

Velvet Terrorism: Pussy Riot's Russia

What follows, in chronological order, is a collection of Pussy Riot's artistic acts in Russia, compiled by Maria (Masha) Alyokhina.

Pussy Riot is punk as a way of life – direct action, activism and peaceful protests that are desperate, sudden and joyous. Pussy Riot were the first artist-activists jailed by Putin for protesting against his regime. The corruption, inhumane laws, censorship, fabricated criminal cases and torture that are prevalent in the repressive police state that is modern Russia are reflected here through the system's various responses to Pussy Riot and other activists. It shows how this system has paved the way for the brutal war that Russia is waging against Ukraine, crimes against humanity, fascism, and terrorism.

This book grew out of the exhibition Velvet Terrorism – Pussy Riot's Russia, which Alyokhina created in collaboration with Kling & Bang in Reykjavik. The show opened in their exhibition space in November 2022 – ten years after Pussy Riot performed the Punk Prayer in a church in Moscow and received two years in prison for it.

We give huge thanks to all the Pussy Riot members and friends who have contributed material for this book.

Pussy Riot calls on everyone to engage in any form of activism as a basis for civic responsibility.

**FIGHT FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR FREEDOM, TAKE ACTION!
ANYONE CAN BE PUSSY RIOT!**

Action
FREE THE COBBLESTONES, 2011

Location

Moscow metro station and trolleybus roof

Nadya Tolokonnikova
Yekaterina Samutsevich
Shaiba

Context

Elections are just around the corner. Moscow's streets are covered with new paving stones, thanks to Mayor Sobyanin, who has embezzled millions of rubles through laying street tiles. Freeing the cobblestones should be done in the best revolutionary traditions, using the stones for their intended purpose.

The song "Free the Cobblestones" is dedicated to the elections. Spit on the polling stations, because your ballots will be used for toilet paper in the Presidential Administration. On 4 December, we suggest that you go outside and take a breath of fresh air with us.

Also, we're going crazy about a couple of topics that we've incorporated into our song. Firstly, we are outraged by the logging of Khimki Forest and the crude pressure placed on the campaign for its protection by state bandits. Secondly, we are really annoyed by the recent adoption of the anti-abortion law, despite a massive feminist campaign that has been conducted against it since the spring of 2011.

Reaction

Nothing serious happened.

LYRICS

Free the Cobblestones

They shove voters into school classrooms
In stuffy classrooms, voting booths go stale
It smells of sweat and reeks of control
Floors are swept, stability is ready

Free, free, free the cobblestones!
Liberate, liberate, liberate the cobblestones!

The toilets are cleaned,
the chickens are in civilian clothes
Zizek's ghosts are flushed down the toilet
Khimki forest cleared of protesters
Chirikova has "no admission" to the elections
Feminists are sent on maternity leave
Free, free, free the cobblestones!
Liberate, liberate, liberate the cobblestones!

It's never too late to become a mistress

Batons are charged, the screams are getting louder
Flex the muscles of your arms and legs
The cop licks between your legs

Free, free, free the cobblestones!
Liberate, liberate, liberate the cobblestones!

Egyptian air is good for the lungs
Make Tahrir on Red Square!
Spend a violent day among strong women
Find a crowbar on the balcony, free the cobblestones!

Tahrir! Tahrir! Tahrir! Benghazi!
Tahrir! Tahrir! Tahrir! Tripoli!
The feminist whip is useful to Russia!

Action

FUCK YOU, FUCKING SEXISTS AND FUCKING PUTINISTS, 2011

Location

Various locations, Moscow

Nadya Tolokonnikova
Yekaterina Samutsevich
The bass player

Context

In the lead-up to the 4 December elections, we released a music video for our song "Kropotkin-Vodka," in which we call for a state coup in Russia. Our performances included arsons and a series of musical occupations of glamorous venues in the capital. Concerts took place in areas where wealthy Putinists gather: in Moscow boutiques, at fashion shows, in elite cars, and on the rooftops of Kremlin-affiliated bars.

In our composition, we celebrate Kropotkin-Vodka, a revolutionary drink that has a dual effect: it benefits protestors, but brings lethal poisoning to the authorities, granting them a meeting with President Kennedy. In the song, we propose a new reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in which Russian citizens will be offered the chance to seduce battalions of policewomen. We also realized that no matter what kind of clothing we offer to the police, it will all fit poorly, so we suggest introducing a new uniform: the absence of clothing altogether. A naked police officer will become kinder and more sexually liberated, freed from the pressure of grey state servitude.

Reaction

Nothing serious happened.

LYRICS

Kropotkin-Vodka

Occupy the city with a kitchen frying pan
Come out with a vacuum cleaner, get an orgasm
Seduce battalions of police girls
Naked cops rejoice in the new reform

Fucked up sexists, fucking conformists!

Kropotkin-vodka splashes in the stomachs
It's good for you, but the Kremlin bastards have an uprising of toilets, poisoning is fatal
Flashing lights won't help, Kennedy will meet

Fucked up by the cops, fucking bosses!

Like I slept, in the afternoon I will oppress again
Brass knuckles in my pocket, feminism is sharpened
To move your soup to Eastern Siberia
So that the riot becomes rude enough

Fucking sexists fucking Putinists!
Fucking sexists fucking Putinists!
Fucking sexists fucking Putinists!

Action**DEATH TO PRISON, FREEDOM TO PROTEST, 2011****Location**

Detention Centre No. 1. Moscow

Nadya Tolokonnikova
Yekaterina Samutsevich
Pohlyobka

Context

Pussy Riot performed on the roof of Special Detention Centre No. 1, where those who were arrested after the protest rallies held in early December, following the State Duma elections, were being held.

We performed the song "Death to Prison, Freedom to Protest," in which we call for the peaceful occupation of squares and the release of political prisoners from jails.

Reaction

Nothing serious happened.

LYRICS

Death to Prison

The fun science of capturing squares
The will to power of everyone, without fucking leaders
Direct action is the future of humanity
LGBT, feminists, defend the motherland!

Death to prison, freedom to protest!

Make the cops serve freedom
Protests lead to good weather
Occupy the square, make a peaceful takeover
Take away the machine gun from all the cops

Death to prison, freedom to protest!

Fill up the city, all the squares and streets
There are a lot of them in Russia, leave the oysters
Open all the doors, remove the shoulder straps
Feel the smell of freedom with us

Death to prison, freedom to protest!

Action
PUTIN PEED HIS PANTS, 2012

Location
Lobnoye Mesto
Red Square, Moscow

Nadya Tolokonnikova
Yekaterina Samutsevich
Diana Burkot
Maria Alyokhina
Turya
Garadzha
Pohlyobka
Shaiba

Context
Putin announced he would run for a third presidential term.

The magical winter of 2011. The Snow Revolution. What will they write about it in the history books? Will they mention it at all? What will become of it – will it be the beginning of a bigger revolution that lies ahead? We were led by a belief in the possibility of change.

That winter, the little grey KGB agent Putin and a puffed-up, toy-like Medvedev decided to trade places: prime minister for president. They falsified the results of the elections to the Duma.

We believed that, if we pricked his ass with a pin, Putin would jump out of his presidential seat. He would leap up, and run to hell. His fleshy, Botoxed cheeks would head for the hills and roll off into the dustbin of history.

you can't even imagine us

In January, we started rehearsing in an old factory. After a while, the security guards were no longer surprised to see us. Oh, those girls are here again. Wearing strange-coloured tights, some weird headgear. Russia's a strange place, anyway. You need at least one month of rehearsal to put an action together. When you go live, you only get one take.

You walk through a large hall in an old factory, put up a ladder, climb up onto the windowsill one by one. Shout out a song. 30, 40 times in a row.

get ready

They used to execute people on Lobnoye Mesto. On Lobnoye Mesto, there's a round stone platform that looks like an executioner's block. It's surrounded by stone walls that are maybe six feet high. It's like a large barrel cut in half. Inside, it can hold about thirty people. In Red Square, directly facing the Kremlin. The tsar read out decrees – ukases – here. And declared wars. In 1968, eight dissidents climbed on to

Lobnoye Mesto to protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

for freedom - yours and mine

It was an unprecedented protest in Soviet Russia. The authorities responded with prison sentences and forced psychiatric treatment.

When Pussy Riot performed on Lobnoye Mesto, we unfurled a violet flag: the Venus mirror symbol, a clenched fist in the centre. There were eight of us, like the eight dissidents in 1968.

Reaction

The cops got us afterwards for trespassing. We told them we were drama students. We said that we were staging a play and had decided to rehearse at Lobnoye Mesto. We gave them fake names. Actually, they were real names, just not our own. They hadn't heard 'Putin Peed His Pants'. We spent four hours at the police station and were released without charges.

LYRICS

Putin Peed his Pants

A rebel column is marching on the Kremlin
Windows of the FSB rooms are blowing up and exploding
Bitches are shitting themselves behind red walls
Riot announces, Abort the System!

Attack at dawn? I won't object
For our freedom and yours I punish them with my lash
The glorious Madonna will teach you how to fight
The feminist Magdalene went to a protest march

Riot in Russia - charisma of protest!
Riot in Russia - Putin peed his pants!
Riot in Russia - we exist!
Riot in Russia - Riot, Riot!

Go out to the streets
Live on the Red
Show the freedom
Of civic anger

Sick of the culture of male hysteria
The savage cult of the leader devours your brain
Orthodox religion of a hard dick
Patients are offered treatment by conformity

The regime is moving towards censoring of dreams
It's about time for a clashing confrontation
A pack of bitches from the sexist regime
Beg forgiveness from the feminist fiends

Riot in Russia - charisma of protest!
Riot in Russia - Putin peed his pants!
Riot in Russia - we exist!
Riot in Russia - Riot, Riot!

Go out to the streets
Live on the Red Square
Show the freedom
Of civic anger

Anyone can be Pussy Riot

You stand on the stone walls, and it seems you'll fall any second. You can't let yourself fall, because there won't be a second time. We, Pussy Riot, went out to the square because we dreamed of a different history. Because the one in which the president turned into an emperor was not the one we desired. We were sick of lies. Of the unchanging, dismal lies broadcast on TV – the endless, groundless promises of a happy life.

a long and happy life

Riot is always a thing of beauty.

That is how I got interested. At school, I had this dream of becoming a graffiti artist, and I practised graffiti in my school notepad. If you start your schoolwork on the first page and do your sketches in the back, sooner or later the two will meet in the middle.

And, next to your history notes, graffiti appears. Which turns history into a different story.

Action
PUNK PRAYER, 2012

Location

Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow

Nadya Tolokonnikova
Diana Burkot
Maria Alyokhina
Yekaterina Samutsevich
Shaiba

Context

Putin is getting ready for a third term. The patriarch sails off on a \$680,000 boat. The institutions of power, the ruling party and the Church, are servants of the tsar. You can't achieve any success in Russia, if you're not enmeshed in the system. But you can change the values, change the system.

change the system

The kitchen where we gathered after our Red Square action became our headquarters. We never mentioned addresses over the phone, because the lines were tapped by officers from the Centre Against Extremism.

We ate whatever God sent our way, which was usually pasta.

After the meeting between Putin and the patriarch, it became clear that the patriarch was willing to use the Church to bolster any possible role the president might assume. He decided to put the Church at Putin's disposal, to lay it at his feet. To render Putin a demigod, not just a government official. His Holiness praised the past twelve years of Putin's rule as a 'miracle of God'.

