Unmasked and Unhindered: the Evolution of the Affect Generator in the Works of Pussy Riot

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Unmasked and Unhindered: The Evolution of the Affect Generator in the Works of Pussy Riot

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B.A., University of Colorado Boulder, 2014

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This thesis entitled:
Unmasked and Unhindered: The Evolution of the Affect Generator in the Works of Pussy Riot
by Alicia Elizabeth Baca
has been approved for the Department of Germanic Slavic Languages and Literatures

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Date __________________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
This thesis provides an analysis of the evolution of Pussy Riot's works from "Punk Prayer" to the more recently released "Make America Great Again" and how the change in the group's physical appearance and production style affects their protest art. Pussy Riot has consistently presented themselves as a punk rock performance group that addresses issues regarding women’s rights, LGBT rights, and the corruption within the Russian government through their work; they have used shock value as one of the primary tools to send their message across to their audience. In the past the group used specifically-chosen costumes as one of their means to get their meaning across. The most notable article of their performance costumes, the balaclava mask, not only acted as their insignia, but eventually came to act as an affect generator that incited negative reactions from their audience, ranging from negative comments on the Internet to emotionally driven testimonies during Pussy Riot's trial in 2012. After their arrest and imprisonment following the “Punk Prayer” performance at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow the band members’ identities were revealed and the use of the balaclavas began to dissipate. Now that the balaclava is no longer the primary affect generator for the band, the performer’s body has now taken over that role within the group’s recent music videos. While the group’s original intent was not to show off the bodies of its members because they felt that this would distract the audience from the message of the work, the body is now being used as the primary tool to communicate the group’s ideals. By using the body as the primary affect generator Tolokonnikova has lifted both the physical and metaphorical mask that forced Pussy Riot to stay anonymous during their initial run as a group in Russia.
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Introduction

The Russian punk rock performance group Pussy Riot has continually persisted and persevered through their struggle to bring women’s rights into the limelight of Russian society and politics. The group gained international attention after their arrest, imprisonment, and court trials that followed their most well-known performance “Punk Prayer” which took place in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Savior in February 2012. Since then the group has continued to speak out against the general treatment of women and LGBTQ people as second-class citizens within Russian society and against specific policies created by the Russian government and its leader, President Vladimir Putin. Group members were later put on trial for the actions that occurred during this event and were charged with hooliganism and later with "inciting religious hatred" (Bennetts 138). Throughout their short history as a punk rock performance group Pussy Riot used self-produced songs and music videos of their guerrilla style performances and anonymous stage personas as their primary tools for communicating their ideas. However, since the time of the performance of "Punk Prayer" and subsequent trial, Pussy Riot has largely disbanded. Lately the group has enjoyed a celebrity media status and some members, specifically Nadezhda "Nadja" Tolokonnikova, still create works under the group's name.

The quality and content of the new works that have been created under the Pussy Riot name have drastically changed since the time of "Punk Prayer." With the help of newfound connections such as producer Dave Sitek (Pelly), Tolokonnikova has been able to create new songs and music videos with the quality of high-budget music videos rather than the grungy and strikingly punk music videos of Pussy Riot's past, which have a do-it-yourself quality. By do-it-yourself I mean that the work is done on one’s own without the assistance of any outside sources except for what one has readily available to them; I will henceforth refer to this quality as DIY. While Tolokonnikova does still advocate for women's rights and LGBT rights, her audience has changed somewhat, since she now resides and works within the United States. In addition to this, she has mostly done away with Pussy Riot's trademark anonymous balaclava-clad appearance, which served to distract the audience's attention away from the female body and ensure
anonymity of its members. Instead, she has begun to utilize the female body as a tool to manipulate the emotions of the audience and provoke reactions, and only uses the balaclava as a trademark for the group. While Pussy Riot’s and Tolokonnikova's use of the physical female body as an affect generator has opened more possibilities for the group's work to grow, how do Pussy Riot and Tolokonnikova use the body for different protest aims in each song? First, we will look at a brief historical background of Pussy Riot and their previous endeavors to gain a better understanding of how the group's work has changed over time.

**Historical Background**

Over the period of time that Vladimir Putin has either been in the role of President or "behind the scenes" in the role of Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, there has been a growing disapproval amongst Russian citizens who came to learn the truth behind his corrupt administration and speak out against the president and his regime. Many dissidents that have protested, openly spoken out against, or staged performances have learned that doing so usually results in dangerous consequences. As Marc Bennett illustrates, the act of speaking out against the Russian government is not an activity for the weak-spirited and over time the crackdown on these opposition groups has grown more and more brutal. Many notable anti-Putin critics were active before and during the time of Pussy Riot's work in Russia. While these dissidents have taken different measures to express their distrust towards the Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian government, what they all share in common, Pussy Riot included, is that over the time of Putin’s presidency the crackdown and treatment of political dissidents and protestors has grown harsher and has reached a point where it is almost impossible to criticize the president without making a dangerous enemy.

The group Pussy Riot was originally formed in 2011 and has produced a number of performative pieces that take the form of songs and music videos that are released on the Internet. While the group does not ally themselves with any particular opposition groups or leaders within the Russian Federation, they are one of the most widely recognized protest groups to have come out of contemporary Russia. Pussy Riot's pre-history lies in the world of contemporary Russian protest. Members, Tolokonnikova, Samutse-
vich, and Tolokonnikova's husband Pyotr Verzilov were all originally members of the art-group Voina in Moscow, Russia. Voina was started by Oleg Vorotnikov, Natalia Sokol, Tolokonnikova, and Verzilov and some of their other fellow students at the Moscow State University (Imposti 1). Voina's activities ranged from happenings in public places, installation pieces, and vandalism. Some of their more widely known works include *Feast*, a wake that took place in a Moscow metro car, held in honor of the group's mentor Dimitry Prigov (Gessen 39), and *Fuck for the Heir Puppy Bear*! which was essentially a public orgy that took place the day before the 2008 Russian Presidential election at the Timiryazev State Biological Museum in Moscow. This work, that both Tolokonnikova and Verzilov participated in, served as a commentary on the fact that Medvedev, a close ally of Putin, would essentially become Putin's successor to the Russian presidency (Imposti 7). Overall, Voina's works during the time of Tolokonnikova, Samutsevich, and Verzilov's membership spoke out against issues regarding the Russian government itself and the administrations of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. However, in 2009 Tolokonnikova, Samutsevich, and Verzilov left Voina and later went on to create one of two factions that still used Voina's name for their own works. As time went on Tolokonnikova and Samutsevich went on to create the group Pussy Riot with new members including Maria "Masha" Alyokhina who also played a key role in the "Punk Prayer" performance (Imposti 2). When describing the type of work that the group created Tolokonnikova explained it as follows:

"То, чем занимается группа PussyRiot, - это оппозиционное искусство, или же политика, обратившаяся к формам, разработанным искусством. В любом случае, это род гражданской деятельности в условиях подавления корпоративной государственной системой базовых прав человека, его гражданских и политических свобод."

