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**Artistic Practices on the Service of the Counter-Hegemony:
The Case of Contemporary Russian Artist Pyotr Pavlensky**
MA thesis

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Tartu 2019

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Acknowledgment

The writing and completion of this thesis would not have been possible without support of my supervisors Dr. Andreas Ventsel and Katarina Damčević. I want to express my gratitude which is beyond any words for the eternal patience of Andreas and Katarina. I also want to thank the University of Tartu for giving a chance for pursuing master degree in the program of the European Union and Russian studies. A special thanking word I want to dedicate to my mother Yekaterina who has been supporting me all the way through the period of my studies, to my friends Dinara Pisareva who inspired me to apply for European Union and Russian studies program, Dinara, Aizhan, Yoko, Daniil, Ainur, Caio and Ariel for their encouragement, to my beloved colleagues Valeria, Alesi, Hilda, Dainis, Bryan, and to my family Andrey, Ol'ga, Talgat, Alexander, Ruslan and Lena for their love and kind words. I want to thank my dearest partners and closest friends Oleg Ivanov and Nikita Naumov for being so supportive in multiple ways.

Abstract

The present thesis explores how the artistic practices can challenge the status quo of the hegemonic discourse and raise the awareness among masses about the socio-political issues. This work primarily focuses on the artistic projects of the Russian contemporary artist Pyotr Pavlensky and attempts to investigate how Pavlensky undermines the legitimacy of the state apparatus by employing artistic means. A discursive analysis of Pavlensky's interviews and lectures, as well as his commentaries are used in the research to accomplish the stated tasks.

The relevance of the topic of how artistic practices can serve counter-hegemony is justified by the fact that Russian as an authoritarian state employs oppressive and controlling strategies to retain its power and dominance within domestic public discourse. The political forms of art are illustrative instances of resistance against the oppressive regime which can produce a shift in the balance of power relations. Though, this shift might not result immediately, it still can figure in the public discourse and thus not only raise the awareness of the civil society about the social issues, but also it has a potential to engage the social groups of the common political interests into political discourse. In the raised discourse, the oppressed individuals acquire their voices through those who support them, as it is in case of political dissidents who are placed under the custody or forced psychiatric treatment. Political activists and artists can draw people's attention the political dissidents against whom the forced use of psychiatric treatment is applied, and in doing this political dissidents and inmates acquire "representation" in a public discourse, thus mediating their needs and demands for justice.

The discourse analysis conducted in the work illustrates how Pavlensky unveils the oppressive and manipulative character of the hegemonic state apparatus. Once the mechanisms of control and manipulation become unobscured the state apparatus is subjected to the critique for the abuse of power. From the analyzed data, namely interviews, lectures and Manifesto it becomes evident what are the techniques the state uses as well as through which institutions it exercises its power over the subjects. The presented results allow to see what role performs the political artist and how they contribute into the public discourse.

Keywords: *Pavlensky, Russia, hegemony, counter-hegemony, political art, artistic practices, state apparatus*

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1. Introduction

This thesis attempts to estimate the political and social value of art by focusing on the case study of Pyotr Pavlensky's works. The given work has two general research questions:

1. How art can raise an awareness on the social and political issues?
2. How does the artist Pyotr Pavlensky by the means of artistic practices attempts to challenge the state apparatus?

One of the arguments presented here claims that art is not only to provide aesthetic pleasure to a spectator, or depict some significant historical event, but it might rather have a normative function, which seeks to defend and promote ideas and ideals. In fact, artistic practices in different historical periods and traditions emphasise distinct features and functions, thus in antiquity it displayed ideals of beauty, whereas feminist art criticizes patriarchy. Thus, contemporary art that emerged in twentieth century tends to reconsider the very phenomenon of art by focusing on its conceptual aspects and bringing about new forms of expression. The Russian contemporary art according to Jonson Lena involves the following art trends originated in the beginning of the 20th century: the Russian avant-garde started in 1910s (the Russian artist group *Jack the Diamond* (Bubnovyi Valet) Natalya Goncharova and Mikhail Larinov, Malevich, Rozanova), Socialist Realism, Russian abstract art (*Drugoe Iskusstvo*) in 1950s, Moscow Conceptualism (Iliya Kavakov, Collective Actions, Andrei Monastyrskii, Boris Groys) and Sots-Art (Mikhail Roshal-Fedorov) in 1970s, Moscow Actionism in 1990s-200s (artist group Voina, Oleg Kulik, Oleg Mavromati, Osmolovskii group) (Jonson 2015: 22-29), and other instances which art critics still struggle to categorize such as Pussy Riot and Pyotr Pavlensky.

Contemporary art in many regards tries to sensitise socio-political issues by problematising particular power relations, especially when it comes to abuse of power by authorities, domination of some social or political group and its attempts to exclude minorities, revealing the techniques of control and oppression over a population, illuminate environmental problems, gender or racial inequalities, etc. There are many examples where art engages into political discourse, especially when it comes to such

niches as feminism, LGBTQI+ rights, political prisoners, ethnic minorities, media propaganda and so on. As it comes to contemporary forms of art, one can also notice that art does perform normative function, namely it promotes specific values, norms, worldview, political agenda be it liberal or conservative; by doing it, artists can deliberately attempt to criticise or subvert the status quo of dominant hegemonic discourse of the state apparatus. Thus, artists engage in discursive practices where counter-hegemonic discourses emerges and the established systems of meaning are contested. The study of contemporary art and artists within the context of political science is of great importance and to support this statement Boris Groys argues: "The belief in the balance of power has a regulatory character - and hence modern art has its own power, its own stance: It favours anything that establishes or maintains the balance of power and tends to exclude or try to outweigh anything that distorts this balance" (Groys 2008: 2).

To give an example on how artist challenge the hegemonic discourse, the Swedish feminist artist Monica Sjöö in her painting *God Giving Birth* (1968) depicts a black woman as a God, thus attempting to question the patriarchal culture along with its religions (Fritz 2018: 330). In doing this, Monica attempted to problematize the inferior situation of women in the society within patriarchal hegemony (Artcornawall.org, n.d.). Or, another example of the Syrian satirists artist group Masasit Mati who attempted to criticise the "godlike" regime of Bashar al-Assad. In their satirist videos of puppet show (*Top Goon*, 2011) Masasit Mati are attacking the regime's propaganda, as well as criticising the armed resistance against Bashar al-Assad, by saying that this movement is as monstrous as the regime itself (Betty, 2013). In Mexico, the group of artists the Assembly of Revolutionary Artists of Oaxaca (ASARO) organized an exhibition *The Ink Shouts* (2008) against the social conflicts between the Mexican state Oaxaca and the government in 2006. The conflicts resulted in deaths of eighteen people. Thus, the artists attempted to express their indignation on social injustice and "the modern form of oppression" of the state authorities, and the Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz in particular¹.

