

Title: Russian Protest Art: The Grotesque Body That Saves the Nation
Author: Zhanna Budenkova, University of Pittsburgh

Abstract:

This paper addresses the body politics of the Russian performance art, including works by Pussy Riot, art group Voina and Piotr Pavlenskii, focusing on its carnivalesque and linguistic qualities. It touches upon the notion of the universal grotesque body proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin; the phenomenon of “molecular revolution;” and specific connection between the body and language which exists in protest art in Russia. It will also look into the phenomenon of martyrdom, which characterizes actionism, and examine its Russian specifics.

This discussion of body politics contributes to the wider established theorization of revolution and rupture that are key components of contemporary Russian protest art. Austrian author Gerald Raunig describes revolution as a complex process, including aspects of resistance, insurrection and constituent power creating new order (44). He defines revolutionary insurrection as “rupture” aiming to counter the homogeneity of the pre-revolutionary status quo (56, 58-59). This understanding of insurrection echoes the concept of “ruptural performance” proposed by the theatre scholar Tony Perucci. Using this term to define protest art practices, Perucci describes ruptural performance as “interruptive, becoming-event, confrontational and baffling” (2). It seeks to challenge “the values and experience of the society,” turning the viewer’s gaze in a direction in which they otherwise refuse to look (3). Contemporary Russian artists produce rupture and confrontation by using their bodies to convey political messages and provoke debates in a form that builds on the aesthetic model of Austrian and Soviet actionists.

Works cited:

Perucci, Tony. "What the F*** Is That? The Poetics of Ruptural Performance." *Liminalities: A^[1]_{SEP}Journal of Performance Studies* 5.3 (2009): 1-18. Print.
Raunig, Gerald, and Aileen Derieg. *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long^[1]_{SEP}Twentieth Century*. Los Angeles: Semiotext (e), 2007. Print