("Pussy Riot’s performances can either be called dissident art, or political action that engages art forms. Either way, our performances are a kind of civic activity amidst the repressions of a corporate political system that directs its power against basic human rights, and civil and political liberties.") (qtd. in Kostiochenko; Pussy Riot 91).
Like Voina, Pussy Riot became known for their unauthorized public performance protests, but with a punk rock twist despite the members’ lack of a musical background (Gessen 65-66). The group became easily recognizable for their use of brightly colored, mismatched balaclavas, dresses, and tights while performing, which were intended to distract the audience away from the members' bodies during their performances and maintain anonymity (Pussy Riot!: A Punk Prayer For Freedom 39). The lyrics of Pussy Riot's songs address issues of women's and LGBT rights in the Russian Federation and express opposition to the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, and his administration and other bodies of authority that are connected to it, unlike the works of Voina that did not address issues surrounding women's and LGBT rights. The members of Pussy Riot themselves are all well-educated, have received a level of higher education and were part of the middle-class (Gabowitsch 191). However, some, like Tolokonnikova, were also self-educated in the realms of feminism, women's rights, and queer theory (Gessen 23-24, 60). Seeing as how feminism has not been a popular social movement in modern times in Russia, Tolokonnikova, Alyokhina, Samutsevich, and other members of Pussy Riot essentially had to make up this feminist ideology that they would be representing on their own (Gessen 60-64). However, through this self-study and creation of their ideology and band personas, those involved, particularly Tolokonnikova, saw a change within themselves that allowed them to find their own self-worth through the creation of this group (Gessen 67-68). Reflecting on this change, Tolokonnikova noticed that she had become more certain in choosing the issues that she wanted to represent, that she felt more confident, and most importantly, that she no longer "saw herself as an appendage to Verzilov and Vorotnikov, even if she had once been a willing appendage" (Gessen 68).

In conjunction with these newfound issues Pussy Riot's early works dealt with issues of women's and LGBT rights in Russia. As in their most internationally known performance "Punk Prayer," their early performances were staged in public, and the group gave no prior notice, did not ask for permission, and released these works as videos that were uploaded onto the Internet. Some of the widely known early works include "Kill the Sexist," which borrowed a musical track from the British punk band the Cockney Rejects with their own lyrics added in, and "Putin's Pissed Himself" in response to Putin's treatment of protesters (Gessen 104-106). While Pussy Riot is not known to have participated or performed in larger
rallies such as the March of Million protests, some background on these protests and their participants is necessary for understanding the reactions that the Russian government has to acts of protest.

It is important to keep in mind that the people that join in on these protests and rallies are typically from the middle class. Protesters are often people who have already been able to find work, provided for themselves and their families, as well as receive some level of higher education (Gabowitsch 3). However, this is not true one hundred percent of the time and we see people from the lower middle class, particularly university students, in these rallies as well. The larger protests, such as the March of Millions protests, were often composed of people from various different opposition and activist groups. One such example would be the very first March of Millions protest that occurred in Bolotnaya Square in Moscow on May 6th, 2012. This protest drew environmentalists, LGBTQ activists, Anti-Nato and anti-WTO advocates, human rights activists, social justice activists, members of left-wing parties, ultra nationalists, and members of smaller political parties (Gabowitsch 3).

The bulk of these protests and rallies occurred during Vladimir Putin's second and third terms and criticized many forms of corruption that occurred during his administration. As argued by Mischa Gabowitsch, Putin's administration can be termed an emotional regime, meaning that it "might deploy ridicule and reprimand to police the display of emotions deemed unacceptable or out of place" (Gabowitsch 47). Essentially, such a regime makes it difficult for middle and/or creative class citizens to voice their opinions or speak out against their government when they become dissatisfied with all that their government has done. As a result those who speak out against Putin often find themselves in jail for their actions, as we see in the case with Pussy Riot.

"Punk Prayer"

"Punk Prayer", Pussy Riot's most well-known performance, was performed in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in February 2012. This piece itself was very controversial and was presented by the Russian media as an event that promoted religious hatred (Kananovich 397), specifically hatred of the Russian Orthodox Church. While "Punk Prayer" was initially dismissed as nothing more than "a colorful skirmish in the anti-Putin opposition's wider war" (Bennetts 137), after the video of the performance was
posted online and made available to viewers on an international level it made worldwide headlines. Pussy Riot even went into this originally believing that they would not be treated any worse by the authorities than they had in the past which had been nothing more than being detained without criminal charges being pressed against the group (Bennetts 138). However, this blatant opposition and breaking of the unspoken rules of Putin's emotional regime not only led to the members being detained, but a court trial that was insistent on making the group out to seem like crazed, religion hating lunatics. This also suggests the power of Pussy Riot's performance and that the Russian government was possibly fearful of the impact that Pussy Riot's message could have had on the general public.

“Punk Prayer” was not intended to be a protest against religion itself, but rather a protest of the relationship between the church and state at that time. During this time, Patriarch Kirill, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, had shown direct support of Russian President Vladimir Putin by telling citizens who God wanted them to vote for in the 2012 presidential election (Bennetts 132-133). As mentioned by Tolokonnikova in her opening courtroom statements during their trial, the group “harbors no hatred towards Orthodox Christians…[in the performance they] aimed to express our disapproval of a certain political event: the patriarch’s support for Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin” (Pussy Riot!: A Punk Prayer For Freedom 42-42). At the time some liberal groups, like Pussy Riot, felt that there should be a clear line of separation between church and state within the country. Samutsevich stated at the closing of the trial that:

"Наше внезапное музыкальное появление в храме Христа Спасителя с песней «Богородица, Путина прогони» нарушило цельность этого, так долго создаваемого и поддерживаемого властями медийного образа, выявило его ложность. В нашем выступлении мы осмелились без благословения патриарха совместить визуальный образ православной культуры и культуры протеста, наведя умных людей на мысль о том, что православная культура принадлежит не только Русской православной церкви, патриарху и Путину - она может оказаться и на стороне гражданского бунта и протестных настроений в России."
"Our sudden musical appearance in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior with the song “Virgin Mary, Put Putin Away” violated the integrity of the media image that the authorities had spent such a long time generating and maintaining, and revealed its falsity. In our performance we dared, without seeking the patriarch’s blessing, to unite the visual imagery of Orthodox culture with that of protest culture, thus suggesting that Orthodox culture belongs not only to the Russian Orthodox Church, the patriarch, and Putin, but that it could also ally itself with civic rebellion and the spirit of protest in Russia."

("Yekaterina Samutsevich Closing Statement at the Pussy Riot Trial Yekaterina Samutsevich" 3:37; qtd. in Kostiochenko; Pussy Riot!: A Punk Prayer For Freedom 89).

The charges, courtroom proceedings, and eventual sentencing that Pussy Riot received for their display of dissatisfaction with the Russian government and its ties to the Russian Orthodox Church provided the Western world with a glimpse into the world of Russia's corrupt government and harsh crackdowns on its dissidents. Pussy Riot's sudden projection into international headlines gave the western world a glimpse into what happens to those who speak about against the leader of the Russian Federation as well as any of his allies, in this case, the Russian Orthodox Church and its leader Patriarch Kirill. Pussy Riot’s performance, arrest, and sentencing not only led to outrage in their home country of Russia, but in countries all over the world. The group even attracted the attention of politicians such as Hillary Clinton and Nobel Peace Prize recipients like Aung San Suu Kyi (Bennetts 138).

Overall, Pussy Riot's performance was viewed by many Russian citizens as an attack on Russian Orthodox Christianity and these sentiments were supported by leaders of the Church itself. Patriarch Kirill stated that Pussy Riot's performance was "a demonic attack on the Church" done by a group of people who "believe in the strength of lies and slander" (qtd. in Bennetts 142). However, what is interesting in this case is that many of those people who found the performance to be offensive were taking it more on a personal emotional level, saying that the performance "was blasphemy, sacrilege, and an insult to [their personal] feelings" (Bennetts 194).

However, this brings up the question of what about this particular performance managed to offend the feelings of Russian Orthodox believers country-wide, especially since most did not feel the need to
pay attention to it when the video of the performance was first released. Indeed, it would be strange and alarming to see a group of women suddenly staging a punk rock performance in the middle of one of Moscow's most famous cathedrals. Specific remarks made about the performers’ physical appearance during this performance are illuminating. While their manner of dress in the "Punk Prayer" video does not differ much from their appearances in any of their past performances (they all still wore bright and colorful balaclavas, tights, and dresses), we should pay special attention to the location they were performing in. This was not an outdoor, public location, but it was an Orthodox cathedral where women are expected to be covered up and not be drawing attention to their bodies. While the group's appearance may not seem as offensive to a Western audience, it is more offensive to an Russian Orthodox one. While the group did not intend to draw attention to the performers’ bodies it does show the power that physical appearance or exposure of some parts of the female body (i.e.: shoulders and arms) can have in performance pieces such as "Punk Prayer" when presented to an audience that would find such appearances offensive.