Political artists actively engage in meaning production, the practices of signification. The process of semiosis is constitutive to social reality, namely the practices of signification, art making or performing contribute to creation and articulation of discourses, building-up of identities and social structures, such as norms, values,

¹ Fowler Museum at UCLA, *La tinta grita/The Ink Shouts: The Art of Social Resistance in Oaxaca*, 2008, <https://www.fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/la-tinta-gritathe-ink-shouts-art-social-resistance-oaxaca-mexico/>, retrieved March 12, 2015

institutional setting, laws. Meanwhile, artists also become the products of discursive field once they undertake some social or political position, among these discursive effects can be listed identity. By introducing, structuring, establishing hierarchies among specific utterances, narratives, texts, signs and codes artists produce discourse. By a discursive articulation in the form of diverse artistic practices such as performances, artists structure a discourse by situating some meanings into dominant positions, and excluding other by rendering them irrelevant. It is worthy to note, that according to this logic some texts and identities undertake dominant positions others become subjected to deliberate exclusion (Lotman 1971 :18). In this regard, political powers such as authorities, institutions and government can intentionally obscure its methods of oppression, control and manipulation over its subjects. Political artists try to unveil these oppressive techniques and raise the awareness among people by accentuating and problematising social issues. This thesis presumes the hypothesis that art can challenge the status quo of the hegemonic discourse by articulating the critique against the state apparatus, however it does not necessarily guarantee that the regime and its institutional setting will be successfully undermined. The second hypothesis argues that artists by the means of artistic practices through the mass media can raise an awareness about mechanisms of control and oppression exercised by the state apparatus. Thus, the given paper focuses on the ways how the artist Pyotr Pavlensky attempts to criticize the hegemony of the Russian state apparatus under Putin's regime.

In relation to this thesis it is worthy mentioning that the previous research papers which were conducted on the topic of political arts with the case study on Pyotr Pavlensky. However, these works do not provide an extensive research on the artistic works of Pyotr in the theoretical frame of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's concept of hegemony, on which the empirical data of this work will be drawn. It also important to note, that the present thesis focuses on the discourse analysis which is presented differently and more elaborated than works listed below.

Among these research paper can be listed *Political Activism in the Authoritarian Regime: Moscow Actionism as a Cause* by Mariam Shuman (2017). In her work, Shuman claims that in the authoritarian states as Russia with minimal democracy there is still a room for political protests in the form of artistic practices. She employs a discourse analysis and the theory of "boomerang pattern" to explore how political ideas voiced by artists help to develop the civil society in the authoritarian state. Another work dedicates

to the study of Pavlensky's artistic practices was conducted by Varvara Esipova in her Master Thesis *Body and Pain in Contemporary Art (On the Phenomenon of Petr Pavlensky)* (2017). In her works she provides a meticulous analysis on the role of bodily techniques in art and they are interrelated with pain. She draws her theory on the case study of Pavlensky's actions. A recent work on Pavlensky actions was published by Andrey Makarychev and Sergey Medvedev in 2018, *Biopolitical art and the struggle for Sovereignty in Putin's Russia*. In the given paper, the authors research the biopolitical implications of the artistic works of Pavlensky. Their work based on the concept of biopower and theories of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben. One more work was done by Kate Ehle *Corporeal Canvas: Art, Protest, and Power in Contemporary Russia* (2017), in which the author researches the corporal protests in the form of art in contemporary Russia. The author focuses on the phenomenon of cultural transition from the literary texts to new forms of aesthetic expression. Ehle draws her research on the theories of Giorgio Agamben biopolitics, Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse's subversive affirmation, and Mikhail Bakhtin's grotesque body. Additional research was conducted by Asia Bazdyrieva named *When The Silence Speaks: Political Art of Petr Pavlensky* (2016). In her work, Bazdyrieva discusses the aesthetic role of Pavlensky performances with a focus on a body as a means of expression. Bazdyrieva studies how the artist reasserts the individual control over one's body. Similar study with a theoretical focus on the concept of hegemony was conducted to understand how aesthetic expressions of the agro-ecological movement in Brazil help to create a counter-hegemonic resistance by defining the image of the common enemy (Flávia Naves & Yuna Reis, 2017). The given thesis is primarily oriented towards the context of the Russian politics with a case study of Pyotr Pavlensky. The present work attempts to grasp the period 2012 until 2017 with a specific case study.

The specific aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that artistic movements and artists in particular can reveal the mechanisms of control and oppression imposed by the hegemonic discourse, and in doing it to criticise and challenge the hegemonic state apparatus. The study researches the value of art within the context of hegemonic struggle. In this regard, the thesis attempts to see how an artist can forge a discourse of resistance and critique against a hegemony. Since the concept hegemony is approached as a discursive structure the thesis will deal with discursive elements such as actors and their discursively constructed identities, utterances they pronounce, articulatory practices in

the form of social action. In this regard, any attempt to reveal the oppressive mechanisms of control and manipulation by the state apparatus are considered as a counter-hegemonic articulation that challenges the state power, but does not necessarily undermine it. By disclosing the naturalized processes of the oppressive system such as manipulation of mass media, use of oppressive laws in the political interests of the state the artists through their access to mass media raise awareness about these techniques of control imposed by the regime.

The present work tends to understand how artists can engage into hegemonic struggle by contesting the status quo of the dominating discourse, especially how social agents by the means of art and artistic production in general can critically approach the techniques of control, oppression, domination and manipulation implemented by such institutions as media, government, prisons, psychiatric hospital, security services (Foucault 1977)². The case study is related to contemporary Russian artist Pyotr Pavlensky who is (in)famous for his radical and controversial artworks. To be more specific, the thesis researches the discourse created, sustained and articulated by Pavlensky with primary focus on his actions, interviews, lectures and *Manifesto*. Thus, this study seeks to understand how by the means of art Pavlensky creates the identity positions, and what are the roles and functions attributed to them within political discourse. The given choice of material for analysis is helpful, because it provides a more detailed and profound understanding of the artist's intentions, as well as allows to construct the image of the hegemony (from the position of the artist). In his actions accompanied by the consequent interviews Pavlensky explains his political position, attitude towards Putin regime, as well as he gives discussions on why he chooses specific means of aesthetic expression. From the *Manifesto*, we can learn on how Pavlensky portrays the state apparatus and see how he elaborates his political positions. The given study is focusing on the potential of art to intervene into hegemonic discourse with an aim to question its status quo. Taking into account that an artist can act on the behalf of misrepresented social groups it is important to investigate what are the means employed to voice the needs of the oppressed.

"To give a voice" does not necessarily mean to let others speak in a literate sense. In fact, in this research "to give a voice" implies that the conditions of the victims of the

² An example of Foucauldian concept of Panopticon, in which Foucault discusses the mechanisms of social surveillance and control

oppressive laws and the Russian justice system, along as of indoctrination by the state media become visible to the public. By pointing at the oppressive laws of the state apparatus and accentuating on its methods of terror Pavlensky creates a precedent that draws audience's attention to the prisoners of the band Pussy Riot who received jail sentence for hooliganism in 2012, to the Russian LGBTQI+ community against which was implemented law of anti-gay propaganda, to the political dissidents against whom the forced psychiatry was used, to the victims of Crimea annexation, to the civil society in the whole that cannot freely express its political critique against the state. As the precedent is created and the discussion about it is disseminated throughout mass media the audience becomes not only aware of the mechanisms of control and deterrence of the state apparatus, but also about the victims of the regime whose political interests and demands are underrepresented within the public discourse and who cannot speak for themselves freely. Pavlensky does not speak for those oppressed social groups immediately but he reveals the oppressive effects of the state justice system and abuse of power of the institutions which caused the lack of political engagement and representation for these social groups. In this vein of reasoning, Pavlensky makes a reclamation of the political interests and demands by stating the existing socio-political issues of those who fell the victims of them. Through his actions the civil society is informed that there are social groups which are in need of proper justice system, non-discriminatory legislation, freedom of expression and right to criticize the state and its apparatus without a risk of being imprisoned or fined. Therefore, this analysis allows to conclude that Pavlensky indirectly voices the political interests and demands of the marginalized social groups.

