ BHG 79.25-80.2

⁷⁸ There is a hidden hypocrisy in this type of didacticism because the holy fool does not do what he preaches. St Symeon pokes fun of people's false sense of righteousness by wearing a ring of sausages around his neck during lent, eating them and constantly offering them to everybody- but he does still get to eat them.

Through the reception of the divine will, the human body serves a didactic and revelatory role for the people, however, as we have discussed in this chapter, Ivanov delineates a strict border between a Hebrew prophet as vessel and the “secret saint’s” relationship to the divine. Fedotov’s definition further marks a similar dichotomy between “possession” and ‘will:’ the holy fool embodies the dialogue between these two forces. *Kenosis* is not a characteristic that Fedotov attributes to holy foolery in his definition, but the term can be seen as a signifier for the above; for instance, it can be implied in the frequent beatings that the fools receive. Christ undergoes *kenosis* through his suffering, and Christian theology encourages believers to undergo *kenosis* in the name of Christ: to imitate the suffering of Christ, to surrender one’s will to Christ.

Imitation of Christ frequently takes the form of masochism and is referred to as *kenosis-in-the-name-of-Christ*; public self-sacrifice modeled on the suffering of Christ on earth. Scholars attribute the imitation of Christ to holy foolery, and by extension, one can argue that social service, parables, prophesy and being possessed by the Spirit are all characteristics derived from the life of Jesus Christ to behavioral signifiers of Christianity. Although “imitation of Christ” is absent from Fedotov’s definition altogether, however, in my analysis, I will extend Fedotov’s definition to include the imitation of Christ and use my term – *kenosis-for-Christ* to define the third characteristic of holy foolery.⁷⁹ *Kenosis* allows for the application of the paradigm of holy foolery to cases in performance art that subject the body to physical pain as a method for the delivery of a political message.

Kenosis for Christ is inherent to the reception of the holy fool and imbedded in the performative and relational nature of the paradigm. Saints are to desire to be co-crucified

⁷⁹ In fact, many scholars of holy foolery find *kenosis* to be one of the markers of the behavioral paradigm. See Svitlana Kobets in *Holy Foolishness in Russia: New Perspectives*

with Christ spiritually, but this desire can also take a physical manifestation for the holy fools. There are actions in the vitae of St Symeon that can be seen as imitations of Christ's carrying the cross through Jerusalem to public mockery:

Here is how he enters the town: he found a dead dog at the dump outside town, removed his belt cord, tied it to the dog's paw and ran, dragging the dog behind him. He entered the city gates, near which there was a children's school. When the children saw, they began to shout: "Look at the stupid abba," and they chased him and beat him all over.⁸⁰

In a classic way, St Symon's *kenosis* for Christ is not devoid of the carnivalesque: the cross is replaced by a dead dog and the Jews that mock Christ on his path to Golgotha are children of Emesa. The relational nature of holy foolery- the contingency between the fool and his audience - is stressed in this passage. It is also important to note that it is unclear when the "didacticism" exactly occurs: the entirety of the events, from the finding of the dog, through the beating, and onwards are interconnected and describe a gradual revelation of meaning.

This nature of how meaning is created is significant to the art performances in question because my study encompasses not just the immediate act and its audience, but a larger unraveling of discourse and creation of meaning- in the case studies, I refer to the interaction as the "event." St Symeon's visual upturning of conventions lays the foundation for the inquiry of the following chapter into the Bakhtinian carnival and carnivalesque. Whereas Christ's journey is to Mount Golgotha, St Symeon's destination is the town's jolly market square. Similarly to Christ, St Symeon is also semi nude: the saint had the habit of taking off his clothes and wrapping them around his head as if it were a turban. These classic gestures of a carnival character must be buttressed by the foundation of religious tradition that has been laid out in this chapter.

⁸⁰ BHG 79.19-25

1.4 Holy Fool and the Avant-Garde

Through the extension of the holy fool topos as an operative paradigm in the work of contemporary political performance artists in Russia, the objective is to shed light on the history of affiliation of Orthodoxy and protest culture and the continual importance of religious aesthetics to post-Soviet art and the structure of Russian postmodernism. The chapter has explicated both the formation and the deconstruction of holy foolery into behavioral terms, in which protest, performance and a specific aesthetics become visible. An important stepping stone to this final part of the analysis is the conceptual relationship between the two forms that can link the above to the present in a solid bind. In this subchapter, I develop on the conceptual affinity to gestures of “negation,” which is one of the theoretical sources of blasphemy in both art and religion. Such an affinity is best traced by Mikhail Epstein, in his extensive work on the Russian postmodernism as a simultaneous player of the Orthodox and Soviet traditions. In affinity to my interest in repositioning the specificity of certain practices and identities in local culture, Epstein is daring in his claims:

It should be emphasized that conceptualism is tightly linked not only with the system of Soviet ideology, but also with the deep contradictions of the Russian religious identity or intermediary point between the West and the East.⁸¹

Epstein is a scholar on Russian culture whose work largely focuses on tracing the counterparts and sometimes roots of certain western concepts in Russian culture. In my analysis, I will put forward Epstein’s original engagements with concepts such as avant-garde, conceptual art, anti-art and negation, which he discusses only terms of physical art-objects and not performance, and extend them where suitable to my work. The objective is less to appropriate Epstein’s methods and terms, but more to give an example of a leading

⁸¹ Epstein, Mikhail. *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, 197

contemporary scholar working with western terms vis a vis a Russian religious tradition, who understands the “religious” in art not in terms of representation of devotional objects (which does not make the art in question religious *in essence*), but as another, complex relation to the sacred.

Epstein argues that the seemingly alien term of the western postmodern, a post-1960 phenomenon, is in fact deeply rooted in the Russian cultural tradition:⁸² Epstein’s definition of postmodernism derives from Jean Baudrillard’s influential discussion of simulation as “production of reality as a series of plausible copies,” as well as the “waning of comprehensible metanarrative and the abolition between high and low culture.”⁸³ Epstein does not focus on the disillusion of metanarrative per se, but in his argument for the longevity of postmodernism as an effective “production of reality” in Russian history. He starts with referencing Prince Vladimir, “who adopted the idea of Christianity in AD 988, and proceeded to implant it in a vast country where it had been virtually unknown until that time.”⁸⁴

This narrative is problematic, since one can claim that Constantine also produced a postmodernism in the IVth century; I think Epstein’s analysis more smoothly accounts for XXth century Russian culture, and Non-Conformist art of the 1980s most specifically; a time when Soviet artists ironically exposed the vacuous nature of labels under communism- Eric Bulatov, Komar and Melamid, Ilia Kabakov. These dissident artists used the visual methods of Andy Warhol, but it would be a mistake to place them in the same genre - these methods came from a different reality and folded into a context different than Warhol’s American capitalism.

⁸² *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*.189

⁸³ *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, 189

⁸⁴ *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, 190-191

Epstein seems driven by a dissatisfaction similar to my own of how dissident and seemingly “Pop” Soviet art folds into western discourse. Where Epstein is most successful, is in his linking of the 1980’s postmodernism to a parallel type of postmodernism emerging in the Soviet 1930s with socialist realism as an official genre - also an empty signifier for a faux-heroism of the time. In a precursor to a postmodern gesture, surrealist Rene Magritte drew a pipe and wrote “ceci n’est pas une pipe.” In the early and late Soviet cases, “the presence of the idea of a sausage confronts the absence of real meat therein.”⁸⁵ However, the absence of a pipe in Magritte is due to the simulation of life that advertising produces; it is not the physical absence of a sausage in economically wrecked USSR. In both cases, paradoxically, “false ideas constitute the essence of this genuine reality.”⁸⁶

Epstein’s analysis of the avant-garde as a form of anti-art that is linked to holy foolery is most influential for the present work. Epstein characterizes the avant-garde as distinctly anti-art, non-representation, and a form of scandal, characteristics that he argues emerge out of a religious tradition and a monotheistic culture. Conceptually, the author argues that there are strong affinities between holy foolery and avant-garde art, and plausibly they are of a single avant-garde tradition that stems from the historical role of dissidence in religion to destroy idols and simulation. Similarly to Duchamp and Malevich, who “blaspheme” by a negation of art that produces a new, more pure form of art (an anti-art), “the foolishness is not a negation of faith, but negation by means of faith. Even blasphemous statements that are often made in the avant-garde milieu can find a parallel in

⁸⁵ *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* 194

⁸⁶ *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, 201

the deed of the holy fool.”⁸⁷ Thus, like an avant-garde artist, the gesture of the holy fool is not an actual negation, but a “protestant” purification of the meaning of faith from idolatry.

It is of note how Epstein indirectly places a generative role into negation and by extension, conceptual blasphemy - negation is not a real negation, but a purification of the genre from which it stems in the sense of crisis. A quote from Berdyaev, a religious scholar writing in the time of the Russian Revolution, illuminates Epstein’s metaphysical scale:

The world becomes disincarnate in its membranes, and is reincarnated again. Are also cannot be preserved in its old incarnation... The true meaning of the crisis in visual arts lies in the convulsive effort to go beyond the material membrane of the world, to capture a more ethereal flesh, to overcome the law of impenetrability... Thus the fate of the world’s flesh comes to pass, leading to a resurrection and a new life through death.⁸⁸

Berdyaev, and through him, Epstein, link the avant-garde with a general change in paradigm, which the avant-garde foreshadows and propels with its sacrificial gestures of negation. This reading diverges from the role of blasphemy as “parasite,” as it is described by Mikhail Bakhtin.⁸⁹ Bakhtin has a similar interest in forces of change and their representation, and their difference is important to develop further. Unlike Bakhtin, who sees change and stasis as a constant dialectic, the former have an apocalyptic, more traditionally eschatological notion of time, which account for this difference in how blasphemy is conceptualized.

In his argument for the roots of Russian conceptualism in this kind of generative-negation, Epstein claims that the West realizes it’s calling in culture that is developed through Catholicism and Protestantism, in their positive sense of God and reason. The East,

⁸⁷ *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, 54

⁸⁸ *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, 57

⁸⁹ Bakhtin notes that humorous forms are reliant on the official pathos, which they mock. Along Bakhtinian definition of parody, “their role was negative, iconoclastic, taboo destroying.”⁸⁹ This relationship constitutes them as parasites - they are parasites of the “serious form.” The dictionary definition of a parasite is “a person or thing that takes something from something else and does nothing to earn or deserve it.”

and Russia, has developed a religious “intuition” based on Emptiness.⁹⁰ Epstein holds that conceptualism itself “illuminates, at least in part, Russia’s religious calling:”

Conceptualism negates affirmation. Such is the difference between satanic laughter, which destroys belief and the laughter of the holy fool, as he unmasks and idol.”⁹¹

The idea of apophatic, transcendental Emptiness is pertinent to “the sausage that is not there.” However, can this apophatic tradition really be extended to the appropriation of the holy fool topos by contemporary political performance art?

The fool becomes a holy fool when the exposure shows not an “emptiness,” but a fullness of power. Is a fullness of power a kind of emptiness – a spiritual emptiness? I would argue against this nuanced reading; the holy fool topos stands in the work of political performance art as an act of generative negation (via blasphemy) and a form of anti-art (didactic, not in a gallery), however, it exposes precisely the fullness of power of the state and the church. This differs from the role of the holy fool in the court of Ivan the Terrible, where the fool was the double of the Tsar, and in a sense, exposed the opposite to the power of the Tsar - an emptiness. From this argument, one can conclude that the appropriation of holy foolery and its embodiment are a conceptual and behavioral form, but that this form is not postmodern in the case of political performance today.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to demonstrate how a religious essence can change and take different forms. Holy foolery as behavioral paradigm has explicated some of the key characteristics of holy foolery, each of which appears in the case study discussions. Through

⁹⁰ *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, 198

⁹¹ *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, 198

Mikhail Epstein, I have clarified my notion of the “religious” in art, and the theoretical connotation that blasphemy can carry in relation to negation and the postmodern.

2 Institutional Critique in Art and Culture Wars

2.1 Introduction

This chapter defines blasphemy and situates it in the context of the post-Soviet art and culture wars. This chapter narrates how the Putin fostered an articulation of the sacred, a concept that increasingly occupies public space and merges with nationalism, effectively sacralizing both domains.⁹² Performance work is relational to its context. Because the carnival of performance art has no audience, and only participants, the “audience” has come to play a new role in the work and its meaning. As opposed to the work of Actionists Brener and Kulik, who evoked laughter to a small art audience even if their work was public, the newly activated self-identified “Orthodox” participants of contemporary political performance add novel dimensions - such as moral offence. This marks a critical transformation in the relationship between the artist, the public and the system of power.

Some Russian intellectuals remember how the historical *yurodivi* functioned as the double of the Tsar,⁹³ and as such the court fool enjoyed an immunity in his hooliganism – this mutual understanding and cohabitation is best exemplified in Brener’s challenging president Yeltsin to a boxing match outside the Red Square.⁹⁴ In 1991 The Blue Noses wrote the offensive word “ХУЙ” with their bodies on the same Red Square. Today, foul

⁹² Papkova, who is cited in the chapter, in her work on the relationship between the ROC and the state, notes the increasing religiosity of Russian population through superficial visual signifiers and the identification of Orthodoxy with nationalism. This form of Orthodoxy is increasingly seen as hypocritical by the “liberal” Orthodox camp of intellectuals and practitioners of culture.

⁹³ See Panchenko, *Laughter as Spectacle* on Ivan The Terrible’s personal fool. In the western tradition, we see this in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, where the King has a fool-double.