Because of how the intent of this piece was described by the group itself, it can initially be difficult to see “Punk Prayer” as a work that relates to the feminist cause that Pussy Riot fights for. Indeed, speaking out against potentially dangerous relationships between the church and state is something that should be done in order to not harm minority groups, but it begs the question whether “Punk Prayer” was a feminist piece at all. While the feminist implications of this piece have often been overlooked by commentators on Pussy Riot we should take the traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church into account when analyzing this particular work in order to better understand the feminist message behind the work.

Most Christian religious traditions are patriarchal in their belief and teachings and the Russian Orthodox Church is no exception. The Russian Orthodox Church is unfortunately sexist when it comes to the church's dogma regarding the roles of women within their society and teaches that “a woman does not have her own will and freedom to make a decision or choice – she should follow her husband’s directions and do his will. Based on this hierarchy, woman’s primary and only obligation is to obey her husband who is her lord and master” (Chernyak 302). In Orthodox pamphlets and other materials designed for believers, women are essentially referred to as second-class citizens who should obey their husbands. The Russ-
ian Orthodox Church allows for this treatment of women, not seeing them as equals, and it is here that we can see the feminist dialogue that is hidden within “Punk Prayer.”

The members of Pussy Riot saw this relationship between the church and state as one that would not only affect politics in the future, but would also deeply affect a large portion of the Russian population, specifically the female portion of the population. The relationship between the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church will inform the lives of Russian citizens. Furthermore, the group believed that the vertical power structure that Putin had created showed how he was not interested in the opinions of the Russian people:

"Потому что, говоря о Путине, мы имеем ввиду, прежде всего, не Владимира Владимировича Путина, но мы имеем ввиду Путина, как систему, созданную им самим. Вертикаль власти, где все управление осуществляется практически вручную. И в этой вертикали не учитывается, совершенно не учитывается мнение масс[...]. Мы считаем, что неэффективность этого управления, она проявляется практически во всем."

("This is because when we talk about Putin, we have in mind first and foremost not Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, but Putin the System that he himself created—the vertical power, where all control is carried out effectively by one person. And that vertical power is uninterested, completely uninterested in the opinion of the masses[...]. We believe that the ineffectiveness of this administration is evident in practically everything.")

("The closing statements from Maria Alyokhina in trial 8 Aug 2012 Free Pussy Riot Maria Alyokhina trial" 1:11 ; qtd. in Kostiochenko; Pussy Riot 104-105).

So long as Putin held power, nothing would change and it would continue to show in every aspect of the government, even in its relationships with other authoritative bodies like the Church. With a relationship such as this running the country, the equal treatment of women and recognition of women’s rights would not be promoted or fought for. With this performance they aimed to “[undermine] not only socio-political, but first and foremost the gender regime of the society, challenging sexism and gender
repression” (Lipovetsky 132). To go further into the meaning behind "Punk Prayer" we will now break down and analyze the lyrics of the piece.

**Lyrics of "Punk Prayer"**

The lyrics of "Punk Prayer" are, without a doubt, filled with imagery that exposes the relationship between the government and the Russian Orthodox Church. For this section a table with the original Russian text and an English translation will be provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Punk Prayer Lyrics</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Богородица, Дево, Путина прогони</td>
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<tr>
<td>Путина прогони, Путина прогони</td>
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<tr>
<td>Черная ряса, золотые погоны</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Все прихожане ползут на поклоны</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Привзрак свободы на небесах</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Гей-прайд отправлен в Сибирь в кандалах</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Глава КГБ, их главный святой</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ведет протестующих в СИЗО под конвой</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Translated by Jeffery Tayler with edits by Alicia Baca)
While reading the lyrics of the song, the reader and listener are made aware of Pussy Riot's word usage as a means to demythologize both the Russian Orthodox Church and the government and shine a light on the patron client relationship that these two parties share (Gabowitsch 163). These two bodies of authority hold a high status within Russian society, one benefitting the other, and throughout the lyrics of "Punk Prayer" the two are often referred to with terms that indicate some aspect of holiness or being above the rest of Russian society. For example, the first verse reads "Глава КГБ, их главный святой/Ведет протестующих в СИЗО под конвой/Чтобы Святейшего не оскорбить/Женщинам нужно рожать и любить (Their chief saint is the head of the KGB/He leads a convoy of protestors to jail/So as not to insult the Holiest One/Women should bear children and love."). These lines paint the leader of the KGB, Putin, as a saintly worshipped figure who has some sort of god-like power because he is able to have protestors escorted to prison without having to dirty his own hands. We also see similar imagery in the last verse "Патриарх Гундяй верит в Путина. (Patriarch Gundyay believes in Putin)." This shows that the leader of the church, then Patriarch Gundyay, has the same level of reverence for Putin as he does for God and believes in him and his actions as if he were a god. The reader is also able to see what the church and state's expectation for women is as well, to "stick to making love and babies." This verse again creates this image of the state and church acting as one body, but shows how the rest of society treats them, as saints and gods on earth. It also emphasizes that others, especially women, are no more than lower class citizens that are only as useful as their reproductive systems.

The lyrics also touch on the Russian government's desire to increase the country's birth rate. Putin planned for an increase in the childcare benefit for mothers in Russia to happen in January of 2007. This payment would increase "for the first child from 700 roubles to 1,500 roubles a month, and increase the benefit for the second child to 3,000 roubles a month" (Population Council). This increase in payment would hopefully encourage women to have more children, which would therefore increase the birth rate. Putin's family policy is a way for the government to have control over the citizens of the Russian federation. Essentially, Putin's family policy was another way to urge Russian citizens to have more children.
and increase the birth rate since the country was experiencing a "demographic crisis" with low fertility rates and increasing mortality rates. Putin believed that one of the reasons that women were choosing to not have children was for economic reasons (Isapova and Perelli-Harris). Essentially this could serve as another way to keep people from protesting, in effect: ‘if you stay quiet, you can reap economic benefits’; but reaping these benefits would come at the cost of having more children, more often, since many of these benefits pushed women to have more than one child under the age of 18 (Isapova and Perelli-Harris). Thus it is not only the Church but also the State which believes that “Women should bear children and love.”

Until now I have discussed the overt content of the song. I would also like to discuss its verbal and performative approach. Here I want to consider Mikhail Bakhtin's work in relation to the lower body because this helps to breakdown how exactly Pussy Riot is demythologizing Putin, the Russian government, and the Russian Orthodox Church. In the sixth chapter of his book *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin discusses how the heavenly and earthy can be tied together in a sort of “grotesque swing” (Bahktin 163) shown through the bodily functions of a human being. Bakhtin defines this grotesque swing as "the play of the upper and lower sphere[s]...[where] the top and bottom, heaven and earth, merge in that image" (Baktin 163). The depiction of the top and bottom coming together and a downward thrust from the heavens to the earth (Bakhtin 370) can be easily identified within the lyrics of Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer."

The image of this downward progression from heaven down to the earth as crap, and then even going further and showing the festering process, is physically visible in the lyrics as the reader moves downwards, verse by verse and chorus by chorus. Throughout the lyrics there is a clear juxtaposition between the above and the below. Putin is referred to being a saint or saintly, but all his heavenly-like attributes are immediately brought down to the earth in the chorus "Срань, срань, срань Господня! (Shit, shit, holy shit!)" While there are several different ways to translate and interpret "срань Господня" for the sake of this paper I will be using the translation that was commonly used for dubbing purposes (Gabowitsch 281) as it better communicates a disgusting and visceral image. There is nothing holy or great about Putin in this depiction. As Bakhtin calls it, this "grotesque swing" unites the heavenly with the earthly
(Bakhtin 370), dethrones Putin as a god-like figure, and reduces him and his relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church to nothing more than a literal piece of fecal matter, completely godless, useless, and powerless in the eyes of Pussy Riot.