Art has a socio-political function since an artist can propagate the interests and needs of a social group. Artistic practices as a form of expression can inform about the current challenges a society is facing. As a means of a critique political art can point at the inequalities or inadequate representation of a social group. This study also contributes into analysis of how by the use of artistic practices the hegemonic discourse is questioned. Thus, the importance of the thesis is justified by its attempts to scrutinize the means of artistic resistance against the hegemony, the ways of revealing the mechanisms of oppression and manipulation, and complement the understanding of the hegemonic struggle via discourse analysis.

The relevance of the study is explained by its emphasis on the discursive struggle. Diverse discourses compete one against another to establish its monopoly over

meaning. Thus, a discourse that succeeds to set this monopoly becomes a hegemonic, or a dominant one. Being in a dominant position it becomes possible to set a political agenda and promote state's interests (which in authoritarian states might not always coincide with those of the civil society), exercise control over citizens. Domination of one social groups implies a submission or exclusion of another one. This study by applying the methods of discourse and contextual analyses seeks to understand how artists can reveal these mechanisms of control and exclusion imposed and exercised by the hegemonic discourse and the dominant social group.

The thesis does not pursue the aim to estimate the aesthetic value of Pavlensky works or to subject them to the deliberate analysis. In fact, as a primary purpose of the thesis is to explore the socio-political potential and function of the artistic works of Pavlensky within the context of the contemporary Russia by grasping the period from 2012 to 2017: *Stitch* (also known as *Seam*) (2012), *Carcass* (2013), *Fixation* (2013), *Freedom* (2014), *Segregation* (2014), *Threat* (2015). The present work differs from the previous articles that study the phenomenon of Pavlensky in terms of its methods and approach. In fact, the thesis undertakes a method of discourse analysis and focuses on specific instances of Pavlensky's actions and utterances that contribute to the formation of counter-hegemonic discourse. In relation to this, the thesis partly relies on theoretical framework developed by Antonio Gramsci on the concept hegemony, and to a greater degree on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theoretizations of hegemony as a discursive construct. The thesis also attempts to research the power of artistic practices in the context of the contemporary Russian politics, namely how art can disclose mechanisms of oppression and control maintained by the state apparatus. Therefore, the present thesis focuses on how Pavlensky employs artistic means to articulate the meaning with an attempt to question the legitimate status of the hegemonic state apparatus, i.e. institutions. In this research, Pavlensky's artistic works are seen contextually and for this reason it is essential to envisage them as precedents, events on the basis of which further articulatory practices are engendered and exercised. In this regard, any dialogue, interview, lecture, utterance and commentary produced by Pavlensky on his works are considered as counter-hegemonic intervention when they are employed with an attempt to reveal or criticize the oppressive character of the hegemonic state apparatus. It is essential first to expose the oppressive character of the state apparatus and Putin regime before the critique against it is enabled. Thus, the major point that thesis strives to reach

is to see how Pavlensky articulates his critique and reveals the mechanisms of control and oppression by undertaking discursive and contextual analyses, where the prevailing subject of research is the content of Pavlensky's works and how they are related to the socio-political context, rather than the formal and aesthetic properties. This decision is made for the sole purpose to follow the research questions and fulfil the aim that the thesis strives to reach. For the sake of the clarity, the works of Pavlensky are perused as a phenomenon of the political art with an emphasis on actionist art which will be discussed further. It is also of high value to refer to Jan Mukařovský's work *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* (1970) where the authors explains that art as a socio-cultural phenomenon might possess other functions than aesthetic and depending on the context an artwork can manifest its aesthetic and extra-aesthetic properties differently. Having this in mind it becomes legitimate to analyse solely socio-political aspects of Pavlensky's actions. There is a remarkable feature of some if not the most instances of contemporary art where the art object or practice manifests its both artistic and non-artistic properties: "...in the context of contemporary art, individual artworks began to be paradox-objects that embody simultaneously thesis and antithesis. Thus *Fountain* by Duchamp is artwork and non-artwork at the same time" (Groys 2008: 3). Therefore, artworks might be subjected to the analysis based solely on the objectives established by the research, therefore the thesis should not necessarily embed aesthetic properties of the studied art phenomenon among its tasks. Moreover, the contemporary forms of art in their paradox produce paradoxical reaction which in fact reflect the context or *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the age, epoch) with which the artworks resonate (Groys 2008: 4).

2. Theoretical Framework

The concept of art is polysemic, it might have various connotations depending on the context where the notion of art is applied. Historically and culturally, the types and the meanings of art vary, thus endowing the term with complexity and ambiguity (Bradley 2007: 23). Taking this fact into consideration it is indispensable to provide the notion of art with specific definition which would allow to distinguish it from what art is not.

Theoretical corpus of the thesis is primarily based on works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's notion of hegemony and their understanding of ontological grounds of the political and social. The concept of hegemony is useful since it allows to acknowledge a dominance of a social group over others. It also helps to understand how social agents maintain the existing order, by reproducing social practices and meanings within a dominant discourse. With a concept of hegemony it is possible to analyse how social reality is constructed, and if the interests on one social group dominate the field of discursivity, then other social groups become marginalised.

Thus, artistic practices in the light of the given work are understood as a form of counter-hegemonic intervention, a means of discursive struggle where monopoly over specific meaning is contested. Chantal Mouffe supplements the understanding of art by defining it as a form of critique of the socio-political order which can re-shape the configuration of power relations, especially when it comes to institutional setting, norms, governmental policies. The thesis will shortly presented the concept of art discussed in the light of Lotmanian theoretical framework which enables to approach it as a modelling system capable for production of meaning. In addition to Juri Lotman's definition of art to formulate what political-critical art is and its functions Asavei Marina-Alina's work *Political-Critical Art and the Aesthetic* (2013) will be of great use. Asavei provides a detailed description of the characteristic properties of the political-critical art, by putting discussing its features and functions. Thus, the theoretical part seeks to establish a proper definition of the political-critical art, its defining characteristics and socio-political importance, as well as to relate artistic practices to a discursive struggle, where art is portrayed as a form of a counter-hegemonic intervention.

The theoretical part will be concluded by introduction of Pavlensky's art and localisation of his works within the actionist artistic tradition. Essential elements of actionism will be discussed within the socio-political context of Russia starting from 1990s to 2012.

2.1. Art and Its Socio-Political Role

Firstly, in order to define the socio-political function of art it is necessary to understand what art is. In the given research a definition to the notion of art is given in the light of Juri Lotman's understanding of secondary modelling system (Lotman 1967: 131-132). Secondary modelling system is a sign system based on the primary modelling system, i.e. natural language (Lotman 1967: 130).

As it was stated by Lotman, art is one of the ways of thinking without which the human conscious is not possible (Lotman 1998: 265). In his works, Lotman compares children's games and art, where he claims that art provides the opportunity to experience the past or possible future without having any actual, immediate experience of it (Lotman 1998: 266). By interacting with an artistic object an individual can "replay" a hypothetical scenario that can happen in the future, or critically reflect on the past in the light of the presented artistic work.