For the right fee the church can provide:

Church service: \$50

Corporate banquet: \$970

Car wash: \$100

Laundry and dry cleaning: \$160

There are some things money can't buy. For everything else, there's the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. A light machine; a sound machine; a soap-bubble machine; a snow machine; a heavy-fog machine; a light-fog machine. These are all for hire in the event halls of the cathedral.

laundry-church

'Let's perform there.'

'In the church?'

'You call that a church?' 'In a church?'

'Sure.'

LYRICS

Punk Prayer

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, banish Putin!
Banish Putin, banish Putin!

Black cassocks, gold braid
The parishioners all crawl and bow
The ghost of freedom is in the heavens
Gay Pride sent to Siberia in chains

The head of the KGB, their chief saint
Leads protesters to prison under escort

So as not to offend the Most Sainted One
Women must give birth and love.

Shit, shit, holy shit!
Shit, shit, holy shit!

Virgin Mary, Mother of God,
Be a feminist!
Be a feminist!

Bless our festering bastard-bosses
Let black cars parade the cross
The missionary's in class for cash
Meet him there, and pay his stash

Patriarch Gundiai believes in Putin
It'd be better to believe in God, you bitch!
The Belt of the Virgin won't deter the demonstrations
The Virgin Mary is with us at the protests

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, banish Putin, banish Putin!
Virgin Mary, Mother of God, banish Putin!

We, feminists, will serve punk prayer at the altar because women cannot approach it.
The mother of God could not, for example, approach the altar if she were in the cathedral.

Women are only allowed to stand on the green walkway before the gates the soles as if they are cleaning women. Or brides. In Russia, there are no women priests. In Russia, there is Pussy Riot.

At the "Orthodox F.A.Q." festival, participants called for a fight against provocative artists who offend the feelings of believers.

Among the art objects of the festival, which is aimed at the Orthodox community, a Flash game "Don't Let Pussy Riot Into the Church" was presented. Figures in

balACLAVAS rush towards the church, and the player, wielding a symbolic cross, must block their path. The festival, which received the blessing of Patriarch Kirill, was organized by a group of Orthodox activists and held in a public square.

Reaction

A criminal case was started against us.

We were charged with hooliganism, committed for reasons of religious hatred and enmity.

We rehearsed for a long time. Every day for about a month. At an art gallery surrounded by a large park with benches.

green carpet to the altar

We walked around the edge of the church and reached a corner.

The guards seemed alarmed. There was no time to lose.

We went up to the low barrier guarding the altar. Katya was the first to hop over.

the guitar is an un-orthodox instrument

The security guards grabbed her. She managed to distract them all, and this bought us 40 seconds to do our performance 40 seconds of crime.

40 seconds of crime

We scrambled up the stairs towards the altar, dropping our backpacks by the Holy Gates. They symbolize the gates to heaven.

We shed our clothes. The outer layers. We put on our balACLAVAS.

time stood still

The security guards tried to catch us. It looked like some bizarre folk dance: he runs up to you, you run backwards; he runs again, you run in a different direction. Two men took my hands and lead me to the exit. They took us to the exit and let us go.

We stood there, looking at the street.

Not a single police car. Katya was waiting for us by the entrance.

We started to run.

Talking heads:

Larissa Pavlova, victims lawyer:

Feminism is a fatal sin, because it is an unnatural expression associated with life.

Gennady Zyuganov, head of communist party:

National symbols are not to be joked with. I take a good belt and whip them.

Kiryll Gundyayev, patriarch:

Our country has no future if the form of political protest is mockery of shrines. It pains me to see how people who can call themselves orthodox begin to justify Pussy Riot.

Artem Ranchenkov, criminal investigator.

The point is that they are real revolutionaries and demons who wanted to change the state of structure.

Dimitry Medvedev, prime minister

I am sick of what they have done and their looks and hysteria that accompanies everything that has happened.

Dimitry Smirnov, chairman of the synodal department of the Moscow patriarchate for the interaction with the armed forces: *They are not girls but creatures I would take the children away from them.*

Archpriest Vsavolod Chaplin, head of the synodal department for church-society relations of the Moscow patriarchate:

For insulting the feelings of believers they should be imprisoned. We Orthodox Christians are challenged. The call is boorish, arrogant, aggressive. Scandalous dances and songs are arranged on the sacred pulpit. No remorse has been voiced so far. Under these conditions an orthodox christian must protect his shrines. To defend by all legal means, that is, to condemn blasphemy and demand that the state do its job.

Maxim Shevchenko, propagandist. Published on the website of "United Russia":

This is a spit in the souls of the overwhelming majority of the Russian population.

Tikhon Shevkunov, Bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church, Putin's Confessor:

In fact, Maria Alyokhina, Ekaterina Samutsevich and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova are the same as shahids who are carefully prepared and used by the people behind them. And we must bitterly admit that "velvet terrorism" with the help of internal and external trustees has both success and followers in our country. Often quite ideological.

Putin, President:

The court sealed them with a two-piece. I have nothing to do with it.

Criminal case
PUNK PRAYER TRIAL, 2012

Location

Khamovnichesky Court, Moscow

Nadya Tolokonnikova
Maria Alyokhina
Yekaterina Samutsevich

Aquarium

Our cage in the courtroom is called 'the aquarium'. It's made of glass, and stands in the middle of the courtroom on the third floor. There is no microphone in the cage. You listen, and speak, through a narrow slit in the bulletproof glass.

'All rise! This court is in session!' a bailiff announces, and everyone stands up.

Bulletproof

'The defendants pose a danger to society and might disrupt the judicial investigation. For this reason, they must be held in custody during the trial.'

A dog vomits at the entrance to the courtroom; the judge steps over the puddle.

Action

Prosecutor: 'The defendants are being charged with hooliganism, committed for reasons of religious hatred and enmity, for reasons of hatred towards a social group, perpetrated by a number of people who conspired together.'

You would have had to be in the courtroom to see how absurd the whole thing was: three girls restrained in a bulletproof plexiglass cage. All three in handcuffs (in spite of the cage). Outside, the cage is surrounded by nine (!) police and Spetsnaz officers, watching the girls' every move. Two police dogs. You'll be kicked out for laughing in the courtroom.

Defence lawyer: 'I summon the witnesses for the defence.'

Prosecutor: 'Objection. I request that the summons be denied.'

Judge: 'Every one of them?'

Prosecutor: 'Every one of them.'

The judge bars the witnesses for the defence from entering the courtroom and orders that those who are already present be removed by the Spetsnaz team. Our witnesses are led out. One of them is shoved down the stairs, and they beat him around his kidneys. The courtroom doors are closed.

Prison term

Nadya Tolokonnikova, 2 years
Maria Alyokhina, 2 years

Yekaterina Samutsevich, 8 months

Reaction

PUNK PRAYER TRIAL, 2012

The judge has a neat square cap of brown hair and rectangular glasses. She sits at her podium under our country's coat of arms. The Russian Federation.

'Summon the plaintiff,' the judge says.

The first plaintiff is the candle-tender from the cathedral. She has long hair covered with a kerchief and is about forty years old. She likes morality and the patriarch. She does not like us.

it happens

She says she entered the church, began to wipe off the candle holders and saw 'some kind of activity'.

'What kind of activity?' the prosecutor asks.

'Leaping and hopping around – clearly planned leaping and hopping,' the candle-tender says.

planned leaping and hopping

'Call the witness,' the judge says.

A scrap of white polka-dotted dress peeks out from under her black robe.

pus-filled orgy

'... that's how they should translate the band's name into Russian,' the witness begins. Our supporters in the courtroom try not to laugh. 'But it's more than a band, it's a whole movement.'

Ugrik the real-estate agent saw the 'Punk Prayer' on the internet and concluded that we worship Satan.

So he is now a witness in the Pussy Riot trial. He's wearing a rumpled polyester shirt.

The judge tries to ascertain whether Ugrik was present in the church on 21 February. 'Were you in the church on 21 February?'

'No, but I saw the video. I was horrified – the girls were heading straight to hell. I had the feeling they didn't know what they were doing. For a Christian, heaven and hell are as real and obvious as the Moscow metro.' are you heading straight to hell?

Action**PUTIN LIGHTS THE FIRES OF REVOLUTION 2012****Location**

Outside Khamovnichesky Court, Moscow

Diana Burkot

Olga Kurachyova

The bass player

Moscow activists and supporters

Context

On the day of our sentence, our collective wrote a song, "Putin Lights the Fires of Revolution" and performed it outside the court.

Reaction

Almost 60 people were detained.

LYRICS

Putin Lights the Fires of Revolution

This state may be stronger than time in jail

The more arrests, the happier it is

Every arrest is carried out with love for the sexist

Who botoxed his cheeks and pumped his chest and abs

But you can't nail us in the coffin

Throw off the yoke of the former KGB!

Putin is lighting the fires of revolution!

He's bored and scared of sharing silence with the people

With every execution: the stench of rotten ash

With every long sentence: a wet dream

The country is going

the country is going into the streets boldly

The country is going

the country is going to bid farewell to the regime

The country is going

the country is going, like a feminist wedge

And Putin is going

Putin is going to say goodbye like a sheep

Arrest the whole city for May 6th

Seven years isn't enough, give us 18!

Forbid us to scream, walk and curse!

Go and marry Father Lukashenko

The country is going,

the country is going into the streets boldly

The country is going,

the country is going to bid farewell to the regime
The country is going, the country is going, like a feminist wedge

And Putin is going, Putin is going to say goodbye like a sheep
Go and marry Father Lukashenko

Reaction

PENAL COLONY, 2012-13

Location for Maria

Penal colony #28 – Berezniki town, Ural mountains Penal colony #2 – Nizniy Novgorod

Location for Nadya

Penal colony #2 – Mordovia region

Maria Alyokhina

Nadya Tolokonnikova

PENAL COLONY

Prisoners in penal colonies live in barracks of 80-100 people in one room. They call it a “unit”. Usually there are only three toilets in the units and there is no hot water. A bath once a week.

According to the law in Russia, all prisoners in colonies are required to work. Working 8 to 12 hours a day, six days a week, the job is most often sewing police uniforms and uniforms for the army. As a salary, prisoners receive 5 to 7 euros per month. This is legalized slavery. In case of any complaints or disagreements with the system, the prisoner is taken from the unit and placed in solitary confinement.

In Russian, the word ‘etap’ means the transportation of convicts from one prison to another. From a detention centre to a penal colony. Etap is the convict’s first step on his path to correction. This is what it’s called in Russia: ‘The path to correction.’

‘Where? Where are you taking me?’

‘You’ll find out when you get there.’

This is their trick – the unknown. This is their method – to frighten. Their way of showing you are just a body.

I arrive at the penal colony after a month. November in the Urals is cold and wild.

You have to think up things to do to stay awake: tie a bunch of cigarettes together with thread (the packs themselves are forbidden; they throw them away during searches and the cigarettes are dumped into a big bag). Put matches back in a box. Sew name tags into your uniform. Make a list of your belongings. All so you won’t fall asleep. Sleeping is a violation of the rules. A missing or poorly attached name tag is a violation. A coat unbuttoned during inspection is a violation.

violation. violation. violation.

Solitary confinement. It’s not a bed. It’s a bunk. Two long wooden boards held up by black chains. On the bottom is my bed. And on the top one? Nothing. It’s empty. They took all my things. They took everything from me. The surveillance camera is over in the corner. Right above the shit-hole on the floor.

the republic of convicts . . .
. . . is what they call the Perm region.

This is where the camps of the Gulag were, and the last camps of the Soviet dissidents. Total isolation, hand-picked prison guards, a harsh northern climate.