We also see the use of grotesque decaying imagery in association as we move downwards in the lyrics. The line "Церковная хвала прогнивших воджей (The Church praises rotten leaders)" in the final verse of the song immediately brings to mind something that is rotting and festering. This of course is not something that one would find in the heavens, but on the earth, or even below the earth. This image of Putin as a rotting or festering leader bring us to this final stage of digestion in this song and depicts him as something that only the maggots or even dogs would feed on. All of this visceral imagery is then tied together by the verse "Патриарх Гундяй верит в Путина/Лучше бы в Бога, сука, верил. (Patriarch Gundyay believes in Putin/Would be better, the bitch, if he believed in God!)" Not only does this leave the reader with the idea that Putin is nothing more than a piece of crap, but that anyone who believes in him and his power is just worshiping crap.

However, it is not only the grotesque that we see in "Punk Prayer", but also the carnivalesque. Bakhtin considered the carnivalesque to be works that depicted the temporary destabilization of an authoritative power that embodies the spirit of the carnival as well (Rabelais and His World 6). Among other instance, the lyrics of the song are playfully asking the Mother of God to become a feminist who would drive Putin out of his position of power, making it seem like she has the authority and power to do so. This idea of the carnivalesque being present in this work is also complimented by the fact that Pussy Riot themselves are dressed up in brightly colorful outfits. Again, while they did not want to draw attention to the bodies of the performers themselves, these bright colors do attract attention and are reminiscent of carnival performers. To further this idea of the carnivalesque, Pussy Riot careful chose the date of their performance to fall on Malenista, Butter Week, a time of celebration, dancing, dressing up, and feasting before Lent (Pussy Riot!: A Punk Prayer for Freedom 23).

The whole performance of "Punk Prayer" is carnivalesque in almost every aspect. The performers are dancing in a public space during a time in the Russian Orthodox calendar that is purposefully set aside for celebration, merry-making, and carnival-like festivities. Their brightly colored physical appearance
makes them look like a parade of sorts. Even the lyrics of "Punk Prayer" have a carnivalesque aspect to them in that they show how ridiculously elevated the Russian president is in their society. Not only do the people see him as a saint, but the way in which this reverence to Putin is depicted in these lyrics does bring carnival aspects to mind with the image of crawling and bowing parishioners, the praising of the vile rotten leader, and parading black limousines. These particular moments recall the instances in which churches would serve as the location for carnivals that would mock serious rituals (Rabelais and His World 6). Carnival familiarity could also be seen in the language that used among its participants as "language [could] mock and insult the deity" (Rabelais and His World 16) and this is very evident in the more grotesque aspects of "Punk Prayer." Laughter also plays an important role in "Punk Prayer" as well. Bakhtin places great importance on laughter:

"Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter." (Rabelais and His World 66).

Pussy Riot also makes use of laughter in this prayer that they send to the Mother of God. This prayer could be interpreted as an honest petition for the Virgin Mary to become a feminist and rid Russia of Putin, however, she would be the least likely figure to do such a thing. This situation is laughable because of the weak and low position that women have in the patriarchal society that is dominant in Russia. These women cannot immediately change centuries of patriarchy; asking a female saint is humorous because there is nothing that she could do to change this situation as well. On top of that, another aspect about this 'prayer' that is laughable is that instead of making changes on their own, as most feminist protestors might, they are asking for change through a prayer that will mostly likely remain unanswered. It is possible that they saw this humorous route as the best way to communicate their message because they were
unable to address it in a serious manner (i.e.: staging a simple protest rally rather than a performance) without being completely dismissed. In order to be heard, they had to act the fool and make a performance out of it rather than simply shouting their protests to an audience who would not listen to them and would most likely tell them to be quiet and to go home to their families.

In keeping with their use of the grotesque and carnivalesque, Pussy Riot liberally uses double-voiced discourse in this text, in which the speaker uses the voice of another’s discourse, in this case for ironic and/or satirical purposes (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics n.p.). This may be seen in the lines we have already examined, “Чтобы Святейшего не оскорбить/Женщинам нужно рожать и любить (So as not to insult the Holiest One/Women need to bear children and love.” Here, there is a surface reading which may seem like a warning to women to remain complacent and quiet, but instead of telling women to stay put in this traditional role, Pussy Riot is calling for them to stand up, to be heard, to make their opinion known, and to take control of their own lives rather than having the government or Church determine what their role in life will be. Pussy Riot plays with two different voices in the lyrics of "Punk Prayer": the one on the surface appears to be linked to the Russian government and tells women and other members of society how they should act unless they want to anger Putin. On the other hand, the other voice that appears here is the one that implies the opposite: that Russian citizens should not sit idly by and should protest and take control of what is happening in their lives through the act of "praying" to the Mother of God and asking her to become a feminist. They are ultimately appealing to an ideal model of what a good Russian woman should be like and asking her to go against tradition, to break these rules and help Russian women reclaim their lives for themselves.

However, this act of involving the name of the Mother of God also shows more play with this double-voiced discourse. Pussy Riot instead chooses to send this “prayer” to the Mother of God with whom they plead to “стань феминисткой, ста́нь феминисткой (become a feminist, become a feminist).” From this statement it is fairly evident that the group has lost all hope in male leaders, God included, to help save them and instead, perhaps jokingly, hope to invoke the Holy Mother. While their "prayer" to the Virgin Mother in particular does show that they would rather put faith in a female figure, they are clearly putting their faith in the worst possible candidate for a feminist. This call for the Mother of God to be-
come a feminist is all in vain as she would be the one figure to best exemplify the traditional roles and values of a women within the Russian Orthodox Church. She would be the opposite of a feminist and would most likely disagree with what Pussy Riot is trying to achieve through this performance. The “Punk Prayer” protest highlights this issue of the treatment of women within the Russian Orthodox Church because it raises the question whether or not it is even worthwhile to look to female saints for aid as they would most likely be opposed to feminist values as well.

Finally, I wish to comment upon the use of the balaclava as a kind of double-voiced discourse. As Alyokhina mentioned in her closing statements, the original intent of the use of the balaclava in their earlier performances was to be a tool that detracts attentions away from the performers’ bodies. However, in light of the text’s double-voiced approach, the balaclava could also be seen as a tool that speaks to the second-class status of women within the Russian Orthodox Church, especially given that women who enter any church must have their heads covered. Rather than being able to show their faces and their bodies without fear, to be able to express themselves freely, and to essentially be the human beings that they are, women of the Russian Orthodox Church have to ideally remain silent and obedient and are expected to dress in a modest way. Women are not equal to men in this patriarchal society and Pussy Riot highlights this aspect of Russian culture and religion in “Punk Prayer.”