⁹⁴ See Panchenko, “Laughter as Spectacle,” 99-100, 121 and Priscilla Hunt “The Fool and the Tsar: The *Vita of Andrew of Constantinople* and Russian Urban Holy Foolishness.”

language is officially forbidden, and the humor of the previous actions is transformed; look at the dead-serious action of Mavromatti, who crucifies and then threatens to electrocute himself to death, or Pavlensky - a naked, emaciated body.

2.2 Defining Blasphemy

Anya Bernstein, writing on the Post-Soviet art wars and the defining of scopic regimes during the “Careful, Religion!” trials, states that “potentially religious art engaging religious themes flourished in Russia throughout the 1990s but passed completely unnoticed by the broader public. Now, not only was there general disapproval, but it was often expressed through the term “blasphemy” (*bogokbul'stvo*, *koshunstvo*) – a term that appeared archaic in the former Soviet Union, just as it does in contemporary Euro-American world, but which now firmly entered public discourse.”⁹⁵ In Ter-Oganian’s case, as well as in the case of Kulik and Brener, religion was not yet mobilized as a marked of identity, and hence, the artists were never publically condemned of “spitting into the souls of Orthodox people”⁹⁶. The charge against Ter-Oganian’s performance was surprising - a kind of cruel joke of the late Yeltsin years. It is not until the “Careful, Religion!” and “Forbidden Art” trials of the mid ‘00s that the accusation of blasphemy is totally exhausted of a humorous, absurd quality.

How do we define blasphemy? David Lawton, in his book *Blasphemy* (1993)⁹⁷ looks at a historical study of blasphemy as text. Lawton argues that blasphemy is escalating in complexity from once being a well-defined act in the Jewish bible, to the Christian tradition,

⁹⁵ *Caution Religion! Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post-Soviet culture wars*, 421

⁹⁶ “spitting into the souls of Orthodox people” as a term is defined in **Extending Is Critique Secular?**

⁹⁷ Lawton, David A. *Blasphemy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

where a single blasphemy is always in conversation with others, pointing to a continual social articulation of moral degeneracy. In affinity to Bakhtin, Lawton links blasphemy to the carnival:

One of [blasphemy's] major characteristics being that it is beyond general definition. No one group consistently controls it, either over time, because values change and transcendent values change more than most in our culture (and hardly at all in others), or at any given moment, though at many such moments it is possible to describe what blasphemy means. Blasphemy is an exchange – a conversation gone wrong, or a carnivalesque travesty of a public conversation. Though the weight is always heavily on the side of power, the offense exists between the sides involved, in the gap between them, in the exchange itself, an exchange without reciprocity. [...] Sometimes a dispute about where power actually lies forms part of that exchange...”⁹⁸

Blasphemy is an exchange. As an exchange transaction, it is often that the users of the discourse are on one side, and the discourse itself is to the other.⁹⁹ What is most telling about Lawton's characteristic is that blasphemy is a carnivalesque travesty, but it is also a dialectic that points to a gap, a kind of existence in two different modalities. It is precisely the same thing that laughter reveals, although laughter also liberates. What does blasphemy open and what does it liberate? Blasphemy is inscribed on the body through power, and laughter emanates from the body. While Bakhtinian laughter shows that nothing is sacred, and blasphemy reveals the borders of the sacred.

Sacred and profane space is intimately interlinked with power: the more hegemonic the power, the more it expands sacred time into space. “Blasphemy is about impure crossings from one side of the sacred-profane divide to the other... [T]he line between sacred and profane is drawn in sand and the proverbial winds of time blow, covering the

⁹⁸ *Blasphemy*, 5

⁹⁹ *Blasphemy*, 43

lines only so they will be redrawn,” writes B. Plate in his book on blasphemy in art.¹⁰⁰ The same author describes the importance in blasphemy as an *accusation* where the meaning “is in the greater environment in which the charges are made.”¹⁰¹ In a sense, that the accusation of blasphemy point not at the accused, but it reverses the finger and points at the accuser. This concept of blasphemy escapes accusers of Pussy Riot, such as Shevchenko; for them, the accusation of blasphemy rests firmly on the accused. Of course, the “reversal of the finger” has a Biblical connotation in which Christ teaches not to judge others: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”¹⁰² However, the evocation of blasphemy, sacrilege and iconoclasm in the artwork that Plate discusses in *Art That Offends* does not always fuel the hot debates like those of the Danish cartoons of Russian culture wars; Francis Bacon’s *Three Studies of the Crucifixion* (1965), Serrano’s *Piss Christ* (1987) and Chip Simon’s *Jesus Toast* (2005) are blasphemous and scandalous works of art that hang in museums and are exhibited in galleries, and which are celebrated for their iconoclasm. I would suggest that blasphemy is not capable of creating a social resonance in a space that has no struggle over conceptions of the sacred. Blasphemy can be evoked, remarked and even celebrated - but it does not produce a revelation without a socially disruptive accusation of blasphemy.

Anya Bernstein also explores the drawing of the boundaries between sacred and profane in the Pussy Riot affair through the accusation of blasphemy. In her work on Pussy Riot, Bernstein seems to ally with Plate’s definition of blasphemy. She writes:

¹⁰⁰ Plate, S. Brent. *Blasphemy: Art That Offends*. London: Black Dog, 2006, 60

¹⁰¹ *Art That Offends*, 34

¹⁰² Matthew 7:1-5

Whether Pussy Riot was supported or condemned, a common sentiment was that they crossed a mysterious invisible line, breaking a previously unspoken taboo, and thereby, revealing its existence. If there was any consensus across the wide social and political spectrum of the Russian public, it was that Pussy Riot sharply divided society.¹⁰³

Both Plate and Bernstein position blasphemy as revealing, pointing out, dividing and crossing an invisible line. I would suggest that in the popular imaginary, this is precisely what rearticulates blasphemy as revelation. Revelation does not function as a prophesy – as in it comes from God, but as a parable – as in the parables of Christ, and the parabolic nature of the behavior of the holy fools.

2.3 Blasphemy and Revelation

There are two distinct voices in the Russian art wars that link Pussy Riot – and by extension, the accusation of blasphemy towards political art – to revelation. Valery Nikolskii of the Moscow branch of the Helsinki Group and dissident priest Gleb Yakunin (who served a prison terms for his fight against the repression of religion in the USSR) claim Pussy Riot in particular as belonging to the religious tradition. In interviews and posts in social media, they point out the term “punk-prayer” as a classic prayer of a holy fool. As in the holy fool topos, the action takes place in a holy place and is addressed to power- the Patriarch and the President. “It is a prayer of people who address power with this or that *oblichenija* (обличения).”¹⁰⁴ⁱⁱ In Russian, the word *oblichenie* is synonymous with “bringing out to clean water,” unmasking, taking away the façade and to open the eyes. I think that the concept of *oblichenie* is also a signifier for the function of revelation. Furthermore, I argue

¹⁰³ Bernstein, Anya. "An Inadvertent Sacrifice: Body Politics and Sovereign Power in the Pussy Riot Affair." *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 1 (2013), 222

¹⁰⁴ See the interview with Valery Nikolskii here:

Fanajlova, Elena. "Delo Pussy Riot: Za Chto Nakazivat' Uchastnits Gruppi?" Radio Liberty. March 23, 2012. Accessed June 02, 2015. <http://www.svoboda.org/content/feature/24525370.html>.

that there is an intimate contingency between the initial blasphemy as an *accusation* and the *oblichenie*- the unmasking of a truth and a revelation.

2.4 Two Cases of Blasphemy

“Careful, Religion!”(2003) and “Forbidden Art” (2006) are two art exhibitions in the Andrei Sakharov Museum in Moscow that were shut down by the Russian government amidst a social scandal. These exhibitions have ignited what Bernstein has called the post-Soviet art and culture wars.

The Museum and Center are named after a famous Soviet dissident and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Andrei Sakharov, a nuclear physicist and a human right advocate. The Museum has a tradition of privileging alternative and dissident art. The first controversial exhibition, “Careful, Religion!,” exhibited the work of 39 Russian and a few international artists plus two art collectives on the theme of religion.¹⁰⁵ The works included installations and visual representations; some works appropriated icons and physical crosses, others were made in the style of *Sotsart*, conflating the imagery of pop, Soviet and nationalist culture with religious imagery. Less than a hundred people had seen the actual exhibition; four days after the exhibition opening, a group of people - referring to themselves as “orthodox activists” - came in and destroyed several of the artworks, writing “scum,” “you hate Orthodoxy,” and “damn you,” etc., on the works and exhibition walls.ⁱⁱⁱ The exhibition was closed. The vandalizing individuals were detained, but the charges against them were soon dropped in

¹⁰⁵ The exhibition statement “communicates the distinct duality of its conception: this is both a call for a careful, delicate and respectful treatment of religion, faith and believers and a sign: “Careful, danger!” when it comes to religious fundamentalism (no matter whether it is Muslim or Russian Orthodox), the fusion with religion with the state, and obscurantism.” (Sakharov Center 2003)

legal acknowledgement that they had not committed a crime. In turn, the accusation of criminal activity was turned on the exhibition organizers.¹⁰⁶ The curator of the exhibition and museum director Yuri Samodurov and the museum affiliate Lyudmila Vasilovskaja were put on trial in Moscow. On March 28, 2005, Samodurov and Vasilovskaja were charged guilty of “ignition of national and religious hate” via Article 282

The “Careful, Religion!” case sparked extreme controversy in Russia and articulated the debates over an existent social divide. The trauma of the case was made more detrimental by the death of the two participating artists (widely assumed to be linked to the artists’ personal reaction to the case¹⁰⁷). The mobilization of the sentiment against the exhibition was also prolific: in the weeks following the opening of the exhibition, the local Russian-language newspapers featured “twenty articles with condemnation, [and] the court received several thousand such letters.”¹⁰⁸ These positions overwhelmingly articulated support for the individuals who destroyed the artwork.

As retaliation after the failure of “Careful, Religion!,” the Sakharov Museum opened “Forbidden Art” exhibition in 2006. Curated by Yuri Samodurov and influential art critic/curator Andrei Erofeev, “Forbidden Art” exhibited works of art that were refused exhibition in museums due to state censorship.¹⁰⁹ Artworks were exhibited behind a wall, which had peepholes to see the work through. Several artists from “Careful, Religion!” were

¹⁰⁶One of the offenders, M. Liukshin, stated that he “aimed to forestall the crime” with his violent actions in the museum.

“Razgrom Antireligioznoj Vistavki - Ne Huliganstvo.” *PIA Новосту*, August 11, 2003. Accessed June 03, 2015. <http://ria.ru/incidents/20030811/418164.html>.

¹⁰⁷ The body of artist Anna Mihalchuk was found in a Berlin river, 2008. Vladislav Mamishev-Monro was found drowned in a pool in Indonesia, 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Samodurov, Yuri. “O Vistavke “Ostorozhno, Religija!” I Sobitijax Vokrug Nee.” *Www.atheism.ru*. Accessed June 03, 2015. http://www.atheism.ru/library/Samodurov_1.phtml.

¹⁰⁹ The exhibition statement is “monitoring and discussion of the character and tendencies of institutional censorship in the cultural field.” (Sakharov Center 2007)

shown, along with established Soviet-era artists, such as Ilia Kabakov. As with “Careful, Religion!,” a case was started against the organizers of the exhibition. They were accused of “ignition of religious hate,” this time by the nationalist-conservative organization “The People’s Assembly” (Народный Собор), which was backed up by “People’s Defense” (Народная Защита) and The Union for Orthodox Youth. In the course of the now infamous trial, the actual works of art were considered by a diverse citizen body - from psychologists to self-identified religious individuals, qualifying the moral pathology of the artists, the blasphemy of the art, and the degeneracy of the curators. As an example, the work by artist A. Savko in “Forbidden Art,” which featured Mickey Mouse as Jesus Christ, was presented by the accusers as an offensive and blasphemous caricature of Christ that intentionally offends the feelings of religious people.^{110iv}

Samodurov and Erofeev were sentenced under Russian Criminal Law Article 282. As a result, Erofeev was fired from his curatorial position in the State Tretyakov Gallery and Samodurov was forced out from the Sakharov Museum Center. The verdict could have included five years in prison, but was minimized to a fine. Both affairs sparked extreme controversies and public debates, which had articulated the position and stakes that will be inherited in the Pussy Riot case within a few years. Similarly to the demonstrations outside the Pussy Riot trials in Moscow, the “Forbidden Art” trial in the Tagansky Court House included demonstrations both by activist art collective Voina (which then included Pussy Riot future member N. Tolokonnikova) and the singing of religious psalms and the demonstration of religious symbols for the purpose of spiritual purification by the accusing

¹¹⁰ "Интерфакс-Религия: Калужский суд признал картину с Микки Маусом в роли Христа экстремистским материалом." *Интерфакс-Религия: Калужский суд признал картину с Микки Маусом в роли Христа экстремистским материалом*, August 19, 2011. Accessed June 03, 2015. <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/index.php/myblogs?act=news&div=41916>.

parties^v. Anya Bernstein defines the proceeding as post-Soviet art wars in which “competing ways of seeing and underlying notion of the human that emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union”¹¹¹ are articulated.