The definition of artistic text here is given in accordance with Lotmanian conceptualization (*Structure of the Artistic Text*, 1970), where the artistic text is seen as a set of dynamic and complex relations which are in flux. Thus, the artistic text is a result of interaction of different codes in one single text (Lotman 1971: 96). An audience by being engaged into a "conversation" with an artist via his works becomes informed about previously unknown elements of its socio-political (in broader sense semiotic) surrounding, like poverty, discrimination, abuse of power, etc. This is the way how art can function as a critical approach against existing norms, regimes and hegemonic discourses in general. Artistic text being an essential part of a context and conditions of its production not only mirrors the social reality, but eventually contributes to its production and articulation, as it states Murray Edelman (1977: 10-11). Thus, by the means of modelling systems, social agents create an image of the world and place themselves on the scale of the socially constructed reality, producing new texts, discourses, and identities.

Contemporary forms of art differ from traditional art-making since artists seek their liberation not only from traditional methods and techniques of their production, but also from ideological influence sustained by institutions, be they academies of fine arts or governmental apparatus. Contemporary artists strive to reevaluate the status quo of political order by problematising social issue, sometimes accentuating their works on provocative ideas and ideals which are not part or even opposite to the existing hegemony,

or just trying to sensitise social inequalities by raising them to a public discourse (Bradley 2007: 24).³ Taking this into account, one can see that artists to a greater degree unconditioned by the dominant discourse, institutions and existing power relations, therefore the critique of the regime they are expressing is not regulated by the government, allowing them to express their views independently from the prevailing trends or institutional support. In fact, artists can represent the demands and political interests of oppressed, marginalised or underrepresented social groups.

A piece of art is always meaningful, it signifies something, it entails a message communicated by a sender. Since any message, any utterance is a part of a discourse, it engages into discursive struggle for the “control” of meaning. Artistic work, either it is an artefact or a performance, is never detached from the context it was created: the pragmatics of art, its functions, purposes, intentions of the author, social setting and the political environment - these all are constitutive elements of any artistic work (Bradley 2007: 9 - 10).

Art, by being a product of ideological system, does serve to specific interests of social actors. Artists by endowing their works with meaning create subject positions, assign individuals or even groups of peoples with identities and social roles based on their political interests and preferences, polarise society on 'them' and 'us' which can eventually lead to the consequences, broadly speaking, in the form of social change (Bradley 2007: 11). One example can be political feminist art is to criticise the hegemonic order of patriarchal discourse, to subvert the norms under which women rights are oppressed, the demands and interests are underrepresented and women are discriminated (Bradley 2007: 20). Thus, feminist art can serve as an example of how awareness on oppressive character of patriarchal system is raised among people that includes a lack of visibility and political representation of women in political and public contexts, discrimination expressed both in linguistic terms⁴ and discrepancy of wages. Another example taken from Pavlensky actions, where the artist attempts to illuminate how the Russian government tries to exercise its control over media space, or uses techniques of forced medicalisation by

³ Among the most outstanding artists it is possible to highlight Ai Weiwei who expressed criticism against Chinese Government on human rights and democracy, Guerilla Girls who fight sexism and racism, Banksy who promotes in his works ideas of anti-war, anti-imperialism, artist group Voina which show the absurdity of politics in Russia after the collapse of the USSR. Widewalls, *15 Influential Political Art Pieces*, 2016,

<https://www.widewalls.ch/political-art/sky-landing/>, accessed April 5, 2019

⁴ In such languages as Russian grammatical category of feminine gender is not used for some professions

prescribing to the prisoners mental diseases with an aim to discredit potential opponents (Luhn 2017).

Undoubtedly, there exist numerous forms of art and their conceptualisations and through the historical evolution of artistic practices this concept acquired diverse formulations, sometimes even controversial and mutually exclusive. Since the present work is focused on artistic works of Pyotr Pavlensky it will be relevant to explore the context in which they were produced. However, it is worthy of noting that Pavlensky himself denies to call his works as performance, instead he insists on using word action⁵ (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016). There is no adequate equivalent in English to denote the Russian *акция* (action) in the context of the political-critical art, therefore in the present thesis the artistic works of Pavlensky are defined as actions. Max Frei in the online art dictionary *Art-Azbuka* explains the difference between art performance and action by saying the former has a scenario and might possess dramaturgic elements, whereas the latter is not produced according to the prescribed plan so an artist does not know what will be next once the artistic act is performed⁶. Actionist art belongs to the umbrella term of performance art, however it is distinct from performance as such, and sometimes action and performance are used interchangeably since it is not always possible to fit an artwork in one precise category (which will be discussed below). One of the justification of this conceptual ambiguity is provided by Marvin Carlson, specifically he claims that performance art is dynamically developing niche of art which is constantly enriching due to perpetual cultural, intellectual, artistic and social innovations (Carlson 1996[2004]: 4). These innovations are motivated by the development of diverse approaches for problematisation of social and political issues, as well as by theoretical both aesthetical (formal) and conceptual aspects of artistic works. This vein of reasoning implies, that the notion of art is structured under the influence of multiple factors: artistic and artists' tradition and innovations, theoretical paradigms and impact of academic discourse. It is also legitimate to say that with a rise of new social issues, needs and necessities new forms of aesthetic expressions and concepts are engendered: protest art, political art, actionist art, political-critical art. Speaking in the context of this work, new forms of art

⁵ In English language there is no equivalent to denote Russian word *акция* - one of the performative forms of art that will be defined further in the thesis.

⁶ The definition is retrieved from art-dictionary: Max Frei, *Art-Azbuka*, art dictionary, 2000-2007, <http://azbuka.gif.ru/alfabet/a/action/>, retrieved May 13, 2019

attempt to struggle against new forms of oppression or tackle with previously unseen social issues, and therefore the meaning of art is in a flux of shifting power relations.

Pavlensky's works are challenging to define as artistic and to pigeonhole to one specific tradition due to the aesthetic means of expression the artist employs. Although Pavlensky work is "deviant" and does not fit into a traditional understanding of art, yet there are several scholars who give the definition to his works as performance art, such as Craig Stewart Walker (2017: 686). Another academics Ana Hedberg Olenina and Irina Schulzki in their editorial article *Mediating Gesture in Theory and Practice* (2017) in analysing Pavlensky works evoke the basic aesthetic elements among which they state: "graphic postures, alignment of the action's elements" (2017: 18-19). Saatchi Gallery arranged the exhibition in 2017 named *Art Riot: Post-Soviet Actionism* where were presented the works of performance artists Oleg Kulik, Pussy Riot, Blue Noses Art Group, Vasily Slonom, AES + F, Arsen Savadov along with Pyotr Pavlensky (Russian Art & Culture 2017). In this regard, the art institution puts Pavlensky in the line together with other Russian Actionism artists which attempts to fit him as a part of this tradition, which is also defined as protest art. The exhibitions explores how the individual freedom is confronted both by religion and political ideology within Russian contemporary context. The researcher Ingrid Nordgaard also defines the works of Pavlensky as "live performances—events that happened at a certain time and place in front of an audience" (Nordgaard 2016: 95). As Nordgaard says Pavlensky in advance agreed with journalist to document his work *Fixation*, however the artist insists that photographing is not a part of his performance (Nordgaard 2016: 95). In the work of Philip Auslander *Performance Documentation and the New York Avant-garde, ca. 1964-1967* (2014) the author claims that the very act of documenting of the event as performance renders it as such. Another scholar Kate Ehle in her work defines Pavlensky's works as political performance art with characteristic bodily elements in terms of aesthetic means of expression (2017: 9, 31). Ehle argues that Pavlensky's performance art is in alignment with Moscow Actionist tradition, relating to Oleg Kulik and Alexander Brener and highlighting such elements as spontaneity, use of naked body and corporeality in general, and provocative aspect of their works contextualized within the theme of politics (2017: 32). Also, a Tartu University graduated MA student from semiotic department Varvara Esipova in her thesis *Body and Pain in Contemporary Art (On the Phenomenon of Petr Pavlensky)* (2017) defines Pavlensky works as performances rather than actions with a focus on the role of