Physical Appearance and Affect Generators

With regard to Pussy Riot’s performance style and method, Caitlin Bruce introduces the theoretical term affect generator. An affect generator is something that receives “attention because of its affective magnetism, and likewise, its affective impact intensifies with its transnational circulation” (Bruce 45). For the purposes of this argument an affect generator will be defined as a person, object or tool used by the artist to communicate their message that 1. has affective magnetism and 2. has the power to influence an audience or incite a reaction in its audience. In Pussy Riot’s performances, affect generators can range from the use of colorful costumes to the use of the body itself. These devices are often interwoven with shock elements, or elements that horrify or disgust the viewer, and this is very evident in the performance of "Punk Prayer" and the music video for "Make America Great Again."
Affect Generators in "Punk Prayer"

The balaclava is not only an affect generator for Pussy Riot, but it also acts as a tool that allows the group to communicate the plight and struggle of women’s rights. The balaclava acts as this metaphorical “mask” that women in Russian society are forced to wear. While women in contemporary Russia are able to enjoy some of the same freedoms as their western counterparts (i.e.: being able to work outside the home and being able to choose whether or not they want to have children), they still live in a society that places the majority of a woman's value on whether or not she is a mother, and still has ideas that women should be docile creatures that listen to prominent male figures in their lives. Thus, the balaclava not only acts at the affect generator that forces viewers to have a reaction to Pussy Riot and their message, but it acts at the metaphorical manifestation of that invisible barrier that prevents women in Russian culture from being able to achieve rights and freedoms from this patriarchal society.

The use of the balaclava in "Punk Prayer" does indeed act as an affect generator for the band. Not only does it serve as a tool that communicates the “object of resistance and challenge to state authority” (Bruce 43), but it proposes the idea that “Pussy Riot are essentially conceptual artists. This is what makes them threatening—it is not possible to imprison a concept” (Bruce 43). Following "Punk Prayer" the balaclava also became a "world-wide symbol of cultural protest. ...[that] unites the participants into a collective trickster – leaving its borders open for anybody willing to join" (Lipovetsky 133). This not only makes the band and its ideologies terrifying, it also makes their appearance, notably the balaclava, into something that incites fear in its spectators, especially the spectators that it is speaking out against (i.e.: the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian government). Even more importantly, “the circulatory power of the balaclava means that such endless reproduction can become monstrous and terrifying. …Pussy Riot’s carnivalesque performance illuminates the horrific character of state control by affecting a range of reactions running from the uncanny and hate, to affinity and solidarity, or fear” (Bruce 49). The balaclava itself became not only the trademark of the group, but a unifying symbol for anyone else who wanted to join in the cause of Pussy Riot.
Reactions to "Punk Prayer"

The reaction to the Punk Prayer performances varied across the globe. While the performance received praise and support from the west, it was not received as well in the Russian Federation. In fact many opposition leaders were very critical of the group and some, like Alexei Navalny, leader of the Progress Party, called the women "...дуры, совершившие мелкое хулиганство ради паблисити." ("fools who committed [an act of] petty hooliganism for publicity's sake.") (Navalny). Others such as Gennady Zuganov, the leader of the Communist Party, even stated that these "...активисткам в качестве наказания достаточно ‘хорошей порки’" ("activists [can receive] enough of a quality punishment [through] 'good whipping' ") (qtd. in RosBiznesKonsalting). However, it should be noted that while many of these groups oppose Putin and his administration, that many of them are not as supportive of women's rights or LGBT rights as one might think. Even amongst many protest groups, there are still issues with xenophobia and sexism (Gabowitsch 173). Even a professor of Tolokonnikova's at the Moscow State University, Alexei Kozyrev, believed that Pussy Riot's act was "[...]не выгодно никому. Оно приносит ущерб обществу...Приносит огромный ущерб Церкви,[...] и конечно, оно приносит ущерб самим девушкам." ("[...]not beneficial to anyone. It causes damage to society...It causes great damage to the Church,[...]and, of course, it harms the girls themselves") (qtd. in Timofeev).

While it might seem strange that these women who were also opposing Putin would receive such harsh backlash from their fellow opposition groups, it demonstrates two things: Pussy Riot’s portrayal in the Russian media likely influenced those who learned about their performance through the media, and women are commonly viewed as second-class citizens in Russia. Further evidence of the latter may be seen in the fact that the women who were put on trial for "Punk Prayer" were often treated as young girls, explicitly being referred to as "devochki" and treated as if they could not have possibly carried out this act of religious hatred by themselves; they clearly needed the help of someone else, most likely a man, to even to be able to do this (Gabowitsch 190-191).

Furthermore, during the court trials several witnesses were asked to testify and give their own account of the spectacle that happened at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. The responses from the wit-
nesses were overwhelmingly negative and several made references to the physical appearance of the group members. Witness Lyubov Sokologorskaya, a candle seller at the Cathedral, criticized the group's appearance, testifying:

"...[они были] в очень яркой [одежде]. Платья одного цвета, колготки другого, а маски эти вообще другого! Открытые руки, плечи. ...Осквернение моего чувства, осквернение моей веры, осквернение моих идеалов, осквернение меня как личности и моего выбора"

("...they were dressed in bright clothing. Dresses of one color, tights of another, and their masks were of yet different colors! Exposed arms, shoulders...[It was] an desecration of my feelings, a desecration of my faith, a desecration of my ideals...a desecration of myself as a person, and my choice!") (qtd. in Snob).

What is interesting here is that we see a visceral, personalized reaction to the actions of Pussy Riot. The witnesses that testified against Pussy Riot felt personally offended by the group's performance and one security guard, Sergey Beloglazov, who had been present at the performance said that he suffered moral damage that caused him so much trauma that he was unable to work two months after the event had occurred (Bennetts 195; Pussy Riot!: A Punk Prayer For Freedom 51). To further solidify those personalized reactions Patriarch Kirill went on to say that the performance was a "demonic attack on the church" (Bennetts 142).

Despite these complaints and attacks, Tolokonnikova found some support and solidarity from other Russian citizens during the time when she was imprisoned. During her time in the penal colony she met individuals who grew to respect the work that she and the other members of Pussy Riot did.

"И с каждым днем тех, кто поддерживает нас, желает нам удачи, скорейшего освобождения, и говорит о том, что наше политическое выступление было оправданным, все больше и больше. Люди говорят нам: изначально мы тоже сомневались, могли ли вы это делать. Но с каждым днем все больше и больше тех, кто говорит нам: время показывает нам то, что ваш
political gesture was correct—that we opened the wounds of this political system, and struck directly at the hornet’s nest...") (qtd. in Kostiochenko; Pussy Riot 93).

However, these sympathetic reactions did not reflect the nation’s overall response to the performance; generally, the reactions to "Punk Prayer" were heavily influenced by the Russian media's negative portrayal of the group at the time, which selected “some aspects of [the] issue or event and [made] them more salient than other aspects” (Kananovich 398). Regardless, members of Pussy Riot continued to create new works after their early prison release on December 23, 2013, following the approval of an amnesty by the State Duma.

Post "Punk Prayer"

While the group may have never considered themselves to be a “traditional punk band” (Pelly), this is the style in which the group initially chose to perform in and it fits the shock element style of their method of artistic communication. Many of their early performances like “Punk Prayer” were all performed in a style that is reminiscent of a punk rock band, having instrumentation that is aggressive and loud in tone and lacking in what other genres such as classical or classic rock might consider to be “good” traditional and organized instrumentation. However, it is because of this particular quality of their “art” that they are able to attract viewers and infect them with their message. The music style of Pussy Riot also fits in within the punk genre with its aggressive lyrics, and harsh vocals that incite a particular reaction from its audience. This use of shock is not new to punk rock. As defined in The Hydra’s Tale: Imagining Disgust by R. Rawdon Wilson, “[punk] shock must always seek and act more disgusting than those previously seen...[must] become a style; that is, to become codified into ritual gestures of rejection, alienation, and horror” (Wilson 27-28). This is exactly what Pussy Riot is achieving through their punk protest art:
they present their ideas and messages in outrageous and agitating ways and use this shock value of punk to astonish their audience and force them to pay attention.