There is no hot water in our barracks. You wash yourself every day over the toilet bowl, pouring water from a plastic bucket over your cunt, the water warmed beforehand in a large vat.

In Penal Colony No. 28, there is one telephone for a thousand people. In the club on the second floor, where the telephone is located, they introduced a timetable for prisoners to receive a phone call once a month.

'If we were to put a phone in every unit, who'd keep track of the calls, Maria Vladimirovna?' Martsenyuk, who has called me in for a disciplinary conversation, asks.

'I don't care,' I answer. 'Families are being destroyed because you don't have enough telephones.'

'We don't have enough guards. Do you think people are lining up to work in this place?'

'Those are just excuses.'

'Hey, watch what you say!'

After two months of intensive human rights correspondence, telephones are installed in each unit.

6 a.m. wake-up, I jump off my bed and run to wash my face in icy-cold water. I run so that I can find a free washbasin, but I see there's already a queue. I run in the other direction, to the storage room, where my huge checked bag with all my belongings is stowed, which is only open for half an hour. We aren't allowed to keep our things with us; they must be stored in this special room. I rush there to put away my pyjamas. But I see that a queue has already formed there, too.

HUNGER STRIKE, 2013

Source

Excerpts of an open letter published in The Guardian on September 23, 2013

Nadya Tolokonnikova

I am going on hunger strike. This is an extreme method, but I am convinced that it is my only way out of my current situation.

The penal colony administration refuses to hear me. But I, in turn, refuse to back down from my demands. I will not remain silent, resigned to watch as my fellow prisoners collapse under the strain of slavery-like conditions. I demand that the colony administration respect human rights; I demand that the Mordovia camp function in accordance with the law. I demand that we be treated like human beings, not slaves.

It has been a year since I arrived at Penal Colony No 14

Mordovia greeted me with the words of the deputy chief of the penal colony, Lieutenant Colonel Kupriyanov, who is the de facto head administrator of our colony. "You should know that when it comes to politics, I am a Stalinist."

My brigade in the sewing shop works 16 to 17 hours a day. From 7.30am to 12.30am. At best, we get four hours of sleep a night. We have a day off once every month and a half. We work almost every Sunday. Prisoners submit petitions to work on weekends "out of [their] own desire". In actuality, there is, of course, no desire to speak of. These petitions are written on the orders of the administration and under pressure from the prisoners that help enforce it.

For the maintenance of discipline and obedience, there is a widely implemented system of unofficial punishments. Prisoners are forced to "stay in the lokalka [a fenced-off passageway between two areas in the camp] until lights out" (the prisoner is forbidden to go into the barracks — whether it be autumn or winter. In the second brigade, consisting of the disabled and elderly, there was a woman who ended up getting such bad frostbite after a day in the lokalka they had to amputate her fingers and one of her feet); "lose hygiene privileges" (the prisoner is forbidden to wash themselves or use the bathroom); "lose commissary and tea-room privileges" (the prisoner is forbidden to eat their own food, or drink beverages). It's both funny and frightening when a 40-year-old woman tells you: "Looks like we're being punished today! I wonder whether we're going to be punished tomorrow, too." She can't leave the sewing workshop to pee or get a piece of candy from her purse. It's forbidden.

Thinking only of sleep and a sip of tea, the harassed and dirty prisoner becomes obedient putty in the hands of the administration, which sees us solely as free slave labor. Thus, in June 2013, my salary was 29 (29!) rubles [57p] for the month. Our brigade sews 150 police uniforms per day. Where does the money they get for them go?

Your hands are pierced with needle-marks and covered in scratches, your blood is all over the work table, but still, you keep sewing. You are a part of the assembly line, and you have to complete your task as well as the experienced sewers. The damn machine keeps breaking down. Because you're new and there's a deficit, you end up with the worst equipment — the weakest motor on the line. And now it's broken down again, and once again, you run to find the mechanic, who is impossible to find. They yell at you, they berate you for slowing down production.

"If you weren't Tolokonnikova, you would have had the shit kicked out of you a long time ago," say fellow prisoners with close ties to the administration. It's true: others are beaten up. For not being able to keep up. They hit them in the kidneys, in the face. Prisoners themselves deliver these beatings and not a single one of them is done without the approval and full knowledge of the administration. A year ago, before I came here, a gypsy woman in the third unit was beaten to death (the third is the pressure unit where they put prisoners that need to undergo daily beatings). She died in the medical unit of PC-14. The administration was able to cover it up: the official cause of death was a stroke. In another unit, new seamstresses who couldn't keep up were undressed and forced to sew naked. No one dares complain to the administration because all they will do is smile and send the prisoner back into the unit, where the "snitch" will be beaten on the orders of that same administration. For the colony administration, controlled hazing is a convenient method for forcing prisoners into total submission to their systemic abuse of human rights.

The living and working-condition violations at PC-14 are endless. However, my main and most important grievance is bigger than any one of these. It is that the colony administration prevents any complaints or claims regarding conditions at PC-14 from leaving colony walls by the harshest means available. The administration forces people to remain silent. It does not scorn stooping to the very lowest and cruelest means to this end. All the other problems come from this one.

My lawyer Dmitry Dinze filed a complaint about the conditions at PC-14 with the prosecutor's office. The deputy head of the colony, Lieutenant Colonel Kupriyanov, instantly made conditions at the camp unbearable. There was search after search, a flood of reports on all my acquaintances, the seizure of warm clothes, and threats of seizure of warm footwear. At work, they get revenge with complicated sewing assignments, increased quotas, and fabricated malfunctions. The leaders of the unit next to mine, Lieutenant Colonel Kupriyanov's right hands, openly requested that prisoners interfere with my work output so that I could be sent to the punishment cell for "damaging government property." They also ordered prisoners to provoke a fight with me.

It is possible to tolerate anything as long as it only affects you. But the method of collective punishment is bigger than that. It means that your unit, or even the entire colony, is required to endure your punishment along with you. This includes, worst of all, people you've come to care about. One of my friends was denied parole, for which she had been awaiting seven years, working hard to exceed her work quotas. She was reprimanded for drinking tea with me. That day, Lieutenant Colonel Kupriyanov transferred her to another unit. Another close acquaintance of mine, a very well-educated woman, was thrown into the "stress unit" for daily beatings

because she was reading and discussing a Justice Department document with me. They filed reports on everyone who talked to me.

I am going on hunger strike and refusing to participate in colony slave labor. I will do this until the administration starts obeying the law and stops treating incarcerated women like cattle ejected from the realm of justice for the purpose of stoking the production of the sewing industry; until they start treating us like humans.

Criminal case
PRISON TRIALS, 2012

Location

Penal Colony #28 – Berezniki town, Ural mountains

Maria Alyokhina

Context

'I came to the court for all those who have no rights, for all those who have no voice, for those who are deprived of their voices by those who have the power to do so.' – Statement to the court, 7 February 2013

for those who have no rights

A large hall in the guards' club. In this hall, the disciplinary commission holds its sessions and punishes the prisoners. It is panelled, with rows of chairs and an oak table. A room that serves guards has been turned into a courtroom where guards are now put on trial.

I have two advocates working on my case against the penal colony. My slight and lively blonde lawyer, Oksana Darova, and Alexander Podrabinek, the Soviet- era dissident who hid us in Moscow. The judge refused to allow me to be present in the courthouse, so I am videoconferencing from the hall. This means that expensive equipment has been installed for the first time in the colony – monitors and microphones – so that I can address the court about the ways in which my rights are being infringed.

trial in a guards' club

I stand up. I look at the screen. The judge's face is broken into pixels. The head of Unit No. 11 Nikolaeva's white braid is broken into pixels; the fleshy cheeks of Major Ignatov are broken into pixels. The courtroom in Berezniki is broken into pixels. I say:

'I can't quite see you, Your Honour. You appear only as a black silhouette.'

A mechanical voice from a small speaker answers, with much interference:

'Sit down, Alyokhina. You have not been asked to speak yet.'

Reaction

We won three cases out of four against the prison administration.

hero/ haemorrhoids

After I wrote a short article about the prison camp, after I told human rights advocates about the prisoners having no warm shawls or hot water or proper pay for our work, I suddenly became something of a haemorrhoid in the guards' asses.

I have two violations for oversleeping on my record. My minder says they'll take me to a disciplinary commission and punish me. She speaks sharply, spitting out the words.

violated the regimen?

And if I accept their authority, by agreeing to lies about violating the regimen, I would be submitting, too. I'd be pleading guilty to a crime I didn't commit. Such moments of choice, made in prison, will stay with you for the rest of your life. These decisions become the most important ones you ever make. Because you can't forget anything you do here within the prison walls. Once you betray yourself, even a single time, you can't stop. You become another person, a stranger to yourself. You become a prisoner. And that means you have been defeated. They will have truly deprived you of your freedom.

to back down an inch is to give up a mile

'I will take you to court,' I say.

'You can send your complaints to the prosecutor. The court won't consider them,' the major says dismissively.

the guards all laugh

Several months later, I win the first case against the guards in the history of this penal colony.

After the court session is over, my friends from home wave to me through the court camera. They smile. They say, 'We won, Masha!' 'Look this way! Wave to us!'

They have camped out two thousand miles away from home to support me. They wave at me from the courtroom and congratulate me. Because we have won. For the first time in the history of this penal colony, where no one had ever before taken the guards to court and had never thought about the rights of prisoners.

The judge retreats to her office and returns with the court's decision; it has ruled in my favour. Three of the disciplinary commission's four orders against me are struck down as illegal. After the decision, Martsenyuk turns red and rushes angrily out of the room. Both he and Major Ignatov will be deprived of their annual bonuses. There has been too much attention directed at Colony No. 28. The regional prison administration has ordered them to follow the law. They have been told to reduce the prisoners' workload and increase their pay.

Action**LIKE IN A RED PRISON, 2013****Location**

Rosneft gas station and oil facilities, Russia

Tanya Sushenkova

Turya Garadzha

Pohlyobka

Context

The purpose of the trial and imprisonment of Nadia Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina was to stop the activities of the punk band. That is why it is important for us to continue the fight to help Pussy Riot overcome the state.

We got to the very essence of why our friends are in cages, but Putin and his friends are not. For the performances of the song "Like in a Red Prison", we broke out of Moscow for the first time and made an All-Russian tour, seizing the country's oil facilities. Last year, oil and gas budget revenues amounted to 7 trillion rubles, but only Putin and several of his friends see these 7 trillion rubles. Therefore, we decided to deal with oil production on our own and sing our new song about the red prison to oil and gas workers.

Modern Russia is likened to the "red zone", where the administration runs everything. Igor Sechin, president of Rosneft and one of the most influential officials in the state, acts as the main "godfather".

This song equates an oil rig with a prison camp.

Reaction

Nothing serious happened.

LYRICS

Like In a Red Prison

Balanda [prison food] propaganda, balanda-propaganda!

Activists are flowing through the pipe

Filling the pipe with life, they're asking for a riot!

Prison Department, Ministry of Internal Affairs Ministry of Emergency Situations, and

Rosnano Lukoil, TNK, Rosneft, and Gazprom

Balanda propaganda, balanda-propaganda!