pain in his artworks and the image of *holy fool* presented in Russian cultural tradition. Andrey Makarychev and Sergey Medvedev in their co-authored work *Biopolitical art and the struggle for Sovereignty in Putin's Russia* (2018) identify Pavlensky's works in the context of biopower and biopolitics as performance and "*performative actionism*". Kassou Naura in her master thesis *L'art Martial de la Performance Extrême Engagée. Prolégomènes à l'étude d'une pratique artistique controversée. Tentative d'approche de deux artistes exemplaires* (2016-2017) repeatedly calls Pavlensky's works as performances.

It is worthy of mentioning that there are scholars who also refer to Pavlensky's artistic works as actions such as Ana Hedberg Olenina and Irina Schulzki in their work *Mediating Gesture in Theory and Practice* (2017) or Asia Bazdyrieva in her paper *When The Silence Speaks: Political Art of Petr Pavlensky* (2016). Mariam Shuman in her work *Political Activism in the Authoritarian Regime: Moscow Actionism as a Cause Célèbre* (2017) defines Pavlensky's artworks as actions and designates that actionists in attempt to criticize the state or by bringing about the socio-political issues simultaneously blur the boundaries between the art and reality (2017: 2-3).

The different ways of framing Pavlensky's artistic works demonstrate how challenging it is to fit the artist in one concrete category, and it is understandable because Pavlensky's artistic projects indeed entail elements both of performance and action, however the artist himself defines them as latter, as they are discussed in this thesis. Artist and political activist Arseniy Zhilyaev argues that actionism is not separable from the political participation and therefore always contains the political dimension (Khazam 2014: 50). Actionism is characterized by relatively short actions which can be easily conveyed by mass media and an essential part of it is "direct action" which is produced to reach a particular goal, for instant pronounce (publically) the social and political issues. Action art is a clustering term that denotes different types of live-performance such as happening, performance and event with foregrounding elements amongst which a choice of specific time and space, potential engagement of spectators (interaction), as well as critical reconsideration (conceptual aspect and intents of the artist) of the socio-political issues which undertake the form of artistic landscape often with use of minimal means (Štrbová 2014: 72).

Apparently, there exist a vast amount of forms of art each with its specifics and peculiarity. In order to grasp a more comprehensive idea of Pavlensky's work it is fruitful

to refer to Asavei Marina-Alina's doctoral thesis *Political-Critical Art and the Aesthetic*, 2013 where she is analysing the critical-political forms of art. In her deliberate work, Asavei provides a detailed definition of political-critical forms of art and their functions. The author makes a clear distinction what is called political and political-critical art. When it comes to political art Asavei argues that it deals solely with propaganda and politics by asserting the *status quo* without attempting to evoke critical reflections and evaluation in the audience (Asavei 2013: 3). Regarding the political-critical art the author claims that it is primarily concerned with “genuine political participation and deliberation” which requires a critical approach from the audience to assess what is conveyed by the author and how does the artwork contribute to the politics (Asavei 2013: 3). In the present thesis the definition of the political-critical art is taken as a key concept when the discussion and analysis concern artworks of Pyotr Pavlensky, and for the sake of succinctness will be phrased as political art.

In her work, Asavei claims that critical-political art does not deal solely with politics, but it also considers the addressee as a political agent who is capable for politically motivated decisions and actions (Asavei 2013: 3). From this it follows, that political artists do not simply address the political issues, either by sensitising them or putting in the foreground of the public discourse. In fact, artists who create artistic political project represent the interests and demands of the social groups. Thus, what Asavei means is that by emphasising the concerns of the civil society political artists try to explicitly or/and implicitly engage those social groups whose interests are underrepresented and disregarded within political and public discourses. Artists who do political art attempt to draw public's attention to some specific social issues, and by doing this they are raising an awareness about the abuse of power by the state. In such way, artists challenge the hegemonic practices of the state apparatus (institutions) amongst which can be named oppressive laws, use of justice system in political interests of the state, manipulation of media. These practices are hegemonic because they are aimed at maintenance of the state power over the civil society and public discourse.

Asavei states that political forms of art intend to challenge the existing social and political order by reconsidering power relations in terms of propagated values, practice of daily social rituals, ideologies, prevailing political agenda of a state (Asavei 2013: 3). In fact, what political artists do is revealing the mechanisms of oppression and control within dominating, naturalized discourse. By exposing and creating their political

projects artists engage in construction of the oppressed social groups and the oppressor itself. It is through this creation and articulation of meaning the civil society becomes aware of the dominated social position of the marginalized groups. To support this claim, Asavei argues that some of the aims of political-critical art are to inform an audience about established hegemonic order, power relations within which mechanisms of oppression and dominance are exercised, as well as to provide marginalized groups of people with a voice whose interests are otherwise ignored (Asavei 2013: 3, 7). Having this in mind, this study explores how Pavlensky by the means of art performs this informative function of the political art. By articulating the critique against the state apparatus the artists infuse a new discourse that contests the dominance of the state apparatus and the exercise of its hegemonic practices the true meaning of which is concealed or masqueraded, for instance, under the pretext of protector's intents against a potential threatening *other* that can undermine the political stability of the regime.

Contemporary art projects sometimes might be difficult to treat as artistic works, for this reason it is necessary to consider those aspects which would demarcate art from mere vandalism or non-art practices. In this case, Asavei proposes to have a look into social, historical, theoretical (academic) frameworks (Asavei 2013: 20). Taking this proposition into consideration it becomes possible to demarcate artistic practices or artefacts from non-artistic events or things. Thus, the relation of the socio-political and historical contexts, their evolution as well as theorisation are essential for understanding of art-work. As a bright example can serve emergence of the Russian (Moscow) actionism as any other artistic movement is not separable from the social context and the means of its production. In fact, Russian (Moscow) actionism emerged as a response to the socio-political situation in the country, of the political uncertainty and dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is also possible to observe the predecessors of the Moscow actionism in the face of the Viennese actionism in 1960s with explicit elements of performance art, transgression of social norms and law, as well as the use of body as a medium. This relation with Viennese serves as a historical framework for the Moscow one (Broadhurst 1999). The similar aspects can be traced in the actions of Pavlensky which to certain degree relate the artist to the tradition of actionism and performance art.