The music video for “Punk Prayer” was also reminiscent of a stereotypical punk rock video and presents the viewer with something that appears to be of DIY, homemade quality. While the final version of this video was heavily edited, the viewer is able to see the emotional impact that Pussy Riot had on their fellow-church goers, and the interaction they had with the authorities. The video itself is in this DIY style that many punk rock musicians employ, such as groups like riot grrrl and the Cockney Rejects (Pelly; Gessen 66), who, as a part of their musical style, express a rebellious attitude towards traditional society. In the case of the “Punk Prayer” video the entirety of the footage was captured on what appears to be a camera phone. The footage itself is very shaky, rarely having a consistent point of focus. The final version of the music video also repeats several of the same scenes over and over in order to fill the entire minute and fifty-two seconds of the song length. The audio of the music video is noticeably rough in quality. In comparison with their recently released recordings, which are much crisper and clearer, the audio of the “Punk Prayer” video is somewhat more muddied and reflects this DIY style of punk rock and adds to the unpredictable and shocking nature of Pussy Riot’s work.

Within the last year the members of Pussy Riot have taken different paths to communicate their message on an international level. In the autumn and winter of 2016 Alyokhina went on a discussion panel tour with Alexandra Bogino of the online journal Medizona and answered questions from fans as well as discussed her experiences in Russia after the performance of “Punk Prayer.” Tolokonnikova on the other hand has taken up residence in the United States and currently lives in Los Angeles, California. In October of 2016 Tolokonnikova, still using the band’s name, released an extended play (EP) release of three new songs: "Make America Great Again," "Organs," and "Straight Outta Vagina." These songs remained similar in their lyrical content, critiquing patriarchal and tyrannical political regimes and advocating for women’s rights. However, the music itself completely diverged from the punk rock instrumentation and the balaclava-clad appearance with which the group had become known. From this release, entitled “xxx,” I will analyze the song “Make American Great Again.”
"Make America Great Again"

The song “Make American Great Again” is a criticism of the American Presidential election and the campaign of then Presidential candidate Donald Trump. For this work Tolokonnikova created a song that is reminiscent of pop music with its catchy rhythm that can easily lure a listener with its predictable tempo and instrumentation and mellow vocals. This song reworks Donald Trump’s campaign slogan of “Make American Great Again” and places it into the message of the song that forces the listener to not only sit down and consider the message of Trump's campaign, but also to witness dramatized events of what could possibly come out of a Trump presidency. Tolokonnikova aimed for this song to serve as a warning for American citizens to think about what could happen if a figure like Trump were to be elected to the presidency. In addition to serving as a warning of what could result from such a presidency, it also speaks to the violations of the rights of women, xenophobia, hate crimes, and the persecution of other minority groups in Russia.

In the music video for “Make America Great Again” Tolokonnikova paints the picture of an American society during a fictionalized Trump presidency that at first seems entertaining, but quickly turns dark with the use of shock value to incite a reaction from its audience. This video creates an emotionally chaotic mix of violence and shock effects paired with the lighthearted instrumentation of popular music. The dystopian society created in this video draws possible inspiration from Nazi propaganda with the uniforms and tools to measure whether a given person fits a “physical norm.” The imagery further adds to the shock value of the work because it illustrates how this situation could play out if Trump was to be elected and uses this disturbing imagery to get that point across to its viewer. So while these shock elements upon first glance may seem like a jest, they serve to make the point that only racism, xenophobia, and the destruction of basic human rights are what lies ahead for America if they choose to elect Trump as their next President.

Throughout the music video the audience sees Tolokonnikova take on the roles of several different characters. These roles include a news reporter, a police officer, a judge, her own feminized version of Donald Trump, and most importantly herself. At the beginning of the video, we see her playing the role of a female foreigner in America. This foreigner persona of Tolokonnikova is brought into a police station
where she is questioned and interrogated about her identity and her reasons for being in America. In this scene she is not given even a second to speak for herself and is automatically accused of being “non-American” for not speaking “American” (“Pussy Riot - Make America Great Again” 0:49). It is at this point in the video where we see shock elements play out and the use of the body as a tool of communication and an affect generator come into play.

While the police that proceed to interrogate Tolokonnikova are physically rough with her, this violence reaches its peak once she is branded by them with a hot iron. In the video she appears to be branded for being an “Outsider” because of her Russian heritage. While this is indeed only stage effects, it does not make the scene any less horrifying. We see shocking imagery where someone is guilty of the crime of being a foreigner trying to seek out a better life. The scene appears to play upon Tolokonnikova’s own situation: she came from Russia where she was no longer safe, but here she runs into a similar regime in her new homeland.

This branding procedure can be seen in several scenes in “Make America Great Again.” Following her branding as an outsider Tolokonnikova is stripped down to her underwear in the police station in order to measure whether or not she meets the grossly exaggerated norms for the female body under the imaginary Trump regime. However, what is interesting about this scene is that while Tolokonnikova is branded again, this scene is oddly titillating for its viewers. In this scene we see a woman in pain as she is ridiculed for not meeting what society deems to be beautiful and “normal,” but we see it presented in a somewhat sexual manner when the viewer witnesses her being forcefully stripped of her clothing by these police officers. There are also brief instances in this scene where the camera focuses on Tolokonnikova's body and cuts out her face. While it may seem rather unclear as to what this scene is criticizing, it is certainly speaking out against the constant sexualization and objectification of female bodies as well as the lofty and ridiculous beauty standards that women all over the world are constantly pressured to meet if they want to be seen as of value to society.

We see this further emphasized when Tolokonnikova is measured up against a chart that depicts the "norms" for a woman's appearance in this Trump state. These standards are highly unrealistic. While Tolokonnikova obviously does not meet these norms, her near-nakedness allows the viewer to look on her
as an object. To further emphasize this objectification, she takes on a passive and powerless role in this scene, whereas the police take on an active role in the process of stripping, hurting, burning, and interrogating her and in this instance the viewer sees men taking control. In the next section, however, this shifts, as Tolokonnikova portrays a character who has ostensibly masterminded this situation: she plays Trump himself. Emphasizing that Trump can do whatever he wants because he has the authority to do so, this cross-dressed Trump persona plays around in the Oval Office, masturbating on the floor, wrapping himself up in the "Trump" flag, and essentially acting like a child with authoritative power. So while there are no lead male characters in this video, and Tolokonnikova herself is presented as a Russian citizen who has found herself in a state of powerlessness, the Trump persona Tolokonnikova portrays is still running the show and holds all the power in controlling what happens within the video and the bodies in it.

Here Tolokonnikova uses the body to criticize the American government as well as the ridiculous beauty standards that society forces upon women, and also uses the body as a site of protest through this use of physical branding. Upon being deemed “too fat” by Trump’s police, Tolokonnikova, playing herself, is branded with a hot iron that labels her as a “Fat Pig” (“Pussy Riot - Make America Great Again” 1:54). While this is of course a result of stage makeup and special effects, the screams of anguish and pain that Tolokonnikova lets out in every instance that she is physically branded are all too real for the viewer. With these instances of branding we see the use of the body as an affect generator. One cannot simply watch these branding scenes without feeling a visceral reaction; just as the balaclava in Pussy Riot’s earlier works incited reactions from its audience, this physical branding accomplishes the same because it is a shocking act that horrifies its viewer.

The use of shock value does not end here. One of the most emotionally disturbing scenes in this video comes after Tolokonnikova’s interrogation and trial where she is again branded as a “Pervert” for supporting LGBTQ rights. This scene is the implied rape scene that takes place in the prison where Tolokonnikova is kept after her trial. After she is judged and sentenced the two male police offices take her to a jail cell where they proceed to remove their belts, remove Tolokonnikova’s clothing despite her shouts of protest, handcuff her to the bars of her cell, remove her underwear, and based on her shrieks and
screams, proceed to rape her and then tell her “We’ll see you tomorrow” ("Pussy Riot - Make America Great Again" 3:05) after they have finished with their activities.