Achieve registration

Villains sit on prison towers

Oil lies on tables

Sechin with crocodiles

Like in a red prison

Wash the worker in a Norwegian fjord

Cut off your dick like hero Depardieu
Your president is like an ayatollah in Iran
And your church is like in the UAE

So that everything is like in Qatar
Villains on prison towers
Pump oil to the last drop
In universities, theology is taught
Epauettes and oil wells
Navalny is jailed
Hugo Chavez is alive
Like in a red prison

a green padded coat

From the meeting room, I was led to the loading bay, a sectioned off strip between the huge rusty entrance gates to the Zone and the exit gates that open out to the outside. Dante would have called the area 'limbo'. But it's not limbo; it's just a stinking five-metre strip where trucks load and unload. A black Volga was waiting there for me. Never before had anyone been taken out of the colony in a government car. 'Get in,' said the unit head.

black volga

Imagine if we had the power to meet our own future. We would have a fireworks display by the colony's stone walls, catch the train with minutes to spare, leave those prison diaries behind untouched, get off the train in Moscow to be met by a packed platform; we'd run through the crowd of journalists with white roses.

what's next?

'What is your dream, Masha?' the girl asked. She was only nineteen but serving a long sentence, about six years. For selling drugs. She gave me a hairclip, a crab with blue stones. We were smoking in the North. Putin had signed a decree ordering an amnesty. He signed the amnesty to save face in the West ahead of the Olympic Games in Sochi. A copy of the newspaper with the published presidential decree was passed from one prisoner to the next.

'I want to go on a trip around the world,' said one girl. 'I want to go to the moon,' said another.

And the girl said, 'I want to be released in the amnesty. I want to see my child. That's what I want most of all.'

She was not released in the amnesty. Nadya and I were released.

no pasarán!
Nadia and I and three other women.
Five women from the world's largest country.
Everyone needed this amnesty but me.

vip amnesty

Big, black, childlike eyes. To her I was a heroine in a fairy tale.
'I want to write a book,' I said. 'Will I be in it?' she asked.
'Definitely.'

no pasarán!

- Well, Maria Vladimirovna, you're free,' said the unit head.
- and you?

Freedom doesn't exist unless you fight for it every day. And I'm riding in a car that's picking up speed.

I had promised my friends in the penal colony that if it would be possible I would light fireworks outside the colony for them when I got out.

Action

PUTIN WILL TEACH YOU TO LOVE THE MOTHERLAND, 2014

Location

Winter Olympic Games, Sochi

Nadya Tolokonnikova

Maria Alyokhina

Peter Verzilov

Anastasia Kirilenko

Olga Pakhtusova

Lusine Janyan

Alexey Knedlyakovsky

Special thanks to David Khakim

Context

Our compulsory VIP-amnesty is all because of the Winter Olympics. Putin has grown tired of answering questions from foreign statesmen about Pussy Riot. He needs to solve the issue of us 'hooligans', so as not to spoil the celebrations.

The amnesty is to save face in front of the West. It is at the Winter Olympics that we realise that everything has changed, we realise that we haven't grasped the scale of change, that we have left prison and arrived in a different country. There is no way back. Putin is on his third presidential term, which has now been extended to six years, and the year 2014 becomes a point of no return.

point of no return

For Putin the Olympics is a special operation to return Russia to greatness.

1. We decided – we are flying to the Olympics at Sochi to shoot the video “Putin Will Teach You to Love the Motherland”.
2. Three days before the closing of the games, we are sure that none of us will reach Sochi. Everyone will be arrested.
3. We fly to Sochi with a large team of 12 people on four different flights. If they start arresting us at the entrance to the city, at least some of us have a chance of getting there.
4. It is known that during the Olympics there are more employees of Russia's FSB in Sochi than indigenous inhabitants. Hot dogs in rolls are being served by a saleswoman with a rank no lower than that of Lieutenant of State Security.
5. Exit from the airport. We light cigarettes, with Nadya a few metres from the door. Immediately we are surrounded by uniformed policemen. They demand our documents. We refuse. We didn't do anything wrong. We are leaving.
6. We rent a car. We are going to look at the first location for the Pussy Riot performance. On an empty night road, the group is stopped by the police. The police

are sure the car was stolen and that the Pussy Riot activist who is driving has a fake licence. We are being arrested. We are released by the police late at night, after they have taken away our right to the car.

7. At eight in the morning we swim in the icy black sea of February – this is our first shoot for the Pussy Riot Olympic video. A police car pulls up to an empty beach. The operatives get out. For 20 minutes they film girls squealing from the cold and diving in balaclavas on several video cameras.

8. At noon, we are detained by a joint border patrol unit of the FSB. We are accused of not having permission to be in the border special zone. The officers don't know where this special zone is located. For the next 12 hours, we are held under arrest at a military facility near the Russian border.

9. In the evening, after 12 hours of interrogations by the FSB border patrol unit, we go to have dinner. Almost immediately, we are targeted by undercover police agents trying to provoke a fight, who are pretending to be regular café patrons.

10. At two o'clock in the morning, we are filming an episode of the video near the Olympic rings on the outskirts of Sochi. We manage to break away from the operatives.

11. In the morning, we leave the cars. We get on a regular bus and go to the centre of Sochi. After 15 minutes, a group of police officers catch up with us: "You must ride with us to the police station", "Why?", "Your hotel has been robbed. You are all suspects". They twist our arms forcefully, throw us into paddy wagons and take us to the police station.

12. We leave the police station, where we were kept for five hours. At the gate, a huge crowd of journalists. We put on balaclavas and break through the ring of press representatives, chanting lines from the song "Putin will teach you to love the motherland". A crowd of journalists is running after us down the alley. People are falling, cameras are falling.

13. In the morning, we shoot the key episode of the video, by the blue wall of Sochi 2014, near the sea port. We are attacked by a crowd of bearded Cossacks with whips. The policemen stand silently nearby. Some of them film what is happening on video cameras.

14. The Cossacks twist our arms, fight, smash our faces until we bleed and spray tear gas in our faces. The police are smiling, watching the bloody carnage.

15. We wipe away the blood, put bandages on the wounds in the hospital, wash the tear gas out of our eyes and go to shoot the next and last episode of the video.

16. At night, in a secret house on the outskirts of Sochi, we edit the video "Putin will teach you to love the motherland". Early in the morning – the premiere and meeting with journalists.

17. Half an hour before the press conference, the hotel, where the meeting with journalists is to take place, refuses to provide a room, under an idiotic pretext. The

meeting with journalists goes ahead on the street, in front of the entrance to the frightened hotel.

18. Journalists are pestered by pro-Kremlin youths dressed as red roosters, waving raw chicken carcasses in the air and chanting "We like sex with chicken!". In an interview with CNN, young people holding chicken carcasses say: "Life is so good in Sochi that there is no need to protest".

19. We're going to the airport – it's time to return to Moscow. The taxi driver recognizes us and takes a picture as a keepsake. On the way we stop for lunch. We leave the café and find out that while we were having lunch two FSB officers approached the taxi driver and forced him to erase the photo. They also called him in to the FSB department for a conversation. We arrive at the airport. We return to Moscow.

20. At the Vnukovo airport. We are again met by a crowd of pro-Kremlin youths, dressed as red roosters. The roosters sing our song "Putin will teach you to love the motherland" with hoarse voices and smash the guitars on the floor, after which they are theatrically detained by the police.

21. Our first morning in Moscow after Sochi. 21 February. We are going to court to support the guys who were arrested for attending a rally against Putin's inauguration on 6 May 2012 at Bolotnaya square. Seven people receive terms from two to four years in prison.

22. The next day, 22 February, the revolution in Ukraine, which we strongly support, prevails. The ousted president Yanukovich secretly flees to Russia.

23. Immediately after the closing of the Olympics and the victory of the Sochi Ukraine, the "Russian Spring of the revolution days, the annexation" begins - in a few days of Crimea will commence.

Reaction

Everyone was detained 3 times.

Beatings, harassments, surveillance, slashed tires.

At night, in a hidden house on the outskirts of Sochi, we edit the video 'Putin will teach you to love the Motherland'. On the first floor of David's wooden house, where the whole team gathers, it looks like a strange squat. An unfinished partly broken house, very similar to its guests.

Lyosha's head is cracked open, Petya's eyes are burned, we all have bruises, swelling, cuts, torn out hair, but we stay editing until the morning. The four of us take it in turns to sleep for several hours on a bed with a broken leg. Early next morning we have the premiere and a meeting with journalists.

At 2 o'clock in the morning, we are filming an episode of the video near the Olympic rings on the outskirts of Sochi. We managed to break away from the operatives.

LYRICS

Putin Will Teach You to Love the Motherland

\$50 billion and a rainbow ray
Rodnina and Kabaeva will pass you the torch
They'll teach you to submit and cry in the camps
Fireworks for the bosses. Hail, Duce!
Sochi is locked down, Olympus is under surveillance
Special forces, weapons, crowds of cops
FSB - argument, Interior Ministry - Argument
On [state-owned] Channel 1 - applause!

Putin will teach you to love the Motherland!
Putin will teach you to love the Motherland!

In Russia, the spring can come suddenly
Greetings to the Messiah in the form of a volley from Aurora.
The prosecutor is determined to be rude
He needs resistance, not pretty eyes!

A fence for the protest, vodka, matryoshka
Prison for Bolotnalya, desert, caviar
The Constitution is in a noose, the boys are in jail
Stability, prison food, a fence, a watchtower

They turned off the [independent] TV Rain broadcast
The gay parade has been dumped in the gutter
A two-toilet cubicle is the priority
The verdict for Russia is jail for six years

Putin will teach you to love the Motherland!
Motherland! Motherland! Motherland!
Motherland! Motherland! Motherland!

Context
NEW FACE OF THE COUNTRY 2014

Location

Outside the court
Zamoskvoretsky Court, Moscow

Defendants of the Bolotnaya Case

Context

21 February 2014. Two years ago, exactly, we were on our way to the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Now it's to the Zamoskvoretsky Court to support the defendants in the Bolotnaya case, who were arrested for attending a protest rally on 6 May 2012 in Bolotnaya Square against Putin's inauguration as President. Seven people in this case will receive prison terms of 2 to 4 years. Hundreds more will become potential defendants in the case, some of them will leave the country to avoid prison.

People of all ages gather near the court to support the political prisoners. One can't hold back the tears, someone else argues with the stone-faced cops, they come in groups and on their own, politicians and ordinary people. And yet Western correspondents are not to be seen in the crowd. These people who supposedly sacrifice themselves to get to the truth in Russia are not visible through the kilometres of Western media newsprint about the Russian Olympics. And it's not fair.

Political prisoners from the Bolotnaya Case will not be released from their prison sentences. Despite hundreds of letters of support, which in Russia have long been equated with toilet paper, they will remain in jail until the end of their term. Putin needs them in prison as an example. An example of what awaits you if you protest in Russia.

The police push people away from the court entrance, they divide the crowd into sections, extracting the most active and throwing them into paddy wagons. People gather together in clusters - if a person is in a group, it is more difficult to pull them out and detain them. When the 2nd Police Special Regiment starts coming for Nadya and me, our cluster instantly forms a ring around us and does not let the cops near. The people stand with their backs to the police, exposing themselves to blows and detentions, just so we are not detained.

Context
ATTACKS ON PUSSY RIOT. 2014

Location

McDonald's, Nizhny Novgorod

Nadya Tolokonnikova
Maria Alyokhina
Peter Verzilov
Tasya Krugovykh

Context

We came to my penal colony, the last one in Nizhny Novgorod, with groceries for my inmate friends and we were attacked by a Nazi group. They grow like mushrooms around the country.

"bon Appetit, you bitches!"

Gopniks in puffer jackets with St. George ribbons leap into McDonald's and surround us. They throw chicken legs at us and spray us with glue from a can. They are carrying syringes filled with Zelenka - brilliant green. They take turns running up to us. One of them is holding a sign: "Dirty whores get out of town."