Remarkably, political art does not belong to one specific genre and is not confined by specific stylistic techniques for its production as well as by the medium for its dissemination (Asavei 2013: 33). Political art as an umbrella term can designate such

forms of art which can either legitimise the reproduction and sustaining of the hegemonic *status quo*, or with similar success they can repel the existing socio-political order, or just simply describe the state of affairs in and for a society or a particular social group (Asavei 2013: 32). Therefore, the study of political forms of art should be approached in regard towards the artists themselves and the ways they address particular issues within a specific context. In the political art a great attention is paid to the social context to which an artist responds, and how one does it. It is important to focus on who is the potential addressee and what issues an artist attempts to problematize. Though, the use of medium depending on the specific context might play an integral part of the meaning.

Asavei elaborates on the notion of political art as a functional one, claiming that one of its primary aims is to subject the status quo of the hegemonic order to critical re-evaluation and thus raise the awareness regarding power abuse. By doing this, art is no more so concerned with representing of the beautiful as a part of its aesthetic properties. Accordingly, primary function of art is rather to increase awareness than produce aesthetic experience. It is true that political and aesthetic properties of art are not necessary mutually exclusive, the category of beautiful which belongs to traditional aesthetic paradigm is not a necessary condition of art (Asavei 2013: 175). Nevertheless, the aesthetical means of expression are integral part of all artistic works, are slightly touched upon in the methodological part. Thus, the use of body as a medium can have biopolitical implications and depending on the context allude to the use of power by the state to exercise the control over the bodies of its citizens (Foucault 1976).

Political forms of art by being critical to a certain degree remain autonomous in relation to state institutions or mainstream forms of art. Having no immediate influence of state institutions or mainstream trends allows political art to retain its independent and critical position towards social issues. This autonomy endows artistic works with ability to resist to any kind of hegemony, be it cultural or political (Asavei 2013: 31 - 32, Groys 2008: 16). By being able to resist on its own, political artists can invent their own language of expression, construct their identities and the identity of the subject of their critic.

Political-critical art as a form of critique reveals the dimension of antagonism within the politics by addressing specific social issue or problematising them. It means that with political-critical art artists can raise the problems related to the rights of oppressed and underrepresented social groups to the public discourse by reaching mass media, however this awareness does not guarantee ultimate support of the civil society or

political elites in the favour of this groups. Asavei claims that political art is produced within a setting of power relations, and by highlighting a particular socio-political issue it re-affirms or rather recognizes the existence, effects or/and functions (like oppression, domination, exclusion, marginalisation, stigmatisation, etc.) of those power relations and hegemonic order in general (Asavei 2013: 33 - 36). By re-affirming the oppression, domination and exclusion political artists engage into discursive struggle over the meaning within a discourse. By identifying the object of their critic as oppressive and exclusive they intentionally attempt to subvert the legitimacy of this object and its practices (e.g. state) and thus destabilizing the hegemonic status quo.

Political-critical art besides having a political aspect, also entails extended aesthetic and artistic dimensions, which are expressed, as it is explained by Asavei, both in conceptual (ideals, ideas, morality, values) and perceptual ways of experiencing (based on five senses) (2013: 53 - 79). The aesthetic means of expression, i.e. form in political art can reinforce the message (Asavei 2013: 92, 109 -110). This is relevant because the actions of Pavlensky (which will be discussed and analysed thoroughly further) where he uses bodily techniques as a medium like nailing the scrotum, cutting off earlobe, wrapping in wire are considered as a sensitive content, meaning they are generally not to be exposed publicly. In employing these radical means of aesthetic expression the artist attempts to draw the audience's attention to his message, thus emphasizing its meaning.

To understand the role of political-critical forms of art it is important to analyse its effectiveness within specific context and its effects on the society. Asavei proposes three different ways of seeing political effectiveness, such as:

- when art project, be it a performance or an artefact, is capable to change the *status quo* of the hegemonic order and power relations;
- informative function of political art brings about the issue into public discourse, making it visible to the audience, by increasing people's awareness of the socio-political and economic troubles. Thus, art can trigger public discussions on addressed issues, attract the attention of international organisations and institutions;
- it may produce emotional resonance by addressing the moral dimension and incite the audience to reconsider its system of values, norms, political preferences (Asavei 2013: 188).

However, the effectiveness of art can be estimated by reaction of the audience, and in some cases the later does not simply possess a necessary vocabulary to develop a comprehensive understanding of art piece/performance (Asavei 2013: 195). Therefore, unprepared audience may not consider a work of art as such, and categorize it, as it was in the case of Pavlensky, as hooliganism or deviant behaviour. Also, the way how artistic work is distributed can significantly contribute into effectiveness of the artistic work, making it more accessible to masses via the internet and media (Asavei 2013: 199). In the given thesis the effectiveness of the political-critical art is primarily relied on the criterion in which successfulness of artwork can be evaluated based on its informative function. This means, that success of Pavlensky's works is measured by dissemination of his works within mass and social media discourses, which means that more and more people are getting familiar with actions of Pavlensky. This criterion is important because it is based on assumption that mass media has a power to influence public opinion as well as to provoke a discussion and draw people's attention to particular socio-political issues. It is also worthy of noting, that other criterion such as radical shift in the balance of power relations when the state is forced to change its political agenda, amend the laws or release the political dissidents can also serve as an indicator of the effectiveness of artistic practices, however it is not the case in the present work. This is justified by the fact that it is not always possible for the artists to transform the whole regime or the functioning of some of its institutions, however in long-term perspective artist can contribute to its change. Similarly, the impact and how effective the artistic project and its effects are can be gauged by the emotional resonance the artist produced in the audience (conducting interviews on what influence Pavlensky's works had on Russian civil society), but due to the limitations the present research design is confined to this criterion cannot be properly addressed.

2.2. Hegemony and Discourse Theory

This section discusses the discourse theory and concept of the hegemony developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. The further empirical part will be drawn on the discourse theory and hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe employ poststructuralist discourse

theory to demonstrate how the hegemonic discourse is formed and what social effects it produces.

The original concept of *hegemony* which Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe operationalise in their work was initially coined by Antonio Gramsci (1971). Gramsci used *hegemony* for description of dominant classes which via discursive processes try to reach consent on existing power relations within a superstructure. This consent is maintained between these dominant classes and those who subordinate to them. Stuart Hall also provides a similar definition for hegemony which is applicable for this research: "dominance and subordination in the field of relations structured by power" (Hall 1985).

For Mouffe and Laclau the concept of hegemony is understood both as a set of political practices that can create or break discourses and political projects, and as the rule of governance with which social practices, regimes and policies are formed and maintained (Howarth 2010: 310, Mouffe 1979: 188). Thus, institutions such as security services, justice system, psychiatric hospitals, prisons, churches and media along with practices that maintain the political agenda in the form of obedience to the law, support to the ruling political groups, performance of everyday rituals are considered as hegemony. The aforementioned institutions are understood as hegemonic apparatuses (Mouffe 1979: 187). For the hegemonic project to take its place different social groups should be unified under the common beliefs and political interests, a "collective will" which is employed through ideology (Howarth 2015: 198). Ideology in its turn produces subjects through the constitution of practices within the hegemonic apparatus (Mouffe 1979: 188).

For this thesis it is important to see institutions as a part of hegemonic apparatus. In the empirical section of the paper such institutions as security services, media, psychiatric hospital, church and justice system are considered as an essential part of the hegemony. Hegemony, as it was indicated above is also seen as practices which are exercised to support this very hegemony. Thus, implementation of oppressive laws, imprisonment of political dissidents and manipulation of media are seen as hegemonic practices since they are used to retain and preserve the hegemony. Any practice that somehow criticizes or attempts to undermine the status quo of these institutions is understood as counter-hegemonic intervention, which will be further analysed in the form of artistic practices (actions and political-critical art).