In relation to the nationalist-conservative accusing parties, who claim to have experienced a deliberate offense of religious sentiments due to the blasphemy in the exhibition, an opposition to the charges from the Russian cultural elite was mobilized.¹¹² Some members of the intellectual elite voiced their dislike of the actual works of art, such as Marat Guelman, but were outraged by the fact of the accusation. As shown in opinion pieces, radio interviews and dozens of articles in various art and non-art media, the opposition was united in condemning the inherently political nature of the trial against the legacy of Sakharov, the premeditated nature of the position to destroy contemporary art, as well as commenting on the “medieval nature” of the charges themselves. There was also revealing commentary expressing the underlying hypocrisy behind the accusation “against hate” that was itself deliberately hateful towards practitioners of experimental culture - this opinion will be influential in the construction of blasphemy and revelation in the Pussy Riot case. As a final word, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church condemned the exhibition by stating that “If we see that an artist is being bad, and this dirt – there is such a form of contemporary art – *chernyxa*, he is squirting out of himself, then he contains others with this.”¹¹³ By both sides of the divide, the art wars became a competition over dissimilar

¹¹¹ Bernstein, A. "Caution, Religion! Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post-Soviet Art Wars." *Public Culture* 26, no. 3 74 (2014), 422

¹¹² Including theorist Boris Groys, filmmaker Pavel Lungin, writer Ljudmila Ulitskaja, and many others who spoke out and published work in relation to the trial. However, Anya Bernstein discusses the lack of coherence behind the support among the intellectuals and the gradual change of opinion:

“Caution, Religion! Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post-Soviet Art Wars.

¹¹³ "Patriarch Osudil Erofeeva I Samodurova Za Otsustvie Liubvi K Liudjam." *Lenta.ru*, June 23, 2010. Accessed June 03, 2015. <http://lenta.ru/news/2010/07/22/condemn/>.

notions of secular and sacred values in the public realm of culture.¹¹⁴

2.5 The Church and State as Institutions

To what extent is the perceived infringement on secular culture, as expressed by contemporary Russian intellectuals in opposition to the above charges, justified by the institution of the Russian Orthodox Church? Irina Papkova in *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics* (2011) gives an up to date account of the evolution of the ROC (Russian Orthodox Church) and its role in Russian politics. Papkova discusses how Russian Orthodoxy has been mobilized by the state apparatus for a unification of people in search of identity after the fall of a seventy-four-year experiment in socialism and state enforced atheism.¹¹⁵ It is important to note that the Orthodox Church has had a long struggle for independence - from Peter I onward it was under the control of the state, and the patriarchate was only able to be restored in 1917 due to the collapse of the state. This history of state subordination is influential for our analysis of the present-day behavior of the ROC.

To this day, ideal notions of church and state relations have not been solidified. Having learned from the mistakes of the Soviet past, the Orthodox Church explicitly rejects any infiltration by the government. In turn, it has come to infiltrate politics with a novel agency.¹¹⁶ *The Social Concept* (2000) - an official publication on the identity and role of the Orthodox Church, written by the Patriarch – is an important expression of how the ROC

In Russian:

“Когда мы видим, что художник пакостничает, причем эту пакость и грязь, есть такое современное слово — чернуху, выплескивает из себя, то он этим заражает других.”

¹¹⁴ Bernstein, A. "Caution, Religion! Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post-Soviet Art Wars." *Public Culture* 26, no. 3 74 (2014),

¹¹⁵ Papkova, Irina. *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011

¹¹⁶ 1927- Metropolitan Sergius signed a declaration of loyalty to the Soviet state. The Orthodox Church became the state church, and engaged in the propaganda of the USSR as a place of religious freedom. “*Sergianism* became a byword for unholy compromise with a godless regime,” *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 28

understands its role. *The Social Concept* describes the term “secular” as a “certain distinction between the spheres of church and state:” it is not a total removal of religion from the public sphere.¹¹⁷ In the “Church and State” section of *The Social Concept*, the Patriarchate claims the right to “bring to the state’s attention the inadmissibility of the spread of convictions that lead... to spiritual offense of religious feelings, [and] any damage to the cultural-spiritual authenticity of [Russia’s] people.”¹¹⁸ This important statement demonstrates the ideal sought contingency between the state and the church, and makes the ROC a de facto hegemon over moral values.

Surprisingly, *The Social Concept* has not been discussed in the plethora of publications concerning the “religious hate” charges and trials that I have read. However, it is very pertinent. Through the “Church and State” clause, the justification of the action against Pussy Riot and other art has a legal precedent. Papkova discusses how through *The Social Concept*, the ROC has the right to challenge the mass media whenever there is “blasphemy against God, other examples of blasphemy, systematic conscious disinformation about church life, libel against the church and its clergy.”¹¹⁹ The Patriarch has the right to appeal to the state for the enforcement of action to these cases. However, the close allegiance between the Patriarch and the President create voluntary public enforcement where there has been merely an opinion expressed in either realm. In the given cases, the Patriarch has never made a specific appeal for condemnation, but the accusations unravel in relation to the understood, implicit approval of the Patriarch.

The influence of the ROC in post-Soviet Russia is summed up by Papkova as “the

¹¹⁷ *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 30

¹¹⁸ *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 36

¹¹⁹ *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 38

frequent joint appearances of politicians and high-ranking clergy, the remarkable visibility of the ROC in the secular media, the generally benevolent attitudes towards the church in the army, and finally, the patriarch's role in the presidential inauguration ceremonies since the first Putin term.¹²⁰ The nature of the Russian population's identification with Orthodoxy is also complex, and must be analyzed in order to unpack the identity construction of the players in the post-Soviet art and culture wars. There is no available data on Russian baptisms, but in a 2008 poll, 60-80% of the population identified as "Orthodox." Papkova notes a discrepancy between these numbers and the identification as "believer" or "church-goer" - a meager 3-7% of the population in the same category of "Orthodox." Also, a surprising amount of "Orthodox" identifies with un-Christian categories of "magic," etc., and only 17% of the "Orthodox" actually believe in basic Orthodox tenants: Jesus Christ as the son of God, etc.¹²¹ On par with this data, Papkova notes that the "resurgent popularity of religion," documented in statistics, is not supported by statistical increase in the realm of "church-goer" or "believer," but in the rising popularity of Orthodox religiosity outside church walls – "including religious processions, pilgrimages and Orthodox markets."¹²² Lastly, it is important to note that 72% of the poll participants view Orthodoxy as the basis of the Russian state and cultural tradition. These statistics convey the popularity of visual identification with Orthodoxy and its conflation with "Russianness," but not a practice of the Christian values and system of beliefs.

One can foresee the foundation for the dispute for a spirituality and belief-based Orthodox identity with that of nationalism and visual, religious identification-based

¹²⁰ *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 189

¹²¹ *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 179

¹²² *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 180

Orthodox identity. Furthermore, state politics in Russia share “in patterns of confounding spirituality with culture and of treating religion and spirituality as useful primarily in the creation of patriotic (and, by implication, obedient) citizens.”¹²³ Such perceptions are indeed popular and have sprouted routes; for instance, the anti-western group Orthodox Sovereignty held the conference “Orthodoxy and Patriotism” in 2004, reserved for the discussion of the intimate and necessary cooperation between the church and the state.¹²⁴

Papkova also narrates the schism between “liberal” and “traditionalist” understanding of Orthodoxy (her terms). I believe that this precise schism articulates itself in the public cases that make up the post-Soviet art and culture wars - from Oleg Mavromatti to “Careful, Religion!” to Pussy Riot. The unification of the church and state under Stalin have taught two powerful lessons: for the ROC, to be independent of state influence, and for believers, to be independent of the ROC. Religious and intellectual dissidents have formed a particular identity based on a shared opposition to Soviet system; these people were brought back into certain “alternative” parishes that had liberal and dissident priests under Perestroika. “Liberal Orthodoxy as it exists today in Russia centers on the movements associated with Fathers Alexander Men’ and Georgii Kochetkov. [...] On the one hand, some reformers have sought to perpetuate the legacy of Father Alexander Men’, a highly popular pastor who was killed by an unknown assassin in 1990.”¹²⁵ The name of Alexander Men’ is synonymous with the few, highly active priests of the late Soviet era. Father Men’ was responsible for “the conversion of thousands, among them many members of the intelligentsia, which as a class tended toward political dissidence. Although he himself never

¹²³ *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 167

¹²⁴ *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 49

¹²⁵ *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 54

engaged in overt dissident activism, many of his followers were active participants in the prolific intellectual and political debates that characterized the Perestroika period,”¹²⁶ Men’s friends included a number of dissident priests, such as Gleb Yakunin, who appears later in this work for his characterization of Pussy Riot as holy fools, and who spent years incarcerated for his criticism of the Soviet persecution of religion.¹²⁷ Priest Kochetkov further developed on the reformist tradition within ROC of the early XXth century.

The purpose of this brief aside into the politics of the ROC is to situate the discussion of political performance art in post-socialist space as it is perceived by its actors, who in turn are contingent on the identity constructions that I have narrated here. Through this analysis of post-Soviet identity construction, I suggest that a federal condemnation of “religious hate” towards institutional critique in art should not be aligned with the Western understanding of institutional critique in art, because it misrepresents the culture and religion-specific function of the work and tradition of dissent. It should not be overlooked that neither the influential *Institutional Critique Anthology*¹²⁸ nor the canonical *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*,¹²⁹ feature a single contemporary Russian artist or art group. There are ample publication on the Culture Wars in America, Europe and Australia. There are also publications on political art and the politics of aesthetics. However, there are no established theoretical frameworks that can account for this discrepancy in the role and perception of institutional critique in the post-Soviet space.

¹²⁶ *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 54

¹²⁷ 5 *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 4

¹²⁸ Alberro, Alexander and Stimson, Blake (eds.) (2009), *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press)

¹²⁹ Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds. *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002

2.6 Targets of Institutional Critique

Institutional critique is a form of critique directed towards institutions of power. Institutional critique can be both from within the tradition that is contingent on a particular institution, as well as by individuals outside of the tradition. For instance, the institution of the Roman Catholic Church was critiqued from inside the religious tradition by the Protestant Movement. It is critiqued by religious outsiders in activist groups such as Femen today.

Because of the history of institutional critique in the Western art discourse, global political art that works with the methods of institutional critique is often assumed to partake in a western tradition of protest and secular values- i.e. acting from within “contemporary art.” Paradoxically, the position of Western contemporary art discourse corresponds to that of the accusers of “religious offense” – both positions highlight the separate, independent realm of art, which is perceived as imbued with atheist protest values.

I propose that in the cases of Pussy Riot, Oleg Mavromatti and Petr Pavlensky, this assumption is faulty and diminishes the complexity of the case by eliminating the possibility of critique from within a religious tradition. The defense of the “blasphemous art” must be seen as a position within the stakes of contemporary Russia, and as a continuation of the local tradition of liberal and critical Orthodoxy, with contingent, culture specific notions of dissent and postmodernism.¹³⁰ The reversal of the accusation, that the perpetrators themselves are causing “religious offense” to the artists signifies a dispute over the authenticity of belonging and the disputed hierarchy of values in post-Soviet Russia. Does the term “institutional critique” expand to allow for such a discourse?

¹³⁰ For Russian postmodernism and tradition of dissent, see chapter **Holy Foolery as Behavioral Paradigm** in this thesis.

Within the genre of art, "institutional critique" is an artistic practice that reflects critically on its own place within galleries and museums and on the concept and social function of art itself.¹³¹ This art genre reverses the presumed neutrality and aesthetic autonomy of art and makes art a device for the exposure of "institutionally cultivated sensibilities" and their contingent ideologies and identities. Such concerns have always been a part of modern art and its making, but they took on new urgency at the end of the 1960s, driven by the social upheaval of the time.¹³² Institutional critique uses the methods of conceptual art and is closely associated with structuralism and post-structuralism.¹³³ Among debates on homosexuality, drugs, women's rights, race etc., specific to the American and British contexts, the Euro-American culture wars¹³⁴ of the 1980s have made institutional critique a popular medium for artists from the global periphery to expose the imbedded colonial structures of western institutions and western ways of seeing. Today, there remains a close affinity between the practice of institutional critique and postcolonial discourse.¹³⁵

Political performance art extends the traditional targets and audience of institutional critique because it works outside of the allocated spheres of art - the gallery and museum – through its critical engagements with public space and by extension, the federal law. Institutional critique in the case of political performance art can be seen as a commentary on

¹³¹ Alberro, Alexander, and Blake Stimson. *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.

¹³² Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions." *October* 55 (1990): 105. doi:10.2307/778941.
: 105–143

¹³³ *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*

¹³⁴ A culture war is a struggle between modes of cultural values. In the Western discourse, and in particular in the United States and United Kingdom, the term refers to the conflicts between conservative/traditional and progressive/liberal values. In the 1980s, the Culture Wars included debates over abortion, homosexuality, race, drugs as well as the church and state.

These terms are themselves imbued with complex significations and political alliances; they can be mistakenly appropriated as an ideological package to other cultural contexts, where in fact each identity – such as "liberal" or "conservative" is highly epistemological and culture-specific.

¹³⁵ For example, see the canonical work *Couple in a Cage* by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Pena.

the social conventions that are sanctioned by the law, and the objective of political performance-based institutional critique is the exposure and questioning of systems of political power in public space with the tools of conceptual art.

2.7 Post-Soviet Institutional Critique

Contemporary political performance artists in Russia identify with the term Actionism (in extension to the influential Moscow Actionist movement of the 1980s and 90's). As with all political art, the work does not practice aesthetic independence and claims relationality to the social context; in the case of Russia, the primary institutions of critique since 2000 has been the Russian Orthodox Church and the Federal State. This target is created through the increasing role of the two spheres in the constitutionally-ordained secular realm of culture and art. Contemporary artists that make political work in Russia often target and conflate the institutions of the church and the state; the pop aesthetics and caricatures - the president Putin as the Antichrist, or a visual collage of the Patriarch and the President in one, available en masse on the Internet – are a comical illustration of the larger dynamics.