6 am, we had just got off the train and gone to eat. Another guy in a hat sprays brilliant green from a syringe. Aim for the eyes. Ten people stand over our table at McDonald's. They are filming us and repeat that we must go "back... to America!"

happy meal

Zelenka is green ethyl alcohol, used as an antiseptic in Soviet days. A man passing the scene interjects: "Ten men attacking two girls, wow that's really great, congratulations!"

The glue is finished and one of the gopniks throws the large empty can at us. It hits my head. It hurts, there is blood in my hair and on my face, but I am oblivious, I tell our camera why we are there. And Nadya speaks too:

"We came to Nizhny Novgorod to visit the penal colony. Prisoners there receive 200 roubles a month. We are here to support them."

Tasya is holding the camera, she has an ocular burn that will lead to complete loss of vision. And Nadia has a burn too. I have concussion. The police, whose station is just around the corner, take 40 minutes to get to us. The ambulance travels at the same speed. The attack will not be investigated.

Context

CRIMEA, 2014

Location

Simferopol, annexed Crimea

AGENTS OF THE WEST

A sign warning against “agents of the West” in Simferopol centre.

In 2014, we realized that we had been released into a different country than we remembered. Another place, which was more violent and more terrifying. Putin annexed Crimea one week after the event of “Putin will teach you to love the Motherland”, one week after the Sochi games.

They annexed Crimea. They took another’s territory and didn’t receive any proper reaction from the West, just very light embargoes that were avoided by the biggest European countries. This was a sign for Putin as a dictator that it was OK to take territories, and, even back then, they started a war in the Ukraine.

In the annexed Crimea, they started to build these warning signs about “agents of the West”, and also started to use Soviet Union rhetoric against people, like “enemy of the State”, “enemy of the people”, “agents”, “foreign agents”. They started to change the law again, and again, and created laws about foreign agents and unwanted organisations. Since that moment, they can call anyone they want a foreign agent as a legal term.

The same for unwanted organisations and unwanted persons. They can persecute whoever they want.

Attention! Agents of the West

A year after the march for peace, Boris Nemtsov is assassinated. Shot in the chest on a bridge near the Kremlin. At this point Nemtsov was investigating the war in eastern Ukraine that Putin started soon after the annexation of Crimea. Nemtsov wants to publish a report and print out thousands of copies to hand to passers-by on the street. So that everyone knows the truth. Nemtsov does not live to see the report published; his associate, Ilya Yashin will complete the job.

Eight years later, after the start of a full-scale war, Yashin will be sentenced to 8 years in jail for the publication of the Russian army’s crimes in Bucha.

A "Russian election" is being brought to occupied Crimea. No observers, just smiling women employed by the Russian state, "no violations detected".

Armed checkpoints are set up at all strategic locations on the peninsula. The halls where ballot papers are handed out, where there are booths and ballot boxes, are packed with people dressed in camouflage. Even before the polling stations close, Russian flags are already hanging on the buildings.

"Believe in a free future," says Paul McCartney, and asks us to pass these words on to the young people in Russia. We promise to pass them on.

When Paul's handwritten letter landed on the judge's table in Berezniki calling for my release from prison (six months after my conviction) I liked the look on her face. "File it," she said monotonously, as if nothing much had happened. But even through the poorly working video link between me and her it was clear what had actually happened. The world of a Ural city judge and the world of a British music legend had, for a second, collided.

We are at a rehearsal with McCartney in Los Angeles. There's a break and we are given a vegetarian buffet. Putin is a Beatles fan, he personally gave Sir Paul a tour of the Kremlin. Paul says Putin didn't seem the worst of evils in the West at first, but after the annexation of Crimea opinions of him radically changed. The whole world is watching the events in south-east Ukraine.

As we stand in Sir Paul's studio "boards of shame" are being erected in occupied Crimea. They are stands with photos of traitors of the homeland. "Agents of Western influence" is the title of one of the stands. Our photos are in the bottom right corner. Eight years from now, at the start of a full-scale war, all the people in the pictures will be squeezed out of the country, thrown behind bars, or killed.

A free future?

Action
THE BALL, 2014

Location
Red Square, Moscow

Pyotr Verzilov
Maria Alyokhina
Hardcore Moscow activists

Context
Navalny's brother, Oleg, received three and a half years in prison for being the brother of the country's main opposition leader. Thousands of people came to Red Square to protest, but they were dispersed by the police. But a few people remained. 26 degrees below zero. All night we stood with posters inside a huge Christmas ball. We were also detained in the morning. Three paddy wagons came for eight, super-frozen people.

Reaction
Detention, day in police station.

Action
DON'T BE AFRAID, 2015

Location
Bolotnaya Square, Moscow

Katrin Nenasheva
Nadya Tolokonnikova

Context
Don't be Afraid action, day 18.

Sewing the flag of Russia in prison uniforms in a square on Russia Day, 12 June.

For "Don't be Afraid" artist Katrin Nenasheva wore prison clothing in various public places for 30 days, documenting daily how others reacted to her presence.

The performance with the flag was done on the 18th day of the action, on Russia Day. Nadia joined Katrin, wearing the uniform she had worn during her incarceration in the Mordovian penal colony.

The girls came to the square in prison uniforms and attempted to sew the flag of Russia with the tag "Russia, Penal Colony-1". "The country itself has become imprisoned in a socio-cultural sense. In reality, 12 June is the holiday of the Imprisoned Russia," Katrin said.

Reaction
They did not have time to finish the flag in the square, because they were detained by the police.

Action
HAPPY BIRTHDAY EXECUTIONERS, 2017

Location

Lubyanka, FSB building, Moscow

Maria Alyokhina
Olga Borisova

Context

We wandered around the backyards of the Lubyanka - here Lenin spoke, and had a grandiose banquet, here is where Dzerzhinsky organised the first underground laboratory in the country, where the first experiments on psychotropic substances were made on those arrested and taken into the unknown at night. Laboratory X. And now - literally next to it - with a huge sickle and hammer in a wreath: the reception of the FSB. We decided to give the Chekists a present for their anniversary. We go to the reception of the FSB to congratulate them. They've been in Lubyanka since 1917 under different names – Cheka – NKVD – KGB and now FSB – and today they are celebrating 70 years since Stalin's Big Terror in 1937.

'are there any sheets?' I ask in a businesslike voice

Night. "Happy birthday, executioners" - we write with a spray can, folding the sheet to fit it in the narrow kitchen.

Morning. Meet me at Starbucks on Lubyanka. We go to the reception of the FSB to congratulate the security officers. We are rolling out the sheet in the most protected place of the country. And everything seems to be fine. The fact that we manage to hang it without having our faces immediately pushed into the asphalt is a success. It seems to me that the corner is not straight so I return to fix it. Olga walks away. And suddenly I'm surrounded from all sides by policemen in civilian clothes. They missed Olga.

Reaction

Spent one night in the police station and received 40 hours of community service.

Reception of the FSB. On the floor lies our white sheet with red letters.

The officer asks:

- Have your relatives been persecuted?
- Well, yes, but I was imprisoned myself.
- For what?
- For the song Mother Mary, banish Putin. For 2 years. - Oh, is that Pussy Riot?
- Yes, Pussy Riot
- Well, then this is for life.

Action

FREE SENTSOV, 2017

Location 1

Bridge next to Sentsov's penal colony Yakutsk, Siberia
Yakutsk Police Station

Maria Alyokhina
Olga Borisova
Alexander Sofeev

Context

After the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in the east of Ukraine in 2014, not only oppositionists, but also Ukrainian citizens began to be persecuted inside Russia. One of them was the Ukrainian director Oleg Sentsov. Having been tortured by the FSB and having received a sentence of 20 years under strict regime in the autumn of 2015, Sentsov delivered one of the strongest speeches in court I have heard.

We went to Siberia, to Yakutsk, and carried out the first action, next to the penal colony in which he was being held.

Reaction

Detained by the police, received a fine.

From Sentsov's speech in court at the time of his sentencing.

"You know, you were right, the worst sin on earth is cowardice."

This was written by the great Russian writer Bulgakov in the book "The Master and Margarita", and I agree with him. Cowardice is the most important, the most terrible sin on earth. Betrayal is such a private form of cowardice.

I have been staying in your beautiful country for a year and watching your TV. Your propaganda is working great. Most of the Russian population believes what they say: Putin is a good fellow, fascists are in Ukraine, Russia is doing everything right, enemies are all around. You understand perfectly well that there are no fascists in Ukraine, that Crimea was taken illegally, and your troops are present in the Donbass. Even I, being here in prison, know that your troops are in Donbass.

We also had a criminal power, but we came out against it. They didn't want to hear us

– we knocked on trash cans. The authorities didn't want to see us – we set fire to tires. In the end, we won. The same thing will happen to you sooner or later. I don't want anyone to get hurt, I just want you not to be ruled by criminals anymore.

And I want to wish Russia – learn not to be afraid!

Location 2

Trump Tower, New York
Maria Alyokhina
Olga Borisova
Elly Brinkley
Kyle Dacuyan
Dylan Winn-Davies (who distracted the Trump Tower security while we hung the
“Free Sentsov” banner)

Context

We held the second action in New York with local activists from the literary organization PEN, having told them about the Sentsov case. During a break between performances, blocking Trump Tower for half an hour, we hung a huge banner and released several hundred leaflets.

Reaction

Talk with NY police. No detention, no fine.

Location 3

Simferopol, annexed Crimea

Maria Alyokhina
Olga Borisova
Alexander Sofeev

Context

We decided to do a third action in Crimea. According to the plan, the action was to take place near a statue of Lenin in Simferopol that Sentsov was wrongly accused of attempting to bomb.

Reaction

The FSB detained me at the airport, and Olga and Sasha on the ferry, burned all the equipment and threatened me with physical violence. After the arrest, Olga and Sasha left, but I still unfurled the banner at the train station. Then people dressed as Cossacks attacked me with whips.

All three participants of the action were detained by the police and sentenced.

Action
PAPER PLANES, 2018

Location

Lubyanka, FSB Building, Moscow

Maria Alyokhina

Alexander Sofeev

Dima

Kultrab art community Various moscow activists

Context

This has been the main headquarters of the special services since 1917. In addition to the Chekist's cabinets, it was used as a prison for the most dangerous revolutionaries, directors, and poets, who went through many days of torture in the Lubyanka cellars.

No one has escaped in the building's entire history.

During the last century, the Checkists often changed their title, but never left the building.

VChK – NKVD – KGB – and finally FSB.

The archives of what went on here remains classified to this day.

In 2018, Roskomnadzor decided to block Telegram, the messenger service we all used. The Telegram logo? An airplane. We made lots of colourful paper airplanes and launched them into the FSB building.

Reaction

A few nights in police detention + 100 hours of community service for Masha.

"I went out to protest because our fundamental right, the right granted to us by the Constitution, is being violated," says Olga, a female doctor, in court. I think this is the first time I've seen someone who has never been involved in activism before, speak so calmly, clearly and confidently that any politician would be envious. I continued, but in a slightly different way.

"Well, I started launching paper airplanes, first a pink one, then a yellow one, then a blue one..." The judge smirks; it's the same judge, a matryoshka doll, who was there on Chekist Day, after our "Happy Birthday, Executioners" action. She will assign me another 100 hours of community service, which will initially seem like a trifle but will turn into a foundation for new adventures after a few months.