This scene is certainly one of the most disturbing and horrifying scenes in the “Make America Great Again” video. Not only does it speak to the issues of sexual assault, rape, violence against women, but also the treatment of prisoners, a topic that Pussy Riot became particularly passionate about after their arrest and trial for "Punk Prayer." This particular scene comes off as some of the strongest shock material in the entire video, but as atrocious as it may be, it communicates Tolokonnikova’s message effectively. She herself experienced poor treatment when she was imprisoned: for example, she was not able to bathe regularly and was subjected to humiliating acts such as participating in prison beauty pageants. Given that context, this scene speaks to the poor treatment of women in the Russian prison system (Gessen 269). In order to show the true horror of acts like this, Tolokonnikova chose to use shock value. When discussing this particular scene in an interview with Pitchfork Tolokonnikova stated that this work “[is] not about Trump being a rapist. It’s about Trump’s anti-feminist views. It’s my prediction of what will happen in prisons if Trump will be elected as president. Right now, the American prison system is fucked up—it’s as fucked up as the Russian prison system…so rapes, and all kinds of violence, will increase in prisons. It’s about that” (Pelly). In order to get her message and point across to her viewers this was communicated through the use and abuse of the female body. The female body has now become the affect generator for Pussy Riot; the group is using the shock value that it can produce to its fullest potential in order to incite certain reactions and realizations in audience members.

In these more recent videos, the band does not choose to not wear balaclavas as often as they once did, suggesting a sort of liberation from having to conceal their identities from the public. However, the content is disturbing. The branding, stripping, and raping scenes are both disturbing and titillating; here the body is used as a performance tool, a new affect generator. This is shock art. As defined by Wilson, “modern shock art has been a way of disturbing smug, complacent, and hypocritical audiences by [...] showing them what they find offensive” (Wilson 27).

While the musical instrumentation of “Make America Great Again” may not necessarily fulfill this “shock” that Wilson talks about, the content of the music video and the lyrics of the song certainly do.
The music video is shocking with its branding scene and scenes of implied rape and sexual abuse and by the titillating nature of these scenes. However, they provoke the viewer into feeling this shock and disgust and generate this reaction that only makes the viewer feel disgusted at what they are watching but potentially might even make them realize that they should also feel disgusted because they may be aroused by what is happening to the women in this video. The way in which the new works of Pussy Riot have been produced has generated a much different reaction from their viewers than those of their previous works.

Reactions to Recent Works

Overall, when comparing the reactions to the recent works of Pussy Riot and their past works, specifically "Punk Prayer," the difference is stark. As mentioned in the section regarding the reactions to "Punk Prayer," the reactions to that performance within Russia were overall mostly negative and the majority of positive support and feedback came from a western audience. However, the reactions to recent works such as "Make America Great Again" and the recently released "Police State" are mixed. What is necessary to keep in mind with these reactions, however, is that they come from a global Internet audience and not in-person witnesses like in "Punk Prayer." The music videos that have been released alongside Pussy Riot's new songs are not the same type of guerrilla, public performances as they have done in the past. These new music videos are professionally directed and produced within the United States, a country, that for the most part, was sympathetic to Pussy Riot during the time of their trial in 2012.

Compared to the reactions that "Punk Prayer" received, which ranged from comments on the Internet to that of the Russian government, the reactions to "Make America Great Again" and "Police State" have either taken the form of comments on the media website YouTube or interviews with popular journals and websites such as Pitchfork, Yahoo!, Vice, and The Guardian. The comments that are found on YouTube are currently the main source of any sort of negative feedback to these recent works. Representative examples include: "Дешевой законной шлак (cheap, custom slag)," "Fucking cringe propaganda" "Cossacks, feel free to whip them again!", "Где панк? Ало?" ("Where is the punk? Hello?") ("Pussy Riot - Make American Great Again"). "Protest can't be pop. Ya blew it." ("Pussy Riot - Police State"). Interestingly enough, there has not been any sort of backlash against these works from the American gov-
ernment or mention of it from the now President Trump himself. Compared to the negative response that Pussy Riot and Tolokonnikova received within Russia during the trial for "Punk Prayer" the scathing virtual burns of YouTube commenters are barely a scratch on the group's ego. With that being said, instead of being placed on trial, Pussy Riot, more specially Tolokonnikova, has been placed in the spotlight and has gone from being a dissident to being a public media star. During the time in which she has created these new works she has not only been 'rewarded' with interviews, but has also recently signed to the record label Nice Life (still using Pussy Riot's name) and has even begun to stage "performance art tours" with her "Russian crew" ("Exclusive interview with Nadja Tolokonnikova of Pussy Riot"). Rather than being ridiculed or hurt in public, such as when they were attacked by a group of men in a McDonald's in Nizhny Novgorod (Mullen), they are now treated as honored guests in interviews and discussion panels. In addition to this praise, there has not been any sort of criticism regarding the physical appearance of the female body in these new works like there was with "Punk Prayer." In comparison, the female body in "Make America Great Again" is certainly more exposed, but how does it effect the protest aims of this work?

Affect Generators and Protest Aims

The balaclava that the members of Pussy Riot donned in their earlier performances not only served as a disguise and a tool to make their viewers focus more on the overall message of their work, but it also took on the role of being their insignia and an affect generator as well. The balaclava incited feelings of shock and fear within their viewers. It made it clear that this group was creating these performative punk pieces not to draw attention to their physical bodies, but to their ideas. It made the point that you can arrest a person, but not an idea and it gave those who opposed them something to truly fear. It was an affect generator that helped to make their ideas the most prominent aspect of their act and not only affected and incited reactions not only within Russia, but it also did the same on an international level once the band was imprisoned.

Anonymity has been a big part of Pussy Riot’s style. Pussy Riot initially started performing in complete anonymity, using that image on purpose to make sure that their issues would always remain in
the limelight rather than the performers themselves. While they aimed to remain anonymous, they still made it clear what their self-identified genders were by choosing to wear traditionally feminine articles of clothing (dresses and tights) as their costumes. The group performed the gender which they each identified with, but in a manner that did not draw attention to the sexualized aspects of a woman’s body. Specifically, although the dresses were tight fitting, colorful and revealed the performers’ arms, they did not reveal cleavage or thighs, and the performers wore tights to cover their legs. They “didn't want to draw attention to the girls’ bodies and take away from their ideologies, but rather wanted to create characters who expressed their ideologies for them (Pussy Riot!: A Punk Prayer For Freedom 39).

In refusing to disguise their gender, Pussy Riot relied on existing stereotypes of female performers in the punk and rock genres to make their audiences uncomfortable. As Dan Graham mentions in his writings on “New Wave Rock and the Feminine,” having a band or performance group that consists of all women “proves [to be] more problematic for the audience to identify with” (Graham, 128). This is because the audience is typically male; and typically the dynamic of rock culture is structured by patriarchy. By donning these costumes, the performers of Pussy Riots bring a female element to the punk rock performance, but without making their bodies a focal point of the performance.

Even women audiences can have difficulty relating to all-female groups. Because of the patriarchal performance dynamics that accompany the rock genre, audience members of any gender will carry certain expectations. Depending on how an all-female group chooses to act out and represent their genders they either make male audience members feel threatened with their stage presence and personas, or they can become objectified and in turn make male audience members feel more relaxed because they will then be able to just simply rest their eyes on and admire them solely for their feminine appearances. These aspects of female sexuality that are constantly made out to be objects of possession or sexual gratification for men consequently make it difficult for male listeners and audience members to identify with or even take all-female groups seriously, especially when those performers do not play up their sexuality (Graham 128-130). The balaclava assists here: it makes sure that audience members cannot see Pussy Riot’s members as beautiful rock stars. Instead, they are almost a “Greek chorus” of anonymous women who stand for an idea.
That has now changed. The most recent music videos of Pussy Riot show more exposure of the female body, and there is no anonymity. We do see the use of the balaclava in some of the band’s most recent videos like “Make American Great Again”; however, in these instances it serves the purpose of a stylistic logo that lets the viewer know that this work is by the band Pussy Riot. It is not as prominent a symbol as it once had been. The affect generator for Pussy Riot has changed: the world is now aware of their identities so there is no point in using a tool that no longer has the same effect on its audience as it once had. What else do they have left to use? They have their identities, themselves and their bodies and now have the ability to use their bodies as they see fit.