The critique of politics creates the appropriation of the aesthetics of power by the artists. Political performance work that appropriates religious aesthetic and stages performances in public spaces is reprimanded by two spheres of power: by the federal laws against forms of religious hate on one end, and by the clause against spiritual offense by the Church and its members, on the other. The accusation on the end of the public always evokes the term “blasphemy,” however, the law, which does not have a specific prohibition against “blasphemy,” usually responds to the accusation through the evocation of several

laws: Article 282 – against the ignition of religious hate (Avder Ter-Oganian, Mavromatti, Samodurov, Erofeev), Article 213 against hooliganism (Pussy Riot, Pavlensky). Each of these laws has legal dimension of a permissible punishment - this is negotiated in each case – it can be as harsh as a seven year imprisonment, to a house arrest, to a fine. As we have seen, the majority of the cases with “guilty” charges appeal to the European Court of Human Rights (Yuri Samodurov, Erofeev) and or seek asylum abroad (Oleg Mavromatti, Avdei Ter-Oganian).

Art can be read in a multiplicity of ways, and reading art with reference to religion, also a versatile phenomenon, inadvertently uncovers many problems and inconsistencies. The following case studies will explore the work of three political performance artists as evidence: my engagement will privilege the affinities with holy foolery and religious dissent – specifically through creation and functions of blasphemy and revelation, institutional critique, imitation of Christ, the body and engagement with space. These terms that will be introduced here and continually referenced in the chapters of the thesis.

Lastly, the engagement with the work will be contained by the medium of the work itself. In the case of Mavromatti, who is also a video artist, the artist-made video of the performance allows for a deeper engagement with the action through visual analysis. For Pussy Riot, the music clip version of the performance was released by the group itself, however, the video clip will be referenced side by side with the prolific visual documentation of the public reactions to the trial, recordings of the trial themselves, and celebratory reenactments. For Pavlensky, the photographic documentation of the event largely comes from various news sources; the artist’s work is meant to be experienced virtually as evidence of a past event with consideration of his issued statement.

2.8 Conclusion

Blasphemy and iconoclasm enter the post-Soviet cultural discourse early on, but their social resonance in the 90's and early 2000s simmers slowly until it overflows in the "Careful, Religion!" art and culture wars.¹³⁶ The heat is first turned on in 1998, in Avdei Ter-Oganian at *Art-Manezh-98* exhibition, where the artist was accused with the yet-to-be infamous Article 282 for his performance. Ter-Oganian performed *Young Atheist* (*Юный Безбожник*), an action for which he chopped up icons with an axe in a gallery space. The performance can be seen as a parody of St Basil Fool-in-Christ (d.1557), in which the saint destroyed a miracle-working icon to reveal the devil painted underneath.¹³⁷ In fact, in his defense, Ter-Oganian himself referred to the action as parody. Things took a distinctly non-humorous turn when the artist was condemned of "stirring of religious hate" and had to flee to Prague as a political refugee, where he lives to this day. However, this action, performed in a gallery for an art audience, did not have the moral resonance of the public, political work of the Putin years.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ See chapter **Extending *Is Critique Secular?*** in this thesis. Also, Bernstein, Anya. "Caution, Religion!: Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post- Soviet Art Wars," Global Secularisms Conference, New York University, 2013

¹³⁷ *Smekb v Drevnei Rusi*, 83.

¹³⁸ For discussion on the increasing unification of church and state politics in Russia under the Putin presidency, see: Papkova, Irina. *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011

3 Oleg Mavromatti - Crucifixion and Article 282

Oleg Mavromatti, b. 1965, is a Russian Actionist and a dissident artist living in exile. He was part of the influential Moscow Actionist art movement of the 1990's, which included artists such as Alexander Brener, Oleg Kulik, Avdei Ter-Oganian and others. The event that I explore in the case study is composed of two connected actions – *Do Not Believe Your Eyes* and *Ally/Foe* that take place with an interval of ten years – 2000 and 2010. I see these two actions as constituting a single event.

In April 1st, 2000 Mavromatti performed *Do Not Believe Your Eyes*, in which the artist had himself publically crucified in Moscow. A wooden cross was placed on the square in front of the State Institute of Culture, while facing the Cathedral of Christ the Savior - the official church of the Patriarchate of Moscow. The choice of space was intentional and symbolic: the artist was commenting on the de-facto unification of church and state in Russia by facing the Cathedral of Christ the Savior and commenting on the unification of culture with religion by turning his back to the Institute. Below is the description of the performance, as seen on the official documentation published on the Internet.

The artist-made 7:30-minute video of the performance, *Do Not Believe Your Eyes* (2010)¹³⁹, starts with a shot of a street dog carrying a rat in his mouth. It is a gray day and there is snow on the ground; one senses the cold. This opening image might have been accidental, and it also falls in line with the director Oleg Kulik, Moscow Actionist who frequently imitated street dogs, interests in the animalistic in life. The image functions as a

¹³⁹ Mavromatti, Oleg. "*Do Not Believe Your Eyes, 2000.*" Vimeo. 2011. Accessed June 02, 2015. <https://vimeo.com/21220322>.

metaphor for the performance itself. The reference is to Darwin, whom Mavromatti mentions later on: one big animal is eating a smaller one –this effectively illustrates the survival of the fittest. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a sacrificial offering and an illustration of the Christian truism of the “last becoming the first” through the virtue of meekness and self-sacrifice in the face of the cruelty of life.

(Images: screenshot from *Do Not Believe Your Eyes* (2010))



The beginning of the event is marked by the apparition of the body. The camera zooms out to show the back of a man with his arms out on a cross – this is the artist Oleg Mavromatti. He is wearing a white shirt and pants. There are several cameras around him and large lights. Exactly in front of him is the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. A man is tying Mavromatti’s hands to the wooden pole with a rope. The voice behind the camera (Oleg Kulik) asks:

“Are you afraid?”

Mavromatti initially says “no,” and then admits to being afraid. He also says that he has not taken drugs in advance. The cameraman asks:

“Is there an element of blasphemy?”

“I don’t think so,” replies Mavromatti.

“Why then the Cathedral of Christ the Savior?”

“You know, I am just a human, nothing else,” says Mavromatti.

Blasphemy, fear, pain and humanity becomes key players in the contained psychological world of the performance – they are introduced in the beginning and referenced again in the subsequent dialogue (below). What is important here for our analysis, is that the artist’s actual stance on these terms becomes secondary to how they are perceived by the audience, and how they acquire a life outside of this contained performance itself: the event starts with the performance, but it does not end when the performance ends. In the public domain and in the domain of the law, the artist is judged with consideration of these terms – they are personal and public at the same time. This consideration is applicable to all the works in the case study.

It is important to highlight how Mavromatti specifically says that he does not see blasphemy in the action, and yet blasphemy comes up as a player in the very beginning, foreshadowing the accusation of blasphemy in court. In fact, my research into the cases of political performance that is accused of blasphemy and is then somehow processed in relation to the Russian Criminal Law (in most cases, via Article 282 or 213, as there is no exact law against blasphemy per se) shows that the artists always appear shocked when they are accused of blasphemy by the persecutor, and they say that they did not intend to offend any “religious feelings.”^{140vi}

A political performance is carefully planned out, and I would argue that Mavromatti foresaw the possible accusation of blasphemy, but does not invoke it as the motivation

¹⁴⁰ On the radio station *Radio Svoboda*, Mavromatti explains that the law became involved in his case by total accident and “hypocrisy,” that was based on a territorial dispute between the Ministry of Culture and its neighboring territory. Mavromatti, Oleg. “Vertikal' Dlja Khudozhnikov.” Interview by Dmitri Volchek. Transcript. Radio Svoboda. September 16, 2010.

behind the act. Does this diminish the intentionality of blasphemy? In the tradition of religious dissent, it is important that the blasphemy is an accusation. The accusation reinforces the relational triptych that constitutes the event: the performance, the public reaction and the law. The artist might express a singular, directed function for the performance, but he has no control over the event itself: the event that follows a successful performance becomes bigger due to its place in the public sphere. In the public sphere, the action absorbs a multiplicity of voices and judgments and it equalizes the hierarchy of authority of the citizen body - an art critic becomes equal to a regular passerby.

(Images: screenshots from *Do Not Believe Your Eyes* (2010))



1



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5

The images above illustrate the progression of the crucifixion in terms of the body and gestures. In the beginning of the crucifixion-action, the camera focuses on the hands, which are being tied to the stick by another man. Shortly after, a young man in white comes over to Mavromatti's right hand with a nail and a hammer and the camera shows a close-up of the nail being inserted into and through the skin onto the wood (1). Mavromatti appears calm. The action is repeated on the left hand (2). [...] A woman is shown coming up to Mavromatti and asking him what he means by "this." Later, another man comes up to Mavromatti and tears open his shirt on the back. On the artists' back a triangle-shaped part of skin is shaved from the hair (3). On this shaved triangle it is written: "Я НЕ СЫН БОГА" ("I am not the Son of God", (4)).

From the video, which has several cuts, it is unclear how much time has passed. Halfway through the film, a man with a microphone is shown asking Mavromatti, who is in the crucified position, about the meaning of his action.

(Dialogue progression from left to right. Images: screenshot from *Do Not Believe Your Eyes* (2010))



“It is a de-sacralization,” Mavromatti replies, “I wanted to say that I am an ordinary human being. I don’t claim to be Christ or want to gain His glory. There is nothing religious in this action. This action is only artistic. I stand in the center of the Ministry of Culture and Cathedral of Christ the Savior. And I represent a transmitter, a lost segment of a transmitter of sort... Therefore you can see the presence of Darwin... [...]” The artist then fades off.

“Do you feel pain?” the reporter asks.

Mavromatti admits to feeling pain (and no other clear feelings) and he then states: “It is hard to say what pain is. I think pain is real art. Only when one feels real pain, you understand that he/she is a real artist.” [...].

“Why did you do this? You didn’t have to do this this way,” the reporter presses.

“There is no other way. Now more than ever art needs this sacrificial attitude.”

The above dialogue filters the artist’s political stakes through pain and the body. Pain and the body transform the relationship between a “regular human being” to the

domains of authority in Russia. In his view, physical pain is also his proof of being a “real artist” – it is his sacrifice that proves his worth. Mavromatti is also saying that he is an artist, and his art works in a secular domain of art and culture; however, in Russia, the domains of art and culture are becoming sacralized, and therefore his art is also sacralized through the use of religious aesthetics and through the imitation of Christ.^{141vii} It can be inferred that the artist does not wish to use the crucifix, but the state of politics in Russia have left him no other choice - this is the only way to adequately respond to the situation given his role as an Actionist political performance artist.

Do Not Believe Your Eyes - performance functions through the classic tools of institutional critique. Mavromatti critiques the Russian Ministry of Culture and the institution of the Russian Orthodox Church. Mavromatti sees himself as a “transmitter” because he cannot but be between these domains - culture and religion - they have infringed upon his territory of art and have defined it. Of course, the figure of the “transmitter” is also deeply involved in the religious prophet and holy fool tradition: the prophet transmits the Word of God, the holy fool embodies Christ and is a witness of God in the world, and Christ is a transmitter between this world and the divine. In this action we see the formation of a dual alliance - of institutional critique and the religious tradition.

Mavromatti explicitly states that his action is not blasphemy, that it is not religious, that he is not Christ, and even on his back it is written: “I am not a Son of God.” And yet, his action becomes all of these against his will in the eyes of the public. I think it is more

¹⁴¹ Discussion of the components of the performance are abundant. Here is a telling quote on the perceived link between pain and Christ by Vadim Kruglikov of Adindex.ru, which narrates Mavromatti’s relationship to pain and sacrifice as “real art,” and simultaneously is references Christ. Kruglikov, Vadim. "Oleg Mavromatti: Bol'no, Bol'no... a Chorosho!" AdIndex.ru. June 08, 2011. Accessed June 02, 2015. <http://adindex.ru/publication/gallery/2011/07/8/68699.phtml>.

interesting to explore this transformation into the opposite not as a function of a vulgar mistranslation, but instead, to propose the role that negation plays in the Russian Orthodox tradition. Orthodoxy is an apophatic theology (its opposite is cataphatic theology, such as that of Catholicism) of a *via negativa* that is centered on negation and denial. In practice, this expresses itself in the conviction that God cannot be known or named adequately (and potentially that even God does not know itself because God is above being), and that any attempt to the contrary is false and can produce only a diminishment of the truth. For an Orthodox Christian, the following creates a particular relationship to the self – identity is constructed not through affirmative statements, but through the canceling of the self.¹⁴² This act of negation can be highly spiritual and generative.

Mavromatti's action - its aesthetics, choice of space, and his words - place him into a religious tradition. It is interesting that Mavromatti alludes to Darwin, but fades off before he can finish his sentence: Was he trying to situate the concept of the "transmitter" into the discourse on natural selection and evolution? It is unclear, and I would suggest that Mavromatti's inability to finish his sentence is an accidental metaphor for the work itself; Mavromatti falls into the realm of institutional critique from within a religious tradition outside of his own intention. Is it important how this reading relates to Mavromatti's stated intentions for his performance – his own testimony? In one way, the two can coexist because they do not infringe upon each other, however, in the eyes of the law, a multiplicity of reading becomes impossible. In the eyes of the law, his action is a premeditated action against religion and a form of religious hate.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Apophatic theology in relation to art and the avant-garde is further discussed in Chapter **Holy Foolery as Behavioral Paradigm**.

¹⁴³ Russian Criminal Law Article 282: "Against the ignition of national, racial and religious dispute"
See introduction.