Reaction

140 HOURS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE, 2018-19

Location

Molodeznalya district, Moscow

Maria Alyokhina

THE KAFKAESQUE WAY

The house they gave me to clean was supposed to be destroyed in a few months, which is a very Kafkaesque way to make a punishment.

Action**POLICEMAN ENTERS THE GAME, 2018****Location**

World Cup Final, Moscow

Pyotr Verzilov
Nika Nikulshina
Olga Kurachyova
Olga Pakhtusova

Context

Four members of Pussy Riot ran onto the pitch during the 15 July match between France and Croatia in the 2018 FIFA World Cup final.

The action is timed to coincide with the 11th anniversary of the death of the poet, Dimitri Prigov. The heavenly policeman, according to Prigov, speaks on his walkie-talkie with God himself. The earthly policeman fabricates criminal cases. While the heavenly policeman is gently watching the fans at the World Cup, the earthly policeman is preparing to disperse the rallies. The heavenly policeman gently touches a flower in the field and rejoices at the victories of the Russian national team, and the earthly policeman is indifferent to Oleg Sentsov's hunger strike. The heavenly policeman stands as an example of statehood, the earthly policeman hurts everyone.

We demand:

1. Release all political prisoners.
2. Do not imprison people for likes on social media.
3. Stop illegal arrests at rallies.
4. Allow political competition in the country.
5. Do not fabricate criminal cases and do not keep people in jail for no reason.
6. Turn an earthly policeman into a heavenly policeman.

Reaction

They were all arrested and detained for 15 days.

A couple of months later Pyotr Verzilov was exposed to military poison.

Reaction PYOTR'S POISONING 2018

Pyotr was brought unconscious from Moscow to Charité clinic in Germany on a private plane, arranged by Pussy Riot supporters. He recovered in several months.

Action
FSIN=GULAG, 2018

Location
Federal Penitentiary Service, Moscow

Maria Alyokhina

Context
Today in Russia, anyone can get behind bars. To do this, you don't even have to sing a song against Putin. You can be imprisoned for a post, for a repost, for a single demonstration, for talking to friends about politics at McDonald's. What is the prison system? For two years I have seen it from the inside. It is a meat grinder that destroys the humanity in a person.

In my colony, women worked 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, sometimes more. They were paid 200 rubles a month, instead of the required minimum wage. Without medicine, without proper food, without the ability to talk about the conditions in which they live. In my first colony, dissenters were thrown out of windows, in the second they were put in cold chambers.

We came to the reception of the FSIN (Russian Federal Penitentiary Service) with stickers: "FSIN = Gulag", "murders", "torture", "slave labour".

When we started pasting them, an employee came out and told us to submit all complaints in writing.

We replied that that was exactly what we were doing. We just enlarged the words so that they would be readable.

Everyone here has seen a video from the Yaroslavl correctional colony, in which eleven employees torture a prisoner. They beat the heels and the body with rubber batons. This video is not an exceptional case of sadism, but part of the daily practice of the Russian prison system, which turns people into slaves and hostages. That's why we printed out photos of these people, or rather of what was done to them. We are here to say that if we forget this, we will cease to be human.

Reaction
I didn't get caught by the cops. The officers there were employees of the FSIN who don't arrest anyone.

Context

MOSCOW DEMONSTRATIONS, 2019

In the summer of 2019, a number of independent candidates were not registered for the elections to the Moscow Parliament, despite the fact that they properly collected sufficient signatures.

Mass protests began. The security forces violently arrested protesters. Former employees of the Kyiv Berkut, who were wanted in Ukraine, were seen in the ranks of the security forces.

After several hours of participating in a rally taking place all over the centre of Moscow, I sat down on a bench in the park next to where the rally continued and read on my phone. There are several policemen in civilian clothes sitting opposite me, suddenly one of them jumps up, sits down on my bench and says he wants a selfie – he quickly gets out his phone and takes a picture with me.

After that, he tells the uniformed policeman, “Now you can detain her”.

They detain me and take me to the police station. I get a \$2,000 fine the next day. A total of 1,373 people were detained at the rally on 27 July.

After this rally, a criminal case was initiated against the demonstrators, “The Moscow Case”.

Action
SINGLE DEMONSTRATIONS, 2019

Location

Moscow

Administration of the president Petrovka isolation centre Lubyanka, FSB Building

Masha Alekhina

Alexander Sofeev

Anna Kuzminih

Context

2019 was the year of demonstrations – single demonstrations, queues of demonstrations – in support of the defendants in the “Moscow Case”, the largest criminal case since 2012.

When the authorities banned all mass protests, people started lining up to take turns holding a sign on their own. Eventually the line was banned too and, finally, standing alone holding a sign.

Reaction

Massive fines.

Action

STOP GULAG, 2019

Location

Bolshoy Kamenny Bridge, Moscow

Maria Alyokhina
Anna Kuzminykh
Liuda
Dima

Context

By the end of 2019, Russia was busy with a large number of different criminal cases sewn together for political reasons. The defendants in these cases were completely different people.

A female politician, students, intellectuals from the middle class, random passers-by or people who have devoted their lives to finding victims of the regime – all these people have become defendants in criminal cases, because once the repressive mechanism gets going it will not stop.

We made a 10-metre banner saying “Stop Gulag” with portraits of new political prisoners and hung it on a bridge near the Kremlin.

Reaction

I received a big fine, blocking all my bank accounts.

1. Yan Sidorov, activist, student
Held a poster in defence of people whose houses burned down.
4 years in penal colony, tortured
2. Vyacheslav Mordasov, activist
Held a poster "the government resigns".
4 years in penal colony, tortured
3. Ruslan Kostylenkov, rabbit breeder
"The case of new greatness" - protest chat, conversations at McDonald's.
7 years in penal colony tortured, raped
4. Anna Pavlikova, student
"The case of new greatness" - protest chat, conversations at McDonald's.
4 years probation (she was in jail, but after a public campaign - house arrest and probation)
5. Konstantin Kotov, activist, programmer
Held protest posters several times and went to the rally "for fair elections".
1.5 years in penal colony
6. Egor Zhukov, student
Led a youtube channel.

3 years probation with a ban for 2 years on web administration

7. Nikita Chirtsov, programmer

"Pushed a policeman".

1 year in penal colony

8. Yuri Dmitriev, a historian, head of the Karelian branch of the Memorial Society

An expert in the field of Stalinist repression, discovered the Sandarmokh firing range and restored, together with colleagues, 6000 names of people shot there during the Great terror.

15 years in penal colony

9. Azat Miftakhov, mathematician

Broke a window at the office of United Russia.

6 years in penal colony, tortured

10. Anastasia Shevchenko, a public figure, an opposition politician, a member of the "unwanted organization"

After the initiation of a criminal case, she was put under strict house arrest, could not visit her eldest daughter Alina, who was in a serious condition in the hospital. Shortly after Anastasia's arrest, her daughter died.

2 years under strict house arrest

4 years probation

Action
NEW YEAR TREE, 2019-20

Location
Lubyanka, Moscow

Maria Alyokhina
Liudmila Sukova
Alexander Polozun
Dima
Alexander Sofeev

Context

In the Soviet Union religion was considered opium for the people and so they did not celebrate Christmas, but New Year instead, and that is still how it is done in Russia. Outside the headquarters of the Russian Secret Service FSB on Lubyanka there are big illuminated New Year trees, and so, on New Year's Eve, we came to Lubyanka and decorated a tree.

We made 36 balloons – colourful balloons with portraits of political prisoners in them. From the tree, defendants of infamous political cases like the “Moscow Case”, the “Rostov Case”, “The Network” and “New Greatness”, Yuri Dmitriev, Azat Miftakhov and Yulia Tsvetkova look out at passersby and through the windows of Lubyanka. All of them are innocent, almost all are under arrest, many have been tortured, some face up to 18 years in prison, some have found love, some have married, but they all share one thing – their lives will never be the same.

Lubyanka is a dreadful place, and it should become a museum, not a home for the secret police. When the archives are opened and we see how many lives were destroyed within these walls, when this is taught in schools, there will be a chance that the rule of the strong, and power held by fear and indifference, will no longer be key concepts in Russia.

Reaction

We didn't get caught.

Action
“2036”, 2020

Location
Red Square, Moscow

Lucy Shtein
Nika Nikulshina
Alexander Sofeev
Viktor Kotov
Gosha Kozhevnikov
Lisa Samoilova
Maria Timofeeva
Masha Bezverkhaya

Context
On 1 July, a “vote” was held on amendments to the constitution, one of which nullifies Putin’s presidential terms. If the amendments are approved, the president will be able to be re-elected to his post and remain in power until 2036.

We staged “2036” on Red Square, forming these numbers with our bodies on the paving stones.

The action “2036” is an homage to the Russian art group E.T.I., who, in April 1991, spelled out a three letter word, equivalent to FUCK, with their bodies, near Lenin’s mausoleum.

Reaction
Four hours in a police station.
Victor Kotov brutally beaten by the police.

Trolling **BURNING THE CONSTITUTION, 2020**

Location

Moscow apartment

Maria Alyokhina

Context

At the time when the amendments to the constitution were being made, I was continuously monitored.

Two or three unmarked cars followed us day and night, and several plainclothes officers were monitoring the entrance to my building. For this reason, my participation in the street action would have attracted a whole company of police, and the action wouldn't have been able to take place. So I decided to just make a little joke at home.

Hi, I'm Masha, and this is the New Constitution of the Russian Federation. It ALREADY, before any vote, says that Putin can rule forever.

Under the guise of "amendments," we are encouraged to legitimize the dictatorship and move away from democracy.

These amendments will not make your life better by voting FOR - you choose a permanent king, poverty and war. It is naive to believe that after 20 years in power these people want something other than staying there forever.

I am against the dictatorship in Russia, I am against corruption and theft of officials, I am against the cops who beat us in peaceful demonstrations, I am against the propagandists who make us enemies of the people, I am against torture, I am against the court, directly administered from the presidential administration, I am against that the traditions of our country are based on discrimination. I am against amendments to the constitution.

So I've decided to burn it.

Action
RAINBOW DIVERSION, 2020

Location

Moscow:
Federal Security Service on Lubyanka
Administration of the President of Russia
Russian Supreme Court
Ministry of Culture
Police station in Basmanny district

Maria Alyokhina
Lucy Shtein
Diana Burkot
Nika Nikulshina
Alexander Sofeev
Tim Bestsvet
Renat Davletgildeev
Elizaveta Diederich
Vasily Krestianinov
Alan Leonhard
Maria Timofeeva

Context

“There will never be any restrictions on the basis of orientation in Russia,” promised Putin. At the same time, the government was killing gay people in Chechnya, passing transphobic laws (to “strengthen the institution of the family”) and persecuting fathers of children born from surrogate mothers. To encourage people to vote for changes in the Constitution that allowed Putin to stay in power indefinitely, propaganda shared horrific homophobic videos aiming to convince our Russian citizens that staying in a same-sex family is worse for a kid than living in an orphanage.

Pussy Riot congratulates Putin on his 68th birthday and puts up rainbow flags on 5 of the most important government buildings in Russia - the Federal Security Service on Lubyanka, the Administration of the President of Russia, the Russian Supreme Court, the Ministry of Culture and the police station in Basmanny district.

Now is the time

We’re just doing our job

We chose rainbow flags as our gift to Putin as a symbol of missing love and freedom.

The state should not interfere in the life of the LGBTQ community. But if it does, then the community can intervene in the life of the state. You yourself like to say “symmetrical response” in such cases.