The hegemonic state apparatus performs the functions, in the words of Louis Althusser, both of Ideological State Apparatus by employing the indoctrination via media, educational, church institutions, and Repressive State apparatus the primary function of which is to retain the control over the population by the coercive means or the means of force, including: security services, psychiatric institutions, justice system (Althusser 2006: 92-94). These two types of the state apparatuses are used to exercise the control over the civil society by influencing it both in physical terms and ideational.

Laclau and Mouffe develop another concept which is essential to the notion of hegemony which they call articulation (1985: 93). Articulation is the process through which social relations are created and arranged as a discursive structure (Mouffe 1985: 96). It is through articulation becomes possible to articulate the interests of one social group (class) and neutralize of others (Mouffe 1979: 96).

To move further, Laclau and Mouffe elaborate the concept of discourse and define it as “the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice” (Laclau & mouffe 1985: 105). Thus, discourse results from articulatory practice such as exclusion and might include language and social practices, material objects (Howarth 2015: 201). A hegemonic discourse can be challenged by changing, disarticulating and re-articulating of its elements (Sunnecrantz 2017: 20).

Laclau claims that the perception of reality, i.e. all social phenomena are mediated by discourse, and therefore our understanding of it is dependent on discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 1990: 101). Thus, self-perception equally as a perception of its other is discursively mediated. The meanings of these social phenomena can be fixed only temporary. Different discourses strive to establish their specific meanings within the whole field of discursivity, which ultimately affects the construction of social reality and the identities of its agents. The representations on social reality which people hold along with discursive structures are contingent in nature and thus subjected to change in their meaning (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 113). This change is due to the fact that there are different discourses that compete one with others for their dominance over the meaning. It is via language the position and therefore the meaning of signs is constantly negotiated. The ultimate closure or absolute monopoly over meaning is not possible because of the contingent character of the signification (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 110).

Laclau and Mouffe define discourse as a set of signs the meanings of which are in constant flux, however which could be temporarily fixed. Discourses are constituted

through the organisation and articulation of signifiers with assigned meanings. Along with meaning allocation, the exclusion of irrelevant or non-dominant meanings occurs. All other signifieds or meanings which are excluded form the *field of discursivity* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985 [2001]: 112). The meaning of signs is relational, since the meaning of one sign is defined in relation to other signs. Therefore, the way how political artists define them and their political positions are dependent on their other, which might take the role of the regime or state apparatus.

The fixation of discourse occurs by the means of nodal points, a central signifier which organise the system of meanings called *chain of equivalence/difference*. A nodal point is a sign the meaning of which is privileged and in relation to which other signs are organized (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105). An articulation is a process of creation of relations between elements (signs) which might take form in any social action, and once the relations are established a discourse forms a temporary closure of meaning (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 110). The signs the meaning of which has been fixed within a discourse called *moments* (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 110).

Hegemony is a result of discursive articulation, or discursive struggles. Diverse discourses compete one with another in order to establish their monopoly over the meaning of signs, and thus reshaping social relations: "The practices of articulation through which a given order is created and the meaning of social institutions is fixed, are what we call "hegemonic practices."... What is at a given moment accepted as the "natural order", jointly with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices" (Mouffe 2008: 4).

Discourses due to the contingency of the meaning dispose a variety of possibilities for counter-discourses. As Foucault says "[...] in the relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance, for if there were no possibility of resistance - of violent resistance, of escape, of ruse, of strategies that reverse the situation - there would be no relations of power" (Foucault 1991b: 12 in Howarth 2010: 316). Every hegemonic discourse might be subverted by counter-hegemonic practice, which in its turn through disarticulation strives to establish its dominance over the meaning of signs. Competing discourses involve a clash of interests, identities, beliefs, ideologies. According to Mouffe, the power is not located within the repressive state apparatus, but it is distributed within the society (Mouffe 1979: 201). Different discourses are organized across different nodal points with their chains of equivalence which make the discursive

struggle over meaning possible. Therefore, the resistance or counter-discourse can emerge from different social ruptures, such as: political artists, marginalized social groups, intellectuals, politicians, etc.

The chain of equivalence entails diverse subject positions the political and social demands of which are equated within a discursive articulation (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 170). Diverse social and political demands and interests which are articulated via one single nodal point become equivalent one to another, meaning that they represent one political project. By being structured across a nodal point the chain of equivalence articulates social and political demands, along with identities within one discursive formation (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 105-112). The relations established within the chain of equivalence manifest themselves in a unity where the antagonism is temporarily and partially neutralised by the nodal point (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 105-112).

The nodal points and hegemonic discourse in general can be read as a system of meanings with a hierarchic relations between the signs (Lotman 1977). This system of meanings renders some social practices, agents and texts as dominant within the hegemonic discourse, whereas other are subjected to total or partial exclusion. These systems of meanings endow ideologies, institutions, subjects and political representation with a dominant status, and at the same time they attempt to discredit the counter-hegemonic texts, social agents and practices in the form of opposition, resistance, or/and critique by portraying them as illegitimate and irrelevant in the given historical context. Under the notion of text is understood both written and oral: utterances, manifestos, declarations, debates, etc. Thus, political artists through their artistic practices can produce new systems of meaning to challenge the hegemonic status quo of the authorities. By creating artistic works and articulating them publicly via mass media artists' messages can reach larger audience and raise awareness about existing social issues within the civil society.

Laclau and Mouffe claim that discourses tend to dominate one another within a particular historical moment thus trying to establish a hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 139). The identities of subjects and their political interests and demands represent this chain of equivalence the meaning of which is defined through the nodal point. Thus, political artists by the means of articulatory practices such as performances, interviews, actionism establish the nodal point through which they can organize their own chain of

equivalence by assembling the diverse demands and political interests of the social groups under one political project.

2.3. Art as a Counter-Hegemonic Intervention

Hegemony and counter-hegemony should be understood as effects of individuals' performances, for instance gender performance which was meticulously discussed by Judith Butler, 1990. This performance is a set of practices or rituals that people accomplish in everyday routine, for example an expression of loyalty and support to the political elites. These performative actions along with beliefs and values systems assert the status of hegemony as dominant, so to say the use of state symbols, celebration of national events, participation in elections, institution, culture, activism, media consumption are the elements that contribute to the support of the hegemony of a regime (or opposition in case of counter-hegemony). However, there are also actions and identities which do not comply with the dominant hegemonic structure, and at some instances may question its *status quo*.

The subjects who belong to a counter-hegemonic discourse might experience their social position and political interests as inferior (either oppressed or underrepresented) in relation to the hegemony and therefore are in need of proper political representation to resist against the hegemony (Stoddart 2007: 214). The counter-hegemony is dispersed across power relations and diverse subject positions of social subalternities such as marginalized social groups, politically underrepresented or discredited subjects (Stoddart 2007: 218). The marginalised lacunas of the social are the possibilities and *raison d'être* for resistance against "master narratives" (dominant discourses) (Hooks 1990: 150-151). Political-critical art as a counter-hegemonic project produces new meanings to challenge the social order and problematizes diverse issues, extrapolate the demands and obtain political representation (individual demands and identities) of the oppressed and underrepresented social groups within public discourse which can undertake the form of resistance or critique.