As the man in white starts to take out the nails, Mavromatti swears and demands some vodka. A close up shows the vodka being emptied out on the left hand as the nail is removed. The camera then shows Mavromatti, still facing the cross and grimacing from pain, raising his hands with the stigmata (6). Two men come up to Mavromatti, and he is carried off in their embrace into the building behind him. The performance is finished. From the video documentation, it is unclear what proceeds to take place in the Institute of Culture.

Mavromatti's performance, foreshadowing the performance of Pussy Riot, sparked extreme debate in Russia, with many individuals accusing him of blasphemy on one side, others of insanity, and yet others, seeing the deeper critique and even religious meaning in his work¹⁴⁴ Shortly thereafter, Mavromatti was charged under Article 282.2B for the "ignition of national and religious hatred," and fled to Bulgaria to resist imprisonment.

This work found a second iteration ten years later. In 2010, the artist reapplied for his Russian passport from Bulgaria, and was denied due to his status as fugitive facing imprisonment. Consequently, ten years after his crucifixion, Mavromatti performed *Ally/Foe*, a performance that was conceived as a public trial and execution, mirroring the Judgment of Christ and therefore symbolically calling into question a particular set of Christian values among his accusers.

The artist-made video *Death Here and Now* (2010)¹⁴⁵ is a clip from a news report about the Internet action *Ally/Foe*. The video features two reporters from the opposition TV station *Dozhd* introducing and discussing the "most radical art action to date." The first

¹⁴⁴ Kruglikov, Vadim. "Oleg Mavromatti: Bol'no, Bol'no... a Chorosho!" AdIndex.ru. June 08, 2011. Accessed June 02, 2015. <http://adindex.ru/publication/gallery/2011/07/8/68699.phtml>.

¹⁴⁵ Mavromatti, Oleg. "Death Here and Now." Vimeo. 2010. Accessed June 02, 2015. <https://vimeo.com/103478186>.

reporter tells about an “online execution” - how on November 7, 2010 Mavromatti sets up an electric chair that is connected to the computer and stages a live broadcast in which people are invited to call and condemn him for being “guilty” or “not guilty.” According to the statement, if the number of “guilty” votes exceeded the number of “not guilty” twice over, then the artist would be electrocuted to death in a live public broadcast.

(Images: screenshots from *Death Here and Now* (2010))



A second reporter (above left) contextualizes the relation of the performance in the history art - Viennese Actionism and Nietzsche, and narrates the story of Mavromatti, who is living in exile in Bulgaria to escape prison in Russia. The reporter discusses how the case of Mavromatti has evolved and who has advocated on his behalf. The reporter says that for Mavromatti, the performance is an act of desperation, and hence the title *Свой/Чужой* – (*Ally/Foe* is the official translation, but perhaps *Self/Other* better expresses the terms). Over the footage of Mavromatti being electrocuted (below) with each “guilty” vote received, the reporter discusses the action in relation to the violent spectacles of punishment in the Middle Ages.

(Images: screenshots from *Death Here and Now* (2010))



According to the reporter, Mavromatti says that “it is better to live knowing that someone supports you, or die.” At the moment of the report, 77% of the votes are “for” life. The reporter concludes by saying that in the “art sphere” people are indeed very compassionate towards Mavromatti, but in the sphere outside of art, it is doubtful that people will become interested in the project. They note that from a judicial point of view, the action is legal - such a voting is allowed on the Internet.

On November 14, it was announced that the artist was spared execution based on the number of votes in his support.¹⁴⁶ Without resolving the problem with the passport, this marks the end of the event, initiated in the crucifixion in 2000. The remainder of this

¹⁴⁶ Mavromatti set up a webpage for the live voting, which also features commentary. The commentary on the webpage, as well as the lively discussion of the performance across various virtual media platforms, are noteworthy. However, this analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.

analysis of Oleg Mavromatti will focus on the artist's relationship to holy foolery, as a means to unify and contextualize the issues that his work raises and to analyze how it functions in the public domain.

A theological *kenosis* can be attributed to Mavromatti's relationship to the body and pain, present in both of his performances. The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the body is termed *kenosis*, a Greek theological term referencing self-emptying for the reception of divine will (For instance, Christ on the Cross received the Holy Spirit). The physical side of the spiritual process of this self-emptying can involve pain, starvation and suffering. Christ undergoes *kenosis* through his suffering, and Christian theology encourages believers to undergo *kenosis* in the name of Christ: to imitate the suffering of Christ, to surrender one's will to Christ. Imitation of Christ frequently takes the form of masochism and is referred to as *kenosis-in-the-name-of-Christ*; public self-sacrifice modeled on the suffering of Christ on earth. Scholars attribute the imitation of Christ to holy foolery, and by extension, one can argue that social service, parables, prophesy and being possessed by the Spirit are all characteristics derived from the life of Jesus Christ to behavioral signifiers of Christianity. However, these qualities of Christianity can be in stark opposition to the feigned morality and obedience to dogma that is ordained by the official Church and abhorred by the holy fools.

Kenosis for Christ is inherent to the reception of the holy fool and imbedded in the performative and relational nature of the paradigm. Saints are to desire to be co-crucified with Christ spiritually, but this desire can also take a physical manifestation for the holy fools. There are actions in the vitae of St Symeon that can be seen as imitations of Christ's carrying the cross through Jerusalem to public mockery:

Here is how he enters the town: he found a dead dog at the dump outside town, removed his belt cord, tied it to the dog's paw and ran, dragging the dog behind him. He entered the city gates, near which there was a children's school. When the children saw, they began to shout: "Look at the stupid abba, and they chased him and beat him all over."¹⁴⁷

In a classic way, St Symeon's *kenosis* for Christ is not devoid of the carnivalesque: the cross is replaced by a dead dog and the Jews that mock Christ on his path to Golgotha are children of Emesa. Whereas Christ's journey is to Mount Golgotha, St Symeon's destination is the town's jolly market square. Similarly to Christ, St Symeon is also semi nude: the saint had the habit of taking off his clothes and wrapping them around his head as if it were a turban. Alike to St Symeon, *kenosis* is active in the work of Mavromatti as he subjects the body to physical pain, self-emptying and public humiliation. This is a method for the delivery of a parable-like message that is aimed at uncovering the hypocrisy of society. It is a key characteristic of holy foolishness to "serving of the world as a unique parable, which is made incarnate not through words or actions, but through the strength of the Spirit, spiritual commandment of the identity, which is frequently prophetic (Rus: *нпороучество*)."

Ally/Foe can be seen as a continuation of the crucifixion action of 2000. The action is a direct result of the first; it also features an exploration of many of the same issues – pain, humanity, sacrifice, and lastly, it features a continual unity of imitation of Christ. The modeling of Mavromatti on the life of Christ is of particular interest here, and it is what connects him intimately with holy foolery, and pushes him into the tradition of religious dissent and institutional critique from within a religious tradition.

¹⁴⁷ BHG 79.19-25 *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*. Bruxellis: Société Des Bollandistes, 1909.

The imitation of Christ and holy foolery functions through subjecting the self to mockery and judgment. Mavromatti takes this spiritual challenge to the utmost degree- he is willing to sacrifice his life. Christian theology teaches how Christ, who was innocent of all sin, sacrifices himself for the salvation of the world, which mocks and judges him. Through these two actions, Mavromatti's case becomes a parable – his action partakes in the tradition of paradoxical didacticism of holy foolery. I would argue that Mavromatti, who lives in exile without a passport, is successful - his action is seen as testament to the hypocrisy of the Russian law and the Church, and it constitutes a revelation of a larger hypocrisy in the public sphere. Mavromatti's imitation of Christ sanctifies his persona, and his embodiment of a sacrificial lamb becomes pronounced in the course of the 10-year event. Such direct imitation betrays a desire to actually become Christ - scholarship on holy foolery suggests the presence of both imitation and becoming in the topos.

4 Pussy Riot – “Punk prayer” and Article 213

Founded in 2011, Pussy Riot is an anonymous all-women art collective based in Moscow. The women of the collective can be identified by their signature balaclavas, that hide their individual identity. The group has expressed a feminist, pro LGBT and punk political position, which manifests in guerrilla-style public performances and interventions. These performances are later edited into music videos and distributed on the Internet. This thesis is inspired by their most notorious performance, which I aim to narrate as an example of a blasphemy that is capable of revealing a larger blasphemy, and hence become a revelatory public event - *oblichenie*.

On February 21, 2012 Pussy Riot performed a “punk-prayer” in Moscow’s central Russian Orthodox Church - Cathedral of Christ the Savior, which is now, and perhaps forever, lovingly known as Pussy’s Church, a name that loquaciously trumps even the Cathedral’s former nickname of “The atrocious samovar”. Footage of the performance shows four women wearing the group’s emblematic balaclavas and colorful dresses, singing, jumping and crossing themselves beside the altar for approximately ninety seconds before they are chased out of the Cathedral.¹⁴⁸ The chorus to the prayer-song runs “Holy Virgin, please chase away Putin.” Another part of the verse includes the words “*срань Господня*,” which literally translates as “holy shit” (a profane term that also connotes the unworthiness of humans before God in the original Russian).^{viii} The language of the song played a role in the determination of the charge against them.

¹⁴⁸ In fact, the cathedral appearing in the actual video is another church.

(Images left to right: Cathedral of Christ the Savior¹⁴⁹, Pussy Riot performance in Cathedral of Christ the Savior (screenshot)¹⁵⁰, Pussy Riot members in court (screenshot)¹⁵¹)



The performance itself is rarely discussed in artistic terms, as it remains overshadowed by the consequent public reaction to the trial and imprisonment of the members of the group and the popularization of reenactment of the work among western supporters. The aesthetics of the performance are inherited from previous actions. Several members of Pussy Riot were part of the activist collective Voina (War) before an internal split in the group in 2009. Voina, in turn, was influenced by Moscow Actionism, and the group became well known for humorous and political interventions in unexpected public places of Moscow and St Petersburg. Their actions included the infamous drawing of a phallus on the St Petersburg bridge (2010), *How to snatch a chicken* (2010) – a video that documents a woman stuffing a chicken into her vagina in a supermarket, *Fuck for the Heir Puppy Bear* - an orgy in Moscow's Timiryazev State Museum of Biology to “celebrate” the election of Dmitry Medvedev (whose name means “bear” in Russian). Other than a certain

¹⁴⁹ Author's image, 2012

¹⁵⁰ Screenshot, original performance of Pussy Riot in Cathedral of Christ The Savior. “Оригинальная запись выступления Pussy Riot в ХХС.” YouTube video, 1:34. Posted by “SvobodaRadio,” June 5, 2012. Accessed: March 1, 2014. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FoJqzGG7u_k

¹⁵¹ “The closing statements from Nadezhda Tolokonnikova in trial 8 august Free Pussy Riot Free Pussy Riot.” YouTube video, 15:24. Posted by “PussyRiotEng,” August 8, 2012. Accessed, March 1, 2014. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9JyyaniaV0&feature=related>

profane aesthetics and awareness of public space, Pussy Riot inherited Voina's close reading of Bakhtin's carnival, best exemplified in Voina's *Feast* (2007); a sit-down dinner in a Moscow Metro car and a performance that could have been a contemporary rereading of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.

Mikhail Bakhtin's influential concept of the carnival includes the playful, theatrical overturning of conventions. Bakhtin develops on the use of the carnival in medieval folklore and discusses the radical function of humorous forms, such as the fool and the clown, for the remaking of society and social hierarchies.¹⁵² The humorous forms mock at the pathos of official ideology. The appropriation of the carnival by artists such as Voina and Pussy Riot functions as a method of social critique - doing the opposite of the norm reflects the absurdity of the norm itself. For political performance art, the carnival is embodied through choice of space and language, as well as the body – its clothes and accessories. The performance of the changing body of Pussy Riot – circulated in images on the news - continues after the action itself: the carnivalesque body becomes the body behind bars, becomes the emaciated, ill body of the women in the Mordovian labor colony.

The carnival and its relation to the body is revealed in Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais in *Rabelais and His World*. For political performance artists, figures of the carnival, as well as Gargantua and Pantagruel, the visible body is the main site of performance. In addition, *Rabelais and His World* is a study of the semantics of the body, the different meanings of the body's limbs, apertures, functions,¹⁵³ which position the changing physical body as an

¹⁵² Bakhtin's carnival is introduced and discusses in depth in chapter **Blasphemy is the New Laughter**.

¹⁵³ Clark, Katerina, and Michael Holquist. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984, 299.

Through the notion of the "open text," Clark has famously linked Bakhtin's writing on the carnival and Rabelais as an indirect critique of Stalinist show trials and purges. The concept that the carnival is a direct threat to ideology is parcel of this line of analysis.

inherent player in carnival time. For Bakhtin, the body and bodily functions are the space of exception from ideology. Bakhtin sees the body as primal to Rabelais and his poetics; a body which is portrayed in series of mental states, anatomic parts, physiological aspects. The body has also a critical function for political performance, but less so for its parts, as for the relationship between the body and the political space. To which degree the body, conceptualized as a space of exception in Bakhtin, can remain a source of freedom in political performance art? To what degree can the carnival extend to the body behind bars?

Pussy Riot closely appropriates the notions of body and space of the carnival in their performance. The body is the site of freedom and regeneration that is opposed the stasis of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. The colorful outfit, the guitars, the words – classic tropes of the fool and the rogue – are chosen as a humorous parody of convention, thus overturning the conventions themselves on their head. However, there is a limit to this expression of freedom of the carnival, and this limit is precisely what many other political artists work through: it is the system of criminal law. I suggest that Pussy Riot- through their body – exit the theoretical and symbolic space of the carnival and enter the space of power that cannot be turned upside down, a power that has a direct control over the body.