Therefore, we require from the government of Russia and Vladimir Putin himself:

1. Investigate the killings and kidnappings of gay, lesbian, transgender and queer people in Chechnya
2. Stop the harassment of activists and organizations who help the LGBTQ community
3. Pass a law that prevents discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation
4. Legalize same-sex partnerships
5. Stop the harassment of same-sex families, stop taking away children from these families
6. Abolish “a propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations” law as discriminatory and violating the right to freedom of expression
7. Make 7 October LGBTQ Visibility Day

Reaction:

Alexander Sofeev was arrested for a month. The other participants were detained and fined.

Action
CAREFUL, FRAGILE!, 2020

Location
Kremlin, Moscow

Rita Flores
Maria Alyokhina
Farhhad Israfilli-Gelman

Context
Since the protests of 2019, hundreds of people have been accused and several have been prosecuted. While people were receiving sentences, the police were testifying in court that they were frightened by a plastic cup that fell nearby. The plastic cup has been called a weapon for no reason, but the most terrible weapon directed against common people is the police state.

Attempt No. 1: National Unity Day
National Unity Day was invented by Putin to replace Revolution Day. I am not enthusiastic about Lenin's revolution, but the authorities are not afraid of him, they are afraid the word revolution itself.

We are at the Kremlin. Morning. Cops are on our tail.

Cut.

We exit the subway on the outskirts of Moscow. There doesn't seem to be a tail. No one is following us.

Cut.

Plastic bags with pita bread and kefir are falling on the ground. I fall too. Ten people in uniform run to question us, twisting our arms, knocking me to the ground.

Attempt No. 2: Police Day
- And what are you wearing?
- Kokoshniks
- Why?
- Well, we are Russians, so we put them on
- You're detained.

We're being issued a protocol on a non-existent article. In a month we'll be fined for it. Me and Rita for wearing Kokoshniks in the city centre, Farhhad and Samar for not wearing them.

Attempt No.3:
We finally did it without being detained immediately.

Reaction

We were detained by the police for the first two attempts. One of the charges literally says that we were detained for wearing a kokoshnik.

After the action, Rita was arrested almost immediately and issued 20 days of arrest. I was arrested a bit later.

Trolling
A SUITCASE AFTER CAREFUL, FRAGILE!, 2020

Location

Moscow
Our apartments

Maria Alyokhina
Lucy Shtein
Roman Durov

Context

Before my arrest, we decided to troll the cops a little and twice escaped from apartments that they were guarding.

The first time I dressed up as a boy and the second time I climbed into a suitcase and was lifted into a car boot by Lucy and Roma. I ran away from the cops in a suitcase and posted a video of it.

So the cops came to the third apartment, and started to guard the entrance. Our lawyer friend came down to the entrance, with the suitcase in his hand. The cops surrounded the lawyer and demanded that he open the suitcase. "We have information that there is a person in there", the cops began to yell.

"This is the property of a lawyer, according to the law you cannot touch it", the lawyer answers and shows the certificate.

"But we have information that there is a person inside and we need to arrest her!" the cops answer.

They fight for 10 minutes. In the end, the lawyer opens the suitcase – it's empty. We take pictures of everything that's happening from the balcony, wave to them from above and laugh.

Context

ESHNIKI

Centre E

Centre E is the so-called Centre Against Extremism. They are the Russian political police, providing permanent surveillance and organizing attacks on activists. Their officers are called Eshniki.

The work of the Centre E police involves creating fake accounts on social networks, following activists, politicians and artists – anyone who has ever been noticed speaking out against the government – subscribing and watching. They monitor our social networks for hours and then write reports. “Detected,” “Identified,” “Requesting action”. Usually, their accounts are empty profiles without photos and names, something like “Igor 015987,” but sometimes a personality breaks through the username.

hateeveryone – one Eshnik’s online nickname

Eshniks are following us, we film them, they film us. We laugh. On the territory of the Russian Federation we are always provided with a dignified escort by the officers of the

Centre Against Extremism – Centre E.

How to recognise officers from Centre E:

1. Pretending to speak on mobile phone, but actually filming you
2. Living in a grey/brown car under your window
3. Shoes with pointed toes
4. Puffy jackets
5. Small black bags

Criminal case HOUSE ARREST, 2021-22

Location:
Moscow

Maria Alyokhina
Lucy Shtein

Context

Navalny returned to Russia after being poisoned and was arrested at the airport. After that, a large demonstration is announced in support of him and other political prisoners.

We are going to participate.

The apartment where me and Lucy are is surrounded by the police. They turn off our electricity to try to get us to leave the apartment, to be able to arrest and detain us so we will not make it to the demonstration.

Our friend comes over to see if the police are still outside our door and he is detained by them when he enters our floor, right by the elevator. A second friend is detained by the police when he manages to slip us a powerbank.

Both are arrested for 15 days. For no reason.

The third friend arrives by car in the morning, we quickly go down, jump into his car and drive towards the demonstration. In a few days, a criminal case will be opened against this friend.

Reaction

HOUSE ARREST SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS JANUARY 2021

Masha's instagram post:

We have guests! Lucy's apartment is surrounded by cops and cut off from electricity. Therefore, I want to say: Comrade major, go fuck yourself, we have candles and let's meet tomorrow at 2 pm in the city centre for our freedom and yours!

Lucy's tweet:

Joking is cool, but on 23 January, we need to take to the streets and tell the old fart and his friends to go to hell (even though I don't believe in anything and expect nothing, it's better than just sitting at home)

Criminal case
HOUSE ARREST ARREST, JANUARY 2021

Location
Moscow

Maria Alyokhina
Lucy Shtein

We get to the demonstration and protest together with the others, then we decide to go closer to the Kremlin. On the way, near the Bolshoi Theatre, the police detain us and take us to the police station. We spend the night in the police department. The next day, the court issues me a fine, and Lucy is arrested for 10 days.

Two days later we find out that a criminal case has been opened against us. As part of the criminal case, the court puts us under house arrest, they put electronic bracelets on our ankles. During the investigation and trial, we, as accomplices, are prohibited from communicating with each other, leaving the place of house arrest and using the internet. You aren't even able to take out the trash, go grocery shopping or order delivery. Your home turns into a prison cell. Your movements become controlled by the tracking tag on your ankle. Any trips like going to the court or visiting the doctor can only happen when escorted by a penitentiary service officer called "inspector".

Me and Lucy were put under house arrest, split up in two different apartments.

Criminal case
VIOLATING HOUSE ARREST SPRING 2021

1. The first violation of house arrest happened suddenly. I just missed Lucy, downloaded the taxi app (nothing happens if you use the internet as long as you stay off my social media) and went from my apartment to hers. Two hours later, the apartment was surrounded by police, they took me to the police station, from where the inspector took me and returned me to my apartment.

Everyone thought that house arrest would be changed into prison, as it is required by law, but suddenly the investigator did not do it, there was no instruction from above.

2. Once we managed to schedule medical appointments in the same clinic at the same time and met in the x-ray basement. We had been developing this plan for a couple of weeks.
No one found out.

We were breaking the rules

3. Then we were both brought to an appeal hearing. On that day, someone had called the court with a false bomb threat, so people were evacuated from the building. We were on the street together and kissed. The investigator was very dissatisfied, he shouted to our inspectors: "Stop this, do something." But they did nothing.

Reaction

ARREST CAROUSEL 2021

Location
Moscow

Maria Alyokhina
Lucy Shtein
Nika Nikulshina
Alexander Sofeev
Anna Kuzminykh

Context

Detention Centre No. 2

In the summer of 2021, the detentions of Pussy Riot began for no reason. On the streets, and near the houses, they detained and imprisoned us for 16 days. On leaving the detention centre we were detained again and imprisoned for another 15 days.

We call these chain of detentions arrest carousels.

Reaction

ARREST CAROUSEL 2021

We are all serving our arrest in the same special detention centre – Detention centre No. 2 “Mnevniki”.

One of us managed to bring the phone inside and we took super-romantic, lo-fi photos.

Arrest carousels of Pussy Riot & friends / 15 days / 2021-22

1. 7 May 2021 / Nika / 5 nights / resistance
2. 8 May 2021 / Sasha / 5 nights / hooliganism
3. 16 June 2021 / Nika / 15 days / resistance
4. 21 June 2021 / Sasha (+ friend) / 15 nights / hooliganism
5. 22 June 2021 / Lucy / 15 days / resistance
6. 22 June 2021 / Anya / 15 days / resistance
7. 22 June 2021 / Masha (+ 2 friends) / 15 nights / resistance
8. 2 July 2021 / Nika (+ Roma) / 15 nights / resistance
9. 7 July 2021 / Masha () / 15 days / resistance
10. 9 July 2021 / Anya / 10 days / resistance
11. 21 July, 2021 / Rita / 15 days / resistance
12. 12 August 2021 / Rita / 15 days / Nazi propaganda
13. 3 November 2021 / Farhad / 15 days / resistance
14. 16 December 2021 / Lucy / 14 days / Nazi propaganda
15. 16 December 2021 / Masha / 15 days / Nazi propaganda
16. 7 February 2022 / Masha / 15 days / Nazi propaganda
17. 27 February 2022 / Masha / 15 days / resistance
18. 13 March 2022 / Masha / 15 days / resistance

"detention center" is a jail for minor offenses (small fights, drunk driving) - where one can be incarcerated for no more than 15-30 days at a time. The detention center is located in the city, and the administrative case required to incarcerate a political activist there can be written/fabricated within an hour. It is a very easy tool for exerting pressure.

Detention Centre #2 looks like a hostel stylized as a prison. Mustard-coloured walls, high ceilings. Round lamps in black mesh covers, reminiscent of a woman's breast in erotic lingerie. In the cells, there are inscriptions - notes from those who have been here. In Sasha and Mitya's cell, one of them reads, "Navalny was here," and in ours, "Rita - 20 days for an action near the Kremlin."

Reaction

CRIMINAL CASE – HOUSE ARREST REVIEWING CASE FILES, JUNE-JULY 2021

During the arrest carousels, Lucy and I are still involved in the criminal case. We have electronic bracelets on our feet. Every day, the paddy wagon takes us from the cell at the detention centre to the investigative committee to get acquainted with the thick books of the criminal case, sewn with white threads.

1 instagram post = 6 thick criminal case books.

In the investigative committee, we read these books together with the lawyers, and then we are returned back to the cell. We have fun, because this is the first time in the six months of being accomplices that we can spend the night together.

Reaction

CRIMINAL CASE - HOUSE ARREST SENTENCE AUTUMN 2021

Finally, in the fall, we receive the sentence in our criminal cases. The electronic bracelets will have to stay on our ankles, but now we will be able to stay in the same apartment and to leave the apartment during the daytime, when the verdict finally arrives at the Department of Corrections.

Reaction

ARRESTS FOR NAZI PROPAGANDA, WINTER 2021-2022

Location

Moscow

Maria Alyokhina

Lucy Shtein

NAZI PROPAGANDA

Autumn/winter 2021, when most of the Pussy Riot members had left the country, the state began to make carousels again against me and Lucy. A key difference was that the charges this time were not drawn up for “resisting” the police, as usual, but for “Nazi propaganda”.

For instance, in 2018, when Lucy was a municipal deputy in Moscow, she shared a link to a fundraising campaign for the Ukrainian military forces. Pro-Kremlin people responded by calling her a Nazi. One of them made a youtube video about what a Nazi she was, including this collage of her, that says “Lucy Shtein fascist deputy”. The hat obviously being his addition to the photo.