If we look at the statements made by Tolokonnikova in Pelly's interview we can find some reasoning as to why she has opted for the use of her body as her canvas in the group’s most recent music videos. Tolokonnikova sincerely believes that women should be allowed to do what they wish with their bodies; while the most recent releases are both shocking and titillating, here she is choosing to use her body as she wishes in order to get her point of view across to her audience.

The ways that Tolokonnikova chooses to use the body are much more varied than previously. She sexualizes the body, playing up feminine styles of dress and behavior; and she also liberally uses androgyny. In "Make American Great again" Tolokonnikova's dresses femininely when she portrays herself as a Russian foreigner in Trump's America by wearing a dress and over-the-knee stockings. She appears androgynously when she portrays the Trump persona and other authority figures (the police officer and judge). In these scenes where she wears masculine suits and uniforms she also adds feminine aspects by wearing brightly colored makeup and heeled shoes.

By playfully using androgyny in her performances, Tolokonnikova emphasizes the constructed nature of gender. As Judith Butler discusses in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" gender is not something that someone already is when they are born, but it is something that they become over time and is something that is influenced by culture, society, and personal experiences. Butler argues that “gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler 519). Using the body in
this fashion technically does go against the group’s original intent not to parade the bodies of its members
as mentioned in Alyokhina's opening statements during Pussy Riot's trial; however, this playful approach
is in line with Tolokonnikova’s statement advocating the choice of a woman to use her body in whatever
way she pleases (Pelly). The use of the body in these recent music videos is just as shocking as the use of
the balaclava, as they are both used as tools that shock and incite certain reactions in their audience.

In connection with this relationship to the audience and their perception of the group, there is also
a change here as well. As previously discussed, there is a difficulty that audience members can experience
when seeing an all-female rock group performing, but in the pop-style of music that is heard in "Make
America Great Again" this is not the case. The audience's expectations are not flouted and they are al-
lowed to see all aspects of the female body; seeing female performers, including their unclothed bodies, in
a pop music video is not unusual for a contemporary audience. However, what separates works like
"Make America Great Again" from typical pop music videos is that Tolokonnikova makes the audience
uncomfortable by using her body in unexpected ways. She exercises agency over her body by not con-
forming to the stereotypical pop music video by solely depicting herself as an object of the male gaze.
She uses her body in edgy and sometimes horrific ways that serve to make the viewer uncomfortable as
they watch this video.

She sexualizes her own body in this work whenever she is seen being stripped of her clothing, in
her underwear, and in the scenes depicting rape. However, rather than leading the viewer to see these
scenes as titillating, she uses these situations to make the viewer uncomfortable for possibly being
aroused by such a brutal activity. These examples serve to show how she combats the audience's expecta-
tions of female performers in a pop music video and how her uses of the female body play a central role
in shattering those expectations. This uncomfortable feeling that the use of the female body generates in
its audiences enables it to become a powerful affect generator that can use these uncomfortable feelings to
make Tolokonnikova's message reach her audience and articulate her ideals through these performances.

Thus, in the recent videos, Tolokonnikova is taking everything that makes her a woman, femi-
nine, and a feminist and like an artist, is using it to its highest potential. The use of the body in these re-
cent music videos is just as shocking as the use of the balaclava as they are both used as tools that shock
and incite certain reactions in their audience. It is possible that the balaclava also serves as this “societal” mask that women have to wear. If we choose to see this tool as a metaphor for the way in which women are treated in Russian society, as second class citizens who must hide who they truly are, then the use of the body as the tool of artistic communication shows the liberation of a woman from these patriarchal bonds. The way in which Tolokonnikova uses her body in Pussy Riot's recent works is shocking and titillating, but instead of having to hide behind a mask she is now able to express herself to her fullest potential. Her body is now that affect generator, because not only is she only able to incite reactions from her audience with it, but she is communicating the idea that a woman should be able to use her body and mind as she wishes rather than having to remain hidden and forced to conform to ideals of womanhood circulating in Russian culture. Without worry or fear she is able to express herself and her ideals through the use of her body and has liberated herself from this mask that Russian society has placed upon women.

While the reactions between "Punk Prayer" and "Make America Great Again" have been completely different perhaps the greatest affect that this change in effect generators has had on the works of Pussy Riot is that is has allowed Pussy Riot and Tolokonnikova to embrace a more feminine aspect of their performance than they were unable to do before. By using the body as the primary affect generator Tolokonnikova has lifted both the physical and metaphorical mask that forced Pussy Riot to stay anonymous during their initial run as a group in Russia. This not only allows her to put a face to the name of Pussy Riot, but allows her to use the most female aspect of herself: her body. Her body is the affect generator, because not only is she only able to incite reactions from her audience with it, but she is communicating the idea that a woman should be able to use her body and mind as she wishes rather than having to remain hidden and forced to conform to the ideal idea of a woman that Russian society places on its female population. Overall, this change in affect generators allows the works of Pussy Riot to grow and expand because there is now access to the female body that was not present in their previous works. This new attention given to the female body goes against the original intent of not wanting to distract viewers from their message, but it allows for a broadened spectrum of performance art. It allows for the performers’ ability to access and use all aspects of their femininity as tools of protest rather than having limited access by wearing masks and remaining anonymous.
Conclusion

In conclusion Pussy Riot has consistently presented themselves as a punk rock performance group that not only addresses the issues regarding women’s rights, LGBT rights, and political corruption through their work, but they have used shock value as one of the primary tools to send their message across to their audience. In the past the group used specifically chosen costumes as one of their means to get their meaning across. The most notable article of their performance costumes, the balaclava mask, not only acted as their insignia, but eventually came to act as an affect generator that incited certain feelings and reactions within their audience. After their arrest and imprisonment following the “Punk Prayer” performance at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow the band members identities were revealed and the use of the balaclavas began to dissipate. While this was still used in some of their following performances, the use of the balaclava has diminished and now acts more as the band’s insignia which is recognized on an international level. Now that the balaclava is no longer the primary affect generator for the group, the performers body has now taken over that role within the group’s recent music videos. While the group's original intent was not to show off the bodies of its members because they felt that it distracted the audience from the message of the work, the body is now being used as the primary tool to communicate the group’s ideals.

With Tolokonnikova’s recent statements regarding the use of women’s bodies, she feels that women should be able to use them as they see fit. If women choose to use their bodies as a brand or use it to start a movement, then it is completely their choice. While this may seem to deviate from the group’s initial ideals, it furthers the group’s feminist agenda in that it promotes a society where women are not seen as second class citizens and do not need to pledge allegiance or obedience to a patriarch. Women who are able to use their minds and bodies as they wish are able to exercise their freedom in that and that should hold true for Pussy Riot as well. While the use of the body in their most recent music videos is shocking and titillating, to say that it is something that is solely used for shock value would be undermining the group’s and Tolokonnikova’s views. Yes, the content of their most recent work is shocking and hard to watch in some instances, but it is also liberating in that instead of having to act as second class
citizens that have to hide behind something, they can use every part of themselves as they wish to. The use of the body itself is also a shocking tool, and the use of the female body in particular is one that will incite reactions from their audience in a way that the male body may not be able to do. Therefore, with this renewed idea that women should be able to what they wish with their bodies and their lives, the body has taken the place of the balaclava as the effect generator in Pussy Riot’s work and has enabled it the expand and grow through the use of the female body.
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