In the following weeks after the performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, three women out of the four women appearing in the video were arrested. Local authorities in Moscow issued a warrant for Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Yekaterina Samutsevich; they were convicted for hooliganism motivated by hate towards a social group. The initial charge against them was “against ignition of religious hate” (Russian Criminal Law Article 282), but they were ultimately convicted of Article 213 for “hooliganism motivated by hate towards a social group.”

Three women became a body behind bars. The bars physically contain the body, but they also open it up for association. The realm to which the body belongs is specific to the discipline that forms its context, and I suggest that the body of Pussy Riot remakes itself through diverse political, religious and theoretical contexts. Along Bakhtinian lines, each context robes and disrobes with its own signature masks. For Bakhtin, as well as Bergson and Deleuze, the body is a space of potentiality. In Christian thought, the body is secondary to the soul, which belongs to God. Christian philosophy and practice encourages the neglect of the body through ascetic behavior, and the torment and sacrifice of the physical bodies of martyrs connotes the freedom of the soul. In contrast, in political thought, “man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains”: the body constitutes the citizen that belongs to the body politic, and the political status quo plays out on the body through the federal law; most dramatically it is displayed through forced exile, incarceration and execution of the unwanted body from the body politic. I suggest that the image of Pussy Riot articulates itself in each of these contexts.

Inadvertently, political performance art that is reprimanded by the law inscribes itself into the body politic - it appropriates the notion of the state as a symbolic body. In a sense, political performance artists are embodying politics and its power over citizens through the way the law plays out on their bare skin. Oleg Mavromatti lives in exile, Pussy Riot served two years in prison, and Petr Pavlensky, the master of body politic, nailed his testicles to the Red Square to demonstrate the reach of the Kremlin. Bourdieu's notion of the body is worthwhile to quote here: “The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, it brings it back to life. What is ‘learned by the body’ is not something that one has, like

knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is.”¹⁵⁴ Among the supporters of the public perception of Pussy Riot as “martyr-saints”, the women no longer wear a mask or a costume to hide themselves - their body becomes the most bare, disrobed version of itself, and slowly slipping into the contexts of sacrifice and witness.

I argue that the performance of Pussy Riot created an event that lasts through their incarceration. The body of Pussy Riot enters a foreign, hostile territory and cuts into the limit of freedom as articulated by the law. The work is remolded according to this limit: the consequent trials and imprisonment of Pussy Riot changes the work from its theoretical belonging to the tradition of the carnival to a solidified place in the body politic. This transformation starts to articulate alternative modes of resistance. This metamorphosis is marled by the stark difference between Pussy Riot in their funny, profane performances and the way the women speak in court. Embodying the tradition of catacomb Orthodoxy and the exile of intellectuals in the USSR - Dostoevsky and Solzhenitsyn are alluded to on numerous occasions by the women in their court statements; the contained body presses into alternative, inner modes of freedom. In her statement, Alekhina remarks: You can take away my so-called freedom, but my inner freedom you will never be able to possess...^{155ix} Freedom withdraws into the body, and in its withdrawal it stumbles upon buried traditions of dissidence that have articulated similar notions of inner, spiritual freedom.

In the Russian cultural imagination, the discourse on inner freedom has a long tradition in dissent and in particular, spiritual dissent under Communism. The intellectual

¹⁵⁴ Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990, 73

¹⁵⁵ “The closing statements from Maria Alyokhina in trial 8 ag 2012 Free Pussy Riot Maria Alyokhina trial.” YouTube video, 16:02. Posted by “PussyRiotEng,” August 13, 2012. Accessed: March 1, 2014. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmWK7S5IIFw&feature=relmfu>

and religious repressions under Communism have produced a particular alliance between religion outside the Church and underground protest culture that Pussy Riot have successfully reawakened. The unification of the Orthodox church with the communist state in 1943 created an underground, catacomb Orthodox movement, a movement that draws together both dissidents, artists and religious practitioners under a common desire for a particular kind of freedom. It is within this lineage that one can understand the work of political performance artists functioning in the post-Soviet Russia, where the Article 282 of the law code “against the provocation of religious hatred,” which is colloquially labeled the law against blasphemy, has put cultural practitioners behind bars and in mental institutions.

Among the individuals who support their work, there is a multiplicity of identity constructions and political affiliations. However, it is remarked that “all, who today support Pussy Riot, highlight, that the majority of these people do not support their action. They were wrong.”¹⁵⁶ In parallel, it has been remarked by influential curators, such as Guelman and Degot, that any discussion of the performance itself for its aesthetic value is impossible, due to the mobilization of the opposition to their unfair trial. I would argue that the case of Pussy Riot has created a context for support that is completely outside of the actual work that they performed. This is also why the work itself is not celebrated, as it is among the western supporters of Pussy Riot. The fact of their imprisonment has reawakened a tradition of dissent to a state and church hypocrisy, which is understood by certain of their supporters. For their supporters in Russia, their action might be offensive, but it is

¹⁵⁶ Shevchenko, Maxim. "Osoboe Mnenie." *Эхо Москвы*. June 21, 2012. Accessed June 02, 2015. <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/900987-echo/>.

significant because it uncovers a larger truth.

The main target for the revelation of hypocrisy is the site of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior itself. The space chosen for the Pussy Riot performance is emblematic of the corruption of the Church, making it a shared target of both holy fools and political performance artists. The Cathedral of Christ the Savior is the main church of Moscow, and is a replica of a previously destroyed Cathedral. The original cathedral was built by Alexander III in 1883, and it was ostentatiously made to be the largest Orthodox cathedral in the world under Alexander's policy of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality." The cathedral was destroyed in the mass demolition of churches in the anti-religious campaign in 1931.

During the Soviet times the location became the site for ambitions of Stalin-designed epic architecture, but this plan was never realized. Finally, it was turned into the world's largest outdoor pool in 1958 under Nikita Khrushchev. In 1995, the pool was taken down and the current Cathedral was rebuilt and consecrated on Transfiguration Day in 2000. Given these historical events, for many people this site symbolizes a history of top down corruption and affiliation of church and state. Of particular relevance is the association with the corruption of the Orthodox Church: the Cathedral of Christ the Savior is a standing memento to the notorious cooperation of the Church with the KGB in the USSR.

Today the church - in the center of Moscow - is a primarily a touristic destination and a continual symbol of state and church hypocrisy. Music concerts and VIP events are often held there, which is demonstrative of the increasing popularity of Orthodoxy among

the Russian nouveau-riche, political elite and Orthodoxy-fueled nationalism¹⁵⁷ Thus, this sacred-but-profane space was strategically selected by Pussy Riot for their intervention: the performance was critical of the pretense and corruption of that what poses itself as holy and spiritual. Furthermore, the fact that the current Cathedral is a remake of a previous one, makes it into a kind of emblem of church and religious parody that does not see itself as such.

The Pussy Riot case articulates a vast public schism over the nature of truth, freedom and power in Russia today – concepts that have a sacred connotation in the public imaginary. This schism becomes a struggle over the conception of the sacred in an officially secular state.¹⁵⁸ Pussy Riot are accused of “spitting into the souls of Orthodox people” by the persecutors in court. The Patriarch refers to them as “the laughter of the Devil.” The court initially charges them with breaking the law against “religious hate”- a law that is known as the law against blasphemy. The position against Pussy Riot can be characterized as a position of Orthodox people against blasphemy in sacred places. The opposite of this position is the secular stance - for the separation of church and state. However, what is critical to my argument is that the secular position is not based on an atheist ethics, but comes from the conviction that the church itself is no longer sacred - it is a site of ongoing blasphemy. This accounts for the number of Orthodox people who were offended by the performance, but experience the trial as a revelation of this higher-order blasphemy and Pussy Riot as “holy fools.”

¹⁵⁷ Papkova, Irina. *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011

¹⁵⁸ Bernstein, Anya. “Caution, Religion!: Iconoclasm, Secularism, and Ways of Seeing in Post-Soviet Art Wars,” *Global Secularisms Conference*, New York University, 2013.

The statements of Pussy Riot in court fold into the discussion on freedom and dissidence, but as opposed to overturning them in a carnivalesque move, they actively seek to articulate the hypocrisy behind the accusation. The carnivalesque fool becomes sacralized – a holy fool. The stake of the debate for both these political performance artists and the historical holy fools is shared: whether the blasphemy that they evoke exposes a greater evil – becoming a form of revelation and a call for reform. The fact that Pussy Riot manages to unmask a larger hypocrisy metaphorically sanctifies them in the public view – they are seen as partaking in the tradition of dissent within Orthodoxy. Petr Pavlensky comments on the Pussy Riot case in a telling way:

[Pussy Riot trial] is a very telling phenomenon. “The case of Pussy Riot” and the public reaction to my action has shown who today is really on the side of the Orthodox cult in Russia. They are not a continuation of the Christian tradition. They do not keep the Christian tradition, but they reject it. They take up the terms “Christian,” “compassion,” but there is nothing behind this.^{159xi}

Through the claim to the revelation of hypocrisy, the women on Pussy Riot enter into a novel discourse and scopic regime, with which they gradually identify and merge with. The women themselves evoke the tradition of Orthodox revolutionaries and conceptions of “true faith” and “true freedom.” Tolokonnikova, in her closing argument on August 8, 2012 talks about the various trials of philosophers, dissidents and saints in history; from Socrates to Dostoevsky to OBOREU (avant-garde poetry group) to Solzhenitsyn. In response to the Patriarch’s accusation, she draws parallels between Pussy Riot and the trial of Christ, who was supposedly condemned for being “possessed by the Devil”.

¹⁵⁹ Pavlensky, Petr. “Akciya Pussy Riot Kuda Leghche I Bezobidnee Christ.” Interview by Viktor Marinovich. . Общество. №32 (857) 13 августа 2012 г.. БелГазета. Новости Беларуси. Белорусские новости. August 13, 2012. Accessed June 02, 2015. http://www.belgazeta.by/ru/2012_08_13/society/24602/.

I suggest that the core of the Pussy Riot performance as an event was the revealing of a profanity and hypocrisy of the church under a façade of sanctity and morality. In this case, the sacrilege of their act becomes an act of public revelation. The transformation of sacrilege into revelation is one of distinct legitimizing features that make a fool into a saint. It is also among the most direct links to the legacy of Christ, who acted aggressively in the Hebrew temple and was accused of sacrilege by the Pharisees. Scholarship on holy foolery understands this practice as the revelation of a greater social evil: a larger sacrilege, one frequently committed by the church itself. In the case of the paradigmatic holy fool, St Symeon, who Pussy Riot's performance is in close affinity with, his actions fall into a pattern of poking fun at people's presumed righteousness and piety. In his hagiography, St Symeon throws nuts at the lamps and leaps onto the *ambon* of the church so as not to let people think too highly of themselves, to show that merely looking "pious" and going to church is not enough.¹⁶⁰ After being released on probation, Pussy Riot member Samutsevich remarks:

In our performance we dared, without the Patriarch's blessing, to unite the visual imagery of Orthodox culture and that of protest culture, thus suggesting to smart people that Orthodox culture belongs not only to the Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch and Putin, that it could also ally itself with civic rebellion and the spirit of protest in Russia.¹⁶¹

Political performance art, although it often appropriates religious symbolism through the predominance of physical pain and use of nudity in the performance¹⁶², it inscribes itself in the political concept of the body. The body is tightly chained to the politics, and through this

¹⁶⁰ This will be discussed in depth in chapter **Holy Foolery as Behavioral Paradigm**.

There is a hidden hypocrisy in this type of didacticism because the holy fool does not do what he preaches. St Symeon pokes fun of people's false sense of righteousness by wearing a ring of sausages around his neck during lent, eating them and constantly offering them to everybody- but he does still get to eat them.

¹⁶¹ Interview of Ekaterina Samutsevich and Ksenia Sobchak. "Neraschehlennaya" in *Snob Magazine*. October 19, 2012. (Rus., author translation)

¹⁶² "The idea of undressing as a pathway to Truth, as it emerged in early Christianity, was also influenced by the classic Greek aesthetic ideal." Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond, footnote, 27.

See: S. Block, *Clothing Metaphors as a Means for Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition* (1982)

connection, political performance art can reveal and critique the institution of power – its context. As such, political performance brings itself closer to the ideology through the breaking of the law, inscribing itself in the function of power. Artists are reprimanded for their offence in degrees, and in many cases, it costs them their liberty or ability to reside in the country. Therefore, Bakhtin's notion of the body as a space of exception is not applicable to the discourse on political performance art in question. To the contrary, the political performances reveal the lack of a space of exception for individual freedom outside of power structures, and thus they aim to push citizens to action out of the claustrophobia of ideology. It is through the politicization of religion in Russia, that a the institutional critique of a political performance artist can extend to the domain of the church, and thus the action unravels in an entirely new, expanded context, merging with another tradition of critique.

5 Petr Pavlensky – *Separation* and Forced Psychiatric Evaluation

Petr Pavlensky (b. 1984) is a St Petersburg artist and Actionist with an expressed interest in Russian political history, propaganda and constructions of the sacred. The artist does not show work in commercial galleries, and performs exclusively in the public sphere. Documentation of Pavlensky's work exists on media platforms, in records of psychiatric evaluation, and in the police files. The artist does not make official documentation of his actions, and therefore a multiplicity of images circulates across virtual and print media platforms (this is intentional component of the work). As a consequence, his work does not have a hierarchy of authority over the event itself, not to mention a curator or an art historian - depending on the medium that it is discussed in, it is presented and contextualized in a different way. The artist does release short -1-2 sentences- statements about his intention with each action.