Lucy reposted the collage with a quote from a song by Lisa Monetochka: Mama I don’t “siege heil”. Three years later Lucy was arrested for it, accused of Nazi propaganda.

Three months after that, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the term “Nazi” began to be used in relation to Ukrainians, to justify the war.

Context

ACTIVISTS’ FRONT DOORS AFTER RUSSIA STARTED THE WAR AGAINST UKRAINE, 2022

“Don’t sell your motherland, collaborator”

Front door of Lucy Shtein - Pussy Riot activist, Moscow

“Here lives the traitor”

Front door of Alexey Milovanov - activist, Kalingrad

“We know what you’ve done, Nazi”

Front door of Daria Heikinen - activist, St. Petersburg

“Don’t sell your motherland, Front do Dima”

Front door of Dima Ivanov - activist, Moscow

“Traitor”

Front door of Kristina Vorotnikova - activist, St. Petersburg

“Don’t sell your motherland, Front bitch”

Front door of Olga Misik - activist, Moscow

“Let’Z finish the war”

Rita Flores' front door - Pussy Riot activist, Moscow

I heard about the start of the war on the radio while in a special detention centre during one of my 15-day arrests.

In winter, we did not understand why we, and other activists, were being imprisoned for "Nazi propaganda". In the spring, in February 2022, Putin unleashed a full-scale war on Ukraine and propaganda began calling all Ukrainians Nazis.

After the beginning of the war, mass harassment and imprisonment of all those who protested against the war began. War censorship was introduced. Putin's regime forbade even calling the war a war, but instead called it a "special military operation".

The main emblem and the new swastika is the letter Z.

Centre E co-ordinated these attacks on activists' doors, labelling them as traitors, foreign agents etc.

Reaction

ESCAPE 2022

Location

Moscow – Europe

Maria Alyokhina
Lucy Shtein

Federal Search, wanted list
Delivery costume escape
Mr. Krys (Mr. Rat)

Context

The war had begun. When I was put on the arrest carousel for 15 days, Centre E was constantly on duty at our house, so in order to leave, Lucy needed a disguise. A bright green uniform for food delivery couriers – Lucy buys it on a used goods service, where in Russia you can buy anything. It's the perfect disguise – you're simultaneously visible from everywhere and invisible to all. Couriers constantly move around the city and go in and out of buildings, and nobody pays any attention.

The uniform consists of a winter jacket with a hood, capable of withstanding local frosts, a large thermal bag slung over the shoulders, and even a signature mask – made during the time of COVID. The pandemic played into the hands of many activists in terms of the ability to hide their faces.

Early in the morning, Lucy changes into the uniform, puts Mr. Rat into the thermal bag on her back, and leaves the apartment. By the time the police come to their senses, Lucy and Mr. Rat will already be in Belarus.

Lucy then passes the uniform on to me, and it will come in handy when I finally decide to leave to help Ukraine win the war. It was very useful, because the house where I was staying was surrounded by police. The suit allowed me to go out the back door unnoticed.

Reaction

Masha and Lucy appear on the Russian federal wanted list.

Action
SCARECROW, 2022

Location
Tbilisi, Georgia

Anna Kuzminykh
Lada Titova of Ukrainian feminist collective Femen
Anna Zyazeva

Context
The action is timed to the end of winter and the onset of spring, the transition from bad to good.

After the bonfire was lit, the Russians who had gathered for the rally, who had mostly left over the past few weeks, as well as Belarusians and Ukrainians living in Georgia, began to dance.

“As Zelensky said, ‘life will defeat death, and light will defeat darkness,’ and Putin will be punished for all crimes in The Hague. We know for sure – good will win.”

Reaction
A criminal case was started against Anna Kuzminykh in Russia, despite the action having taken place outside the country.

Putin's Ashes, 2022

Pussy Riot members:
Nadya Tolokonnikova
Gera Riot
Yulia Shur
+ anonymous

Context

Members of Pussy Riot burn a 3x3 m portrait of the Putin, perform rituals, and cast spells aimed to chase Putin away.

Reaction

A few months later a criminal case was opened on Nadya, under the "Pussy Riot criminal article" - for "hurting the feelings of believers". This article was introduced to Russia's criminal code in 2012 while Pussy Riot members were on trial for the Punk Prayer.

Nadya was put on Russia's wanted list.

Music video MAMA DON'T WATCH TV 2022

Maria Alyokhina
Diana Burkot
Taso Pletner
Olga Borisova

Context

STATEMENT. This song is our statement against the war that Putin started in Ukraine.

On 24 February 2022, Russia began a wide-scale military attack on Ukraine. Russian bombs and rockets destroyed Ukrainian homes, schools and hospitals, wrecking towns and destroying lives.

We believe that Putin's regime is a terrorist regime, and Putin himself, his officials, generals and propagandists are war criminals.

The chorus is based on the words of a captured Russian conscript soldier who, in a telephone conversation with his mother, said "Mom, there are no Nazis here, don't watch TV." Daily, Russian propaganda poisons the hearts of people with hatred.

Those who oppose Putin are imprisoned, exposed to military poisons and killed. The tradition of political poisoning goes back over 100 years – Laboratory X was the first lab for military poisons, created by the NKVD.

Opposition figures of anti-government movements became victims of the "experiments". Putin and the FSB are proud of this "tradition" and continue it: Alexander Litvinenko, Sergei Skripal, Vladimir Kara-Murza, Pyotr Verzilov, Alexei Navalny.

Russia has continued its military aggression on the territory of Ukraine since 2014, when Russian troops annexed Crimea and began the occupation of the Donbass region. Every day since then Ukraine has had to fight for the right to live and for freedom, fight to guarantee its sovereignty.

During all these years, the international community has looked for compromise and conducted business with Russia, at the same time sponsoring Putin's cruel war. The Kremlin receives billions of Euros from the sale of oil and gas and each day this money converts into Ukrainian blood.

We call for:

1. An EMBARGO on the purchase of Russian oil and gas, on the sale of weapons and police ammunition to Russia.

2. SIEZE the western bank accounts and property of Russian officials and oligarchs and introduce personal sanctions against them.

3. An INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL to try Vladimir Putin, employees of Russian state propaganda, army officers and everyone who is responsible for the genocide of the Ukrainian nation.

LYRICS

Mama Don't Watch TV

The howls of Mariupol
Underneath the bright blue domed sky
A sacred throne is never left unfilled
And its power purchased long ago
The President Eraser rubs out everything in his path
"Z" means a swastika
The tanks for the holiday
A Russian classic
While the old people are decorated with ribbons
We are becoming "foreign agents"

Contraband leaves for the motherland, Cargo 200
They won't show you that on the evening news
Finish school – take a rifle
Up to 15 years in prison for an anti-war poster Russian warship – Go fuck yourself
Tank – is in the swamp
The future – on the chopping block
The cult of victory as the basis of everything Veterans' ashes mixed with coke fit for
MPs
Routine of sadism, Lubyanka mix
And for those who are too outspoken – Laboratory X

Mama, I'm held prisoner
Don't watch TV
Mama, there are no Nazis here
Mama, why is the war
Called a "special operation"?
I don't get it

Putin likes your indifference
For 10 years the West has supplied him with weapons
In the name of the Russian Federation
Poverty, murder, sentences, sanctions
Nonconformity?
Independent opinion?
From where did they prepare an attack on Belarus?
Your death is no big deal, your family will be rewarded
For some war is war, for others it's a dear mother-in-law
"That's all, daughter, mama loves you, goodbye."
Red nails, hands in the earth

BUCHA

Dear sister, we are here without a cross

Monstrous spring has decided to come
Unnecessary amended constitution
It's time for us to complete the revolution
Let Moscow burn
The world is in blood
It can't be washed away
There's nothing to cover it

Lots of land, but they took Crimea
Forgive us
But this is unforgivable

Mama, I'm held prisoner
Don't watch TV
Mama, there are no Nazis here
Mama, why is the war
Called a "special operation"?

Ukraine,
I love you.

Music video
GRAFFITI, 2022-

Location

Vienna / Prague / Minden / Leibzig / Freiburg / Dresden / Canterbury / Budva /
Bremen / Bratislava / Bern / Reykjavík
Bratislava

Maria Alyokhina
Diana Burkot
Taso Pletner
Olga Borisova

Context

War is not that far away.

Reaction

One arrest in Switzerland.

Music Video **SWAN LAKE, 2023**

Maria Alyokhina
Diana Burkot
Olga Borisova
Lucy Shtein

Context

Russian state propaganda poisons people's hearts and brains with hatred. Putin's propagandists are no less war criminals than the soldiers who kill and rape the civilian population of Ukraine or the generals who give these orders. The cult of victory has become the assembly point of the new fascism in Russia.

Lessons of "forced patriotism" were introduced in schools after the invasion in Ukraine. Teachers make groups of schoolchildren get in formations to spell out giant letter Zs with their bodies in classrooms and school gyms to show their support for the war. All over Russia, children are forced to write "kind letters" to the occupying soldiers. In Yekaterinburg, fifth-grader Timofey wrote in his letter that he wished the military "to return home, not to kill people on foreign soil and not to cause harm." The teacher condemned the child and he was harassed by classmates for "insufficient patriotism". "Soldier, don't kill people" was written by a boy and it inspired us to write a song.

This, at first glance invisible and quiet protest of a child against the war is not the only one. Propaganda has made it so that children who take an anti-war position are bullied, beaten and sent to orphanages. Children are being prepared to become meat — "the happiness of the Motherland is more important than life."

We took the musical theme of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake as the basis of the song, it was this ballet that the television would broadcast in the Soviet Union to hide reality.

LYRICS

Swan Lake

The poison passes through the TV cable
Leave everything here that you hadn't already left
A crucified boy on the bulletin board
How many went to kill, believing the killers
The maps of empires have bled

The value of life is overestimated
A woman should give birth more

Don't pity the soldier — women will birth more
They don't consider us human hereorgotten
No one is forgotten, nothing is f
Veterans eat from an empty trough

"The happiness of the motherland is more important than life"
"sovereign democracy"

“national interests”
“preemptive strike”
“gesture of goodwill”
“it's not all so straightforward”
“bombing themselves”
“discrediting the army”
“traditional values”
“expense optimization”
“negative growth”
“strategic retreat”
“import substitution”
“the will of millions”
“informing is a patriot's duty”
“partial mobilization”
“denazification”
“nuclear ash”
“border alignment”
“clap” ”
“smoke”
“borders alignment”
“no panic”

We won't forgive you
And will trample the remains
Ostankino Tower will burn beautifully

Half the country is left homeless
Executioners in epaulets drink
Blocking units, prisoner march guards
The military enlistment officer checks the maternity hospital
A child sews a military robe
Russian field of execution
Ranges

In a black christened bag
A Russian groom goes home

Life with a wire attached to the anus
A summons, vodka on the bus, farewell
Mom knits a bulletproof vest against the cold
Sister imprisoned for anti-war slogan

Replacing imports with dead mice
Replacing men with gifted rams
Replacing brains — Russia today
Winter leaves, hell arrives

Women and children scream in agony
Chekists drink tea, watching the sunset

No one will hear your plea
The National Guard shoots straight into the crowd

Not a defeat, but a regrouping
Not cargo 200, but repackaging
Brotherly graves dug according to standards
We apologize for the inconvenience
We apologize for the glitches
War is a celebration, and everything is fine

WE WON'T FORGIVE YOU AND WE'LL TRAMPLE THE REMAINS
OSTANKINO TOWER WILL BURN BEAUTIFULLY!