Pavlensky's work is propagandistic in that his political statements are embodied and are always explicit, utilitarian and didactic. It might seem that the work is like a tool to create evidence for a preconceived problem- that it is literal. However, a more complex conceptual continuity and spiritual exploration emerges through an engagement of his development since 2012. An engagement with his earlier work is an important illustration of Pavlensky's deep-set notions of institutional critique, religion and politics.

The artist gained exposure with the work *Stich* 2012 (*Шов*); borrowing from an Indian sacred tradition, the artist stitched shut his mouth with thread and stood in all black

clothes in front of Kazan Cathedral as a one-man demonstration against censorship. He held up a sign that read: “ The action of Pussy Riot was a remake of the famous action of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 21:12-13)”¹⁶³ The performance was a stance against the imprisonment of Pussy Riot and for the freedom of expression in Russia. Pavlensky was arrested for *Stich* and was subject to psychiatric evaluation – marking the first of a series of state ordered psychiatric evaluations for his work.

(All images from official artist webpage¹⁶⁴)



Stich



Carcass



Fixation

Through “*Stich*,” Pavlensky actively places himself in the vulnerable social and political spaces that the action and trial of Pussy Riot has uncovered. In an interview on the subject of *Stich*, Pavlensky prolifically comments on the trial as a “very telling phenomenon,” and the Old Testament-like nature of the regime in Russia, a mobilization of a cult of Orthodoxy, and the kind of social body that this creates.

¹⁶³ The quote from Matthew references the famous New Testament passage of Jesus throwing out the salesmen from the temple.

Russian. “*Выступление Pussy Riot было переигрыванием знаменитой акции Иисуса Христа (Мф. 21:12–13)*”.

¹⁶⁴ All images from official artist webpage. <http://xn--80aejmfefrnz.xn--p1ai/>

Along with Pussy Riot, Pavlensky indirectly places himself in what he sees as an authentic, albeit less radical, continuation of the tradition of Christ. He understands the Orthodox Church as the fundamental betrayal of this tradition, breeding a class of Orthodoxy that is in opposition to Christianity. However, “Christian” and “compassion” are also not terms that he directly appropriates into his work - his work is aggressive, violent, provoking. This aggression is situated in his conception of Christ, and not Orthodoxy per se: Pavlensky discusses how Christ would have been even more violent towards the feigned religious-types, and his trial would have been even more harsh than that of Pussy Riot.¹⁶⁵ I highlight this important, early discussion because it foreshadows the development of Pavlensky’s work, where explicit references to religion and Christ become replaced by a signature aesthetics of emaciated, nude body and a pointed political critique, buttressed by western theories on power dynamics and society.

Nudity, pain, and a masked reference to Christ- classic tropes of holy foolery - are a constant in his political work since *Stich*, performance work that includes the controversial actions *Carvass* and *Fixation*, both from 2013; in the former the artist was naked and rolled in front of the State Court House while covered in barbed wire, and the latter is his infamous nailing of his own testicles to the Red Square. Pavlensky was charged with Criminal Law Code Article 213.1B, “hooliganism motivated by hatred towards a social group” for “Fixation,” the same charge that the artists Mavromatti and Pussy Riot faced for their work. The charges were later dismissed. Due to the frequency of these charges against artists that appropriate religious aesthetics, the law is colloquially known as the law against blasphemy.

¹⁶⁵ Pavlensky, Petr. "Akcija Pussy Riot Kuda Leghche I Bezobidnee Christ." Interview by Viktor Marinovich. . *Общество*. №32 (857) 13 августа 2012 г.. БелГазета. Новости Беларуси. Белорусские новости. August 13, 2012. Accessed June 02, 2015. http://www.belgazeta.by/ru/2012_08_13/society/24602/.

However, since the “Careful, Religion!” and Pussy Riot trials, the evocation of the Articles 282 and 213 have become synonymous with the larger blasphemy of the Orthodox Church and the State among members of its opposition.

However, Pavlensky is not really a blasphemer. His expressed appropriation and affinity with Christ does not focus on the blasphemy of Christ - as discusses in Pussy Riot, nor is he expressing the concept of judgment- as in Mavromatti. Pavlensky sees Christ as a radical, political Actionist. Pavlensky’s own actions combine extreme representation of the body politic – “a nation regarded as a corporate entity, likened to the human body”¹⁶⁶ with the Christian notions of the sacred and self-sacrifice. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the action *Separation* (2014) in an attempt to analyze how the above terms find a conceptual home on top of the State Psychiatric ward, and discuss how this can be connected to the late metamorphosis of holy foolery in Russia.

(*Separation* progression left to right¹⁶⁷)



¹⁶⁶ Definition of Body Politic in Oxford English: The people of a nation, state, or society considered collectively as an organized group of citizens" Body Politic. Accessed June 02, 2015. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/body-politic>.

¹⁶⁷ All images from official artist webpage. <http://xn--80aejmfefrnz.xn--p1ai/>

On November 19, 2014 Petr Pavlensky, sitting naked on top of the infamous Serbsky State forensic psychiatry institution in Moscow, cut off his right ear with a knife. The images show the artist sitting on the edge of the building with blood gushing down his body, leaving bright red lines. The police arrive to move the artist from his place. Pavlensky's stated that his action *Separation* comments on the abuse of psychiatry for political purposes - the drawing of the line between insanity and sanity by the state. With overt references to Michel Foucault, the artist statement reads:

A knife separates the lobe of the ear from the body. The concrete wall of psychology separates the society of the sane from the clinically insane. The return to the use of psychiatry for political purposes - the police apparatus is reappropriating the power to constitute the line between reason and insanity.^{xii}

As with all his actions, Pavlensky's choice of space is highly symbolic. Founded in 1921, the Serbsky State Center for Psychiatry has diagnosed hundreds of Soviet dissidents with "sluggish schizophrenia" and several political activists in opposition to Putin's presidency have been ordered to undergo forced psychiatric treatment in the Center.

After the completion of "Separation," the artist was taken away by the police to the Botkinskaya Hospital, where he was evaluated by a psychiatrist for the fourth time since *Stich*, and again characterized as "sane." Insanity is a powerful metaphor in the work, and opens the work to a multiplicity of references. I would suggest that officially diagnosing Pavlensky as "insane" by the state is unlikely as it sums up a much too recent political practice – in the Soviet Union, such actions as Pavlensky's would have been automatically been sentenced as "insane" and "schizophrenic." Pussy Riot, who were charged with "religious hate," but officially sentenced with "hooliganism;" because the intimate connotation of "religious hate" with blasphemy are too evocative in the religious divide of

contemporary Russian society. Pavlensky is only evaluated for insanity- as a kind of threat- but never charged with it or condemned into a mental institution.¹⁶⁸

One of the defining characteristics of holy foolery is being against vainglory through its ascetic taming.¹⁶⁹ For holy fools, this taming of pride and the ego was performed through the desecration of their amassed spiritual achievement by feigned madness. Feigning madness fosters the destruction of the ego. For the holy fools, there is a spectacular lack of concern for people and their norms that came from inner superiority. Their acts of insane sacrilege and blasphemy are also an extension of this taming of vainglory - one has to go against what he thinks is true and good by publically appropriating the tools of the devil. We see the holy-fool like taming of vainglory in the work of Pavlensky not only in the reference to psychiatry, but also in his treatment of the body. The artist's commitment to disdain for the physical norms of the beautiful are further pushed into the realm of masochism and infliction of physical mutilation as a theme in the work. These practices have links to the Christian mystic tradition.

Other than into the official police files, insanity takes us into a parallel, serpentine journey into the history of religion. Other than an homage to Van Gogh, this work can also be read through a historical context that makes strange bedfellows out of religion and madness. Pavlensky is stepping into the social schism that Pussy Riot has uncovered using the referential tools of a particular subset of the behavioral characteristic of holy foolery. Pavlensky's affinity to the political Christ has been discussed above, and I want to propose

¹⁶⁸ I would suggest that these intricate workings of the law are highly meaningful and symbolic here, calling forth for a much more nuanced engagement with the use of psychiatry for political purposes in the history of Russia and the law, which are beyond the scope of the present thesis.

¹⁶⁹ Fedotov's characteristic of holy foolery is discussed in depth in chapter **Holy Foolery as Behavioral Paradigm**

the following passage from the hagiography of the beloved XVI century Fool in Christ, St Nikolai for consideration of Pavlensky's use of gesture:

On the first Saturday of Great Lent in 1570 the Tsar Ivan the Terrible with his army marched into Pskov to sack the city and massacre its inhabitants. At the gate to the city, Nikolka the Fool, half-naked but for a few rags, throws a piece of raw meat at the Tsar.□

"I am Christian and do not eat meat during Lent," says Ivan to him.

"But you do drink human blood," Nikolka replies.

Frightened by the Fool's audacious condemnation, the Tsar ordered to stop the looting and flees the city.

Hagiography of St Nikolai of Pskov, Fool-in-Christ

What is the relationship between the fool Nikolai and political performance artist Pavlensky? Their disparate actions, standing on opposite edges of the trajectory of authoritarian rule in the history of Russia, do not appear to share much. And yet, both individuals make a symbolic and provocative gesture towards an abusive state, a gesture that echoes to a shared didactic and anti-authoritarian commitment: one throws a piece of meat at the Tsar and the other cuts off his ear with a knife on government territory. The seeming dissonance between these two figures can be transformed into a single continuum of activism by a historical examination of the affiliation of madness with dissidence in Russia through the evocation of the Orthodox tradition of holy foolery. Pavlensky, an avid reader of political history, is certainly familiar with this context.

The church canonization of holy fools stopped in the 17th century because of their popularity in Russia and their overt threat to the authority of the church. However, the practice continued and remained popular outside the domains of the Church. The Communist Revolution in Russia prohibited religion and institutionalized the subversive holy foolery as a behavioral form by labeling it as a form of insanity. Incidentally, the

institutionalization of dissidence as a form of schizophrenia comes into being after Stalin; dissidents that escape the gulag are forced into mental institutions. Therein lays the historical link between St Nikolai and Pavlensky, which is opened up by their affinity in gesture.

Pavlensky's seemingly insane gesture of cutting off his ear mirrors the throwing of the meat at the Tsar by the fool Nikolai: Pavlensky, himself investigated for insanity, is sitting on the building of the physical institution that has an uninterrupted history of conflating dissidence and insanity, a practice that mirrors the institutionalization of holy foolery as insane a century prior. We can conclude that Pavlensky's notion of insanity, as it is expressed in "Separation," has complex roots both in Foucault and in Orthodoxy. For Foucault, madness is a symptom of social ills, a kind of metaphor and evidence for practices of inclusion and exclusion in a given society.¹⁷⁰ In the context of Orthodoxy, madness connotes a kind of holiness, which can also be prophetic. Of course, *salia* - the word for the feigned madness of holy foolery, explicitly signifies this behavioral characteristic. However, the theater of madness and the mask of *salia*, the appropriation of these terms carry a postmodern connotation of parody.¹⁷¹ Parody seems somehow foreign to Pavlensky, sitting nude and bloody, with is his emaciated, haunting presence that the images convey.

Differently from Pussy Riot, Pavlensky's actions are markedly lacking in carnival, parody and the postmodern. Alike with Mavromatti, the artist's actions are situated on a foundation of history and the reality of politics: his notion of the power that constitutes social dynamics has a real presence in society. However, unlike Mavromatti, Pavlensky does

¹⁷⁰ Foucault, Michel, and Jean Khalfa. *History of Madness*. London: Routledge, 2006.

¹⁷¹ Postmodernism in relation to holy foolery is discussed in depth in chapter **Holy Foolery as Behavioral Paradigm**.

not negate. Pavlensky does not so much provoke power, or behave in opposition to power, as he uses the tools of power on his own body: voluntarily, he represents and becomes a tortured man in prison, who is forced to place himself in barbed wire, whose ear is cut off, whose mouth is sewn shut. He embodies power. Baudrillard's definition of *hyperreality* in relation the postmodern is worth quoting here:

The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory – precession of simulacra – it is the map that engenders the territory, and if we were to revive [Borges's] fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. *The desert of the real itself.*¹⁷²

The postmodern is a reflection of the simulacra that reality, and everything that constitutes reality, has become. Whereas in the postmodern, meaning is rotting away in shreds from the edges of reality, in the case of Pavlensky's Russia, power and ideology is occupying more and more territory – down to a man's testicles (*Fixation*, 2014). Lacking the postmodern gauze, Christ is not ironical, nor is his smiling face paraded on a sticker for a “society of the spectacle” – he is a historical, political figure and a founder of a tradition that Pavlensky sees no separation with. For the artist, the spaces of the Church, the Red Square, the State Court House are not deserted, but occupied and sacralized. This conception of time and space is important because it is the context for the engagement with Pavlensky, and it is also the context within which the public and the state reaction to political performance art is stemming from.

I would argue that Pavlensky, who is keen on the concept of revelation – his quote on the symbolic role of the Pussy Riot case, referenced before, expresses this – does not

¹⁷² Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

achieve a public “revelation” with his work. For his work to provoke the social body in a way that something new can be revealed by the presence of a hidden hypocrisy, perhaps his work must be less explicit. Or else, Pavlensky must be accused of insanity and incarcerated in a psychiatric ward to create a debate in society. Nonetheless, Pavlensky’s work is sophisticated, daring and demonstrates a continual sensitivity to sacred space and power. His body of work also articulates a novel take on institutional critique. It is important to note how his form of critique functions in opposition to the “ability of reason to unveil unreason,” a characteristic that determines western articulations of critique: paradoxically, it is as if Pavlensky’s action must remain explicitly insane for the complexity of meaning to become present.¹⁷³ As such, I would argue that Pavlensky engages with a form of institutional critique that diverges from the given, western understanding of secular political art. Pavlensky conflates secular, dissident politics with activism from with a religious tradition.

¹⁷³ Notions of secularity are further discussed in the 2nd chapter of this thesis.

Conclusion

Political performance art in Russia works through the direct inheritance of Moscow Conceptualism and is in conversation with radicalism around the world. This thesis has articulated a parallel set of roots, roots that are deeply intertwined with the history of Russian dissidence and the affiliation of dissidence and religion present in the work of artists Pussy Riot, Oleg Mavromatti and Petr Pavlensky. I propose that while in the global and western context of radicalism, the “blasphemous” political performances in the public sphere are often seen as being against religion, in the context of post-Soviet Russia they can be seen as partaking in a tradition of religious protest, institutional critique and call for the separation of church and state from within the secular ethics of Orthodoxy.

The western notion of blasphemy-as-necessarily-regressive is a construct of the development of post-Enlightenment secular values, which inform the contemporary art and activist discourse. In contrast, in Russia, the evocation of blasphemy carries the potentiality of critique from within a religious tradition, which is made socially relevant in the increasing proliferation of the Russian Orthodox Church into culture and politics of post-Soviet Russia. The political stakes of Pussy Riot’s performance in Cathedral of Christ the Savior – for which they were sentenced to prison - can be translated through the discussion of the cultural conceptualizing of religion as protest, where blasphemy is always an accusation, “for it is in the *accusing* itself, and in the greater environment in which the charges are made, that we find the profound power of blasphemy.”¹⁷⁴ Such a concept allows for the scholarly engagement with the motif of blasphemy-becoming-revelation as a form of institutional

¹⁷⁴ *Blasphemy, Art that Offends*, 34

critique inherited from the Orthodox tradition.

The figure of the holy fool has a foot in each of the above realms. The position of anti-authoritarian, secular institutional critique that is on the verge of madness in Orthodoxy is associated with the tradition of holy folly. However, the church canonization of holy foolery has ceased and holy foolery has since withdrawn from an overt presence in the daily life of Medieval Rus'. With recourse to Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope, I discuss how the holy fool is separated from the religious tradition that birthed him, becoming a behavioral paradigm for appropriation in the realm of culture. Through the vitae of St Symeon Salos and St Basil, I highlight how the holy fool is marked by the ability to reveal corruption by his acts of blasphemy and sacrilege in holy places and towards Orthodox people. The appropriation of the paradigm can be distinguished by the main characteristics of the topos, which are active and passive components - *salia*, paradoxical didacticism, *kenosis*-for-Christ. I compare these components of the topos to the work of political performance art, paying close attention to the engagement with space and the body.

The appropriation of the "devil's methods" and insanity- in the case of Pavlensky, these become the methods of the very power he is working against – function in the actions of both the artist and the saint. The body and space play the leading role in both "genres;" meaning is concealed in disruptive physical acts that insert the body into contested ideological territories, such as Mavromatti's crucifixion in front of the Institute of Culture. Finally, as one witnessed in the way the Pussy Riot performance in Cathedral of Christ the Savior morphed through the justice system in Russia, both works are relational; meaning is often revealed through the interaction with the public and via its judgment, and this generative process takes place after the event or action. In the case of holy fools, their work

continues even beyond the life of the *yurodivi* – a fool is unmasked as holy only after the death.

These three case studies articulate the above questions and set the stage for the further engagement with the complex relationship between holy foolery and political performance art in this thesis. An engagement with a historical progression of the resilient holy foolery as a behavioral paradigm through its prohibition in the seventeenth century and its labeling as a form of insanity in the USSR, reveals the affiliation of madness with dissidence in Russia. These complex visual and historical lineages undermine the seeming dissonance between these two genres, transforming them into a single continuum of activism and repression within the cultural tradition of Orthodoxy. Further research into the topic would include an in-depth engagement with notions of the secular and Orthodox identities in Russia, as well as a critical analysis of the Bakhtinian carnival, parody the concepts of laughter and blasphemy as a revolutionary social tools.

To conclude, I wish to cast doubt on the continual power of Bakhtinian laughter in the world that is erupting with accusation of blasphemy. Slavoj Žižek, commenting on the *Charlie Hebdo* case, stated that “*Charlie Hebdo’s* ‘*bête et méchant*’ stance is constrained by the fact that laughter is not in itself liberating, but deeply ambiguous.” There are different kinds of laughter; and the laughter of the fool is not the laughter of the King. “In the popular view of Ancient Greece, there is a contrast between the solemn aristocratic Spartans and the merry democratic Athenians. But the Spartans, who prided themselves on their severity, placed laughter at the centre of their ideology and practice: they recognized communal laughter as a power that helped to increase the glory of the state. Spartan laughter – the brutal mockery of a humiliated enemy or slave, making fun of their fear and pain from a position of power – found an echo in Stalin’s speeches, when he scoffed at the panic and

confusion of ‘traitors’, and survives today.”¹⁷⁵ The problem with *Charlie Hebdo*, according to Žizek, is that its form of laughter was harmless yet fitting with the hegemonic, cynic function of ideology in society. Like the Medusa, ideology submits everything to its gaze, enslaving even the carnival into the society of the spectacle. Laughter has become the sidekick of ideology, not its nemesis. “It posed no threat whatsoever to those in power; it merely made their exercise of power more tolerable.” Perhaps blasphemy can take up the flame of iconoclastic destruction and release the spirit of another kind world from the ashes of self-affirmative stasis.

¹⁷⁵ Žizek, Slavoj. “In the Grey Zone: Slavoj Žizek on responses to the Paris killings.” *London Review of Books*, February 5, 2015, accessed June 8, 2015. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2015/02/05/slavoj-zizek/in-the-grey-zone>

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Endnotes

ⁱ Russian Criminal Law Article 282 in Russian (full text):

1. Действия, направленные на возбуждение национальной, расовой или религиозной вражды, унижение национального достоинства, а равно пропаганда исключительности, превосходства либо неполноценности граждан по признаку их отношения к религии, национальной или расовой принадлежности, если эти деяния совершены публично или с использованием средств массовой информации, —

наказываются штрафом в размере от пятисот до восьмисот минимальных размеров оплаты труда или в размере заработной платы или иного дохода осужденного за период от пяти до восьми месяцев, либо ограничением свободы на срок до трех лет, либо лишением свободы на срок от двух до четырех лет.

2. Те же деяния, совершенные:

- а) с применением насилия или с угрозой его притеснения;
- б) лицом с использованием своего служебного положения;
- в) организованной группой, —

наказываются лишением свободы на срок от трех до пяти лет.

ⁱⁱ Fanajlova, Elena. "Delo Pussy Riot: Za Chto Nakazivat' Uchastnits Gruppi?" Radio Liberty. March 23, 2012. Accessed June 02, 2015. <http://www.svoboda.org/content/feature/24525370.html>.

Full Russian text below:

Валерий Никольский, Московская Хельсинкская группа:

“Я изложу позицию, которую мы вырабатывали вместе с отцом Глебом Якуниным. Напомню, что за приверженность православию он отсидел несколько лет в лагерях, и рассматривает дело Pussy Riot с точки зрения политических преследований. Он обратил внимание на название самого события: панк-молебен. В переводе на язык традиции это молебен юродивого. Это молебен людей, которые обращаются к власти с теми или иными обличениями. В соответствии с традицией обличения должны происходить внутри храма, конечно, без нарушений храмового освященного пространства, и девушки не заходили в алтарь, чтобы не разрушить храмовое пространство. Обличение должно быть обращено к властям, к начальству. И мы видим, что они в своем тексте совершенно точно обращаются к властям, к Патриарху и к Путину. Я хотел бы напомнить, насколько это обличение может быть острым, насколько их обличение соответствует религиозной традиции. На въезде в Псков стоит церковь Святого Местночтимого Николая Любятовского, который встретил Ивана Грозного на въезде в город (будучи уже известным юродивым) и поднес ему кусок сырого мяса. История не сохранила плотно этот диалог, но сказано было примерно следующее: «Одичал ты, царь. Что-то на людей бросаться стал. Возьми кусок этот и съешь его, но не пей крови людской.» Настолько это подействовало на помазанника Божия, что Грозный простоял два дня под Псковом, потом ушел и вернулся гораздо позже, чтобы разгромить город. Значит, мы не видим здесь никакого расхождения с православной традицией. Девушки находились внутри нее и ничего, что противоречило бы религиозным нормам, не совершали. Мы не знаем, кто готовил эту акцию, но видим, что человек этот хорошо знаком с традицией и относится к ней с уважением. Почему же тогда возникает дискуссия об уголовной статье и о том, что в результате они должны быть осуждены? Но мы же понимаем что это будет политический судебный процесс, только потому, что они обратились к Путину. Но мы обратили внимание на то, что Путин после этого сказал: «Мне стыдно за то, что это произошло». И мы это рассматриваем как слабое, косвенное, но правильное

реагирование, хоть и не надеемся, что это повлияет на суд.

Что еще поразительно в этой истории. Что за девушек вступились те священники, которые подвергались преследованиям в советское время. Отец Павел Адельгейм в Пскове, тот же Кураев, который знал, что такое преследования за веру. Есть люди, которые относятся к событиям не как к событиям, которые произошли здесь и сейчас и только в этом президентском сроке, а связаны со всей историей нашей страны. Возможно, девушки станут политзаключенными, мы исходим из того, что в этом процессе есть политическая составляющая. А опыт предъявления хулиганских статей диссидентам мы все по советскому времени знаем.”

iii

“Careful, Religion!” exhibition view. Pieces by Alisa Zrazhevskaya (left) and Alexander Kosoplavov (right). Photograph by Z. M. Kuzikova

“Careful, Religion!” exhibition view after the vandalism. Pieces by Alisa Zrazhevskaya (left) and Alexander Kosoplavov (right). Photograph by Z. M. Kuzikova

iv “Интерфакс-Религия: Калужский суд признал картину с Микки Маусом в роли Христа экстремистским материалом.” *Интерфакс-Религия: Калужский суд признал картину с Микки Маусом в роли Христа экстремистским материалом*, August 19, 2011. Accessed June 03, 2015. <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/index.php/myblogs?act=news&div=41916>. Full Russian text below:

“Тем самым, евангельский сюжет представлен автором работы в виде комикса, что в свою очередь представляет собой и осуществляет предельно циничное, издевательское оскорбление, дисфорическое высмеивание религиозных убеждений и религиозных чувств православных верующих, унижение их человеческого достоинства по признаку отношения к религии.»— *Прокуратура Калужской области, 19 августа 2011 г.*

v

Taganskii court, July 2010. Reuters/ Denis Sinyakov

vi Volchek, Dmitri. “Vertikal’ Dlja Khudozhnikov.” Радио Свобода. September 16, 2010. Accessed June 02, 2015. <http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/2159819.html>.

Russian text below:

“Уголовное дело возникло после подачи заявления приходом Святого Николы, который располагается рядом, за оградой Института культурологии, на чьей территории и велась съемка эпизода. У храма Святого Николы были территориальные претензии к Институту культурологии. Они хотели отсудить эту территорию уже давно, и вот им показалось, что это очень удобный момент. Они подали иск — очевидно, чтобы дискредитировать людей из института и под это дело отсудить себе эту территорию. То есть все упирается в какие-то очень меркантильные вещи, а вовсе не в оскорбления, в какую-то сакральность — все это надумано”

vii Kruglikov, Vadim. “Oleg Mavromatti: Bol’no, Bol’no... a Choroshol!” AdIndex.ru. June 08, 2011. Accessed June 02, 2015. <http://adindex.ru/publication/gallery/2011/07/8/68699.phtml>.

Full Russian text below:

“Ну, хорошо, Мавромати по-честному перенес вбивание в себя больших гвоздей и простоял так довольно долго. А что он хотел сказать миру этим своим членовредительством? А то, что настоящее искусство — это боль и жертвенность. Для первого — боли — он был реально прибит и просто ее, боль, испытывал. Для второго — жертвенности — ему и понадобилась эта довольно прозрачная отсылка

к Христу. Ведь в истории нашего, христианского ареала нет большей жертвы, чем Его жертва.»

^{ix} Alekhina closing statements in court, August 8 2012.

Kostyuchenko, Elena. "So-called Trial." *Новая Газета*. August 10, 2012. Accessed June 04, 2015.

<http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/53903.html>.

Full extract in Russian:

“Я вас не боюсь, не боюсь лжи и фикции, приговора так называемого суда. Вы можете лишить меня лишь так называемой свободы, а мою внутреннюю свободу вам никогда не отнять...”

^{xi} Pavlensky interview.

Pavlensky, Petr. "Akcija Pussy Riot Kuda Leghche I Bezobidnee Christ." Interview by Viktor Marinovich. . *Общество*. №32 (857) 13 августа 2012 г.. БелГазета. Новости Беларуси. Белорусские новости. August 13, 2012. Accessed June 02, 2015. http://www.belgazeta.by/ru/2012_08_13/society/24602/.

Full Russian text below:

“Это очень показательный феномен. «Дело Pussy Riot» и реакция на мою акцию показали, кем на самом деле сегодня являются сторонники православного культа в России. Они не являются продолжателями христианской традиции. Они не сохраняют христианскую культуру, они ее отвергают. Они взяли термины - например, «христианство», «милосердие», - но за ними нет наполнения.”

^{xii} Pavlensky artist statement on “Separation” in Russian:

«Нож отделяет мочку уха от тела. Бетонная стена психиатрии отделяет общество разумных от безумных больных. Возвращая использование психиатрии в политических целях — полицейский аппарат возвращает себе власть определять порог между разумом и безумием»