In order to give a proper definition to the notion of counter-hegemony it will be fruitful to recall the "war of position" proposed by Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci 1971: 495). In fact, the civil society and its consensus with dominant social group for Gramsci are not only a source and condition for hegemony, but also the society conceals the possibilities

of resistance, so to say counter-hegemony. This brings the discussion to subaltern currents which confront the hegemonic discourse and practices across different levels: political, economical, normative-ethical, ideological. These currents unite the interests and demands of different agents which are articulated through the counter-hegemonic discourse. The degree of the counter-hegemonic mobilization of the social groups might vary, as well as their counter-hegemonic articulatory practices can be dispersed within diverse discourses, space and time, and throughout the media, utterances, gestures, discursive elements, structures and social actions. Counter-hegemony can also open new possibilities for discursive struggle through which the demands, needs and interests of subaltern social groups can be articulated and reach political representation. In order to properly address the research questions posed in the thesis the counter-hegemony is primarily referred as articulatory practices and defined in relation to the Russian hegemonic state apparatus. Thus, counter-hegemonic articulation is any social action that attempts to criticize the state apparatus or challenge its hegemonic status by revealing its oppressive character.

A counter-hegemonic intervention is a way to transcend the established relations of meanings and signs which are temporarily monopolised instances of hegemony (Martín-Barbero 1993: 67-68). Disarticulation and its succeeding re-articulation is a way to disrupt the discursive tissue from which the new forms of the social and political projects emerge, such as opposition or political movements. Both disarticulation and re-articulation are understood as social actions such as: protests, political-critical forms of art, revolt, dissent. Political-critical art projects can challenge the status quo of the hegemonic discourse, criticise it and impose its political and social demands upon it. Thus, new political representations, subject positions can rise or acquire their legitimate position within the society, whereas the dominant social group can be deprived of its status or constrained in its institutional intervention.

In order to understand how artistic practices can function as a counter-hegemonic intervention it is indispensable to define the notion of the political and its relation to the current work. Before addressing Laclau and Muffe's concept of the political it is necessary to go back to its origins for the sake of theoretical clarity. Carl Schmitt provided a criterion for understanding of the political which is based on the antithesis of friend and enemy (Schmitt 2008: 26-27). This antithetical relation assumes the dichotomy of the self versus other, where the other can be supplied by negative connotations such as of enemy.

Besides, it is also suggested that the antithesis friend-enemy in its extreme instance is existentially motivated and therefore is understood as the most radical form of antagonism based on "the ever present possibility of conflict" (Schmitt 2008: 32-33). Any antithesis, be it a conflict between religious organisations or states, can acquire a status of the political if the logic friend-enemy logic is present (Schmitt 2008: 37). It is also worthy to note that the antithesis friend-enemy is mutually constitutive and relational.

In the present thesis the notion of the political is understood in a way as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau propose in their theoretical framework. Namely, these authors portray the notion of the political as a continuous possibility of antagonisms which come along with ultimate undecidability and absence of complete closure of meaning (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 126-127). Antagonism happens when identities mutually exclude one another. Thus, antagonism occurs when the interests of two different identities in relation to one action clash.

A social group in order to dominate a discourse should articulate the meaning and fix it accordingly. Through the fixation of meaning power relations are re-configured and maintained. These power relations can take the form of subordination between dominant and subjugated groups, alliances. The power relations can be represented in the form of social identities, practices and diverse institutions sustaining or challenging the existing hegemonic discourse.

This re-articulation and disarticulation of a meaning is a process through which the identities and discourses are challenged. The questioning of the hegemonic discourse is effectuated through its disarticulation in the form of critique which is defined as counter-hegemonic intervention, and through the consequent re-articulation of counter-hegemony. The act of disarticulation is necessary to subvert the legitimacy and challenge the status quo of the hegemony. In fact, this critique can be portrayed as an act of disobedience or resistance against the power relations sustained by subjects and institutions of the hegemonic discourse (Mouffe 2008). The hegemony in order to be challenged and subverted should be first disarticulated. This means, that political institutions, hegemonic state apparatus should be undermined in their dominant status, for instance being criticised for illegal actions or abuse of power. Further, to establish the dominance over meaning by counter-hegemony it is necessary to re-articulate the counter-hegemonic discourse. This happens by rearticulating the meaning of the nodal points, and as a result, re-constructing their chain(s) of equivalence. The process of re-

articulation can take a form of new political agenda, change within the institutional setting, implementation of new laws or amendment of the old ones.

In her essay *Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space* (2007: 1), Chantal Mouffe discusses the idea of Brian Holmes that art functions as a specific metalanguage that transcends the boundaries of casual life and provides new perspective for reflection and self- understanding of individuals. Thus, art affects a variety of social dimensions and creates a new niche for collective reasoning over diverse issues, problematising and re-articulating naturalised discourses, reorganising power relations and challenging established hegemony.

Mouffe defines "critical art" as a counter-hegemonic intervention (Mouffe 2007: 4). Mouffe's claim is that critical art tends to problematise the status quo of the established social order, to unveil what is hidden by power relations through the out-speaking by artist the demands and needs of underrepresented social groups in the given social context or by criticizing the state apparatus for the abuse of power (Mouffe 2007: 5).

Mouffe envisages discourse as "the public spaces" (which are formed under the hegemonic fixation of meaning) as plural grounds for contestation of hegemonic order where intersections of diverse discursive formations compete each against other (Mouffe 2007: 3). It is specifically in this intersection of all possible multiplicity of competing discursive formations where counter-hegemonic articulation originates and proceeds into hegemonic struggle to establish a new dominant articulation over social spaces (Mouffe 2007: 3).

Artistic practice opens up new possibilities for the social inquiry. It experiments with contents and forms to produce innovative and creative means for critical reconsideration of social issues (Holmes 2006: 412). Artistic practice is not only an instrument, a device designed for exploring socially constructed reality, it is an assemblage of distinct modelling mechanism which are capable for disarticulation and re-articulation of discourse. Art mediates "basic human capacities: perception, affect, thought, action and relation" (Holmes 2006: 414) on the micro-structural level of the social formations through the individualised relations of people. An artistic practice through its multiple micro-level operations can raise to macro-level through the public discourse to which the piece of art is addressed: media, politics, economic systems, environmental and security issues (Holmes 2006).

2.4. Pavlensky's Actionism in the Context of Contemporary Russia

In order to understand what Pavlensky's art is it is indispensable to contextualize the artist within the historical development of actionist and performance art in contemporary Russia starting from 1990s to 2012. One of the ways to approach Pavlensky's work is to take a brief overview of his predecessors with whom the artist shares common features which allow relate him to actionist tradition. It is essential to note that Pavlensky still represents a unique phenomenon at least because the context within which he acts and how he builds up the dialogue with the state power through his actions is distinct from the works of other artists. It is also a big advantage to define first the common "aura" of the presented below artist as a *dissent art* that employs such elements as jokes, irony, use of political symbols and parody used to criticize institutions, desacralize the state power, and challenge its hegemonic status quo (Jonson 2015: 248).

The Moscow actionist tradition owes its birth to Viennese actionism in 1960s, however this art movement emerged in Russia as reaction to Conceptualism that was criticized by actionists for its exaggerated intellectualism primarily focused on text, in 1990 after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Jonson 2015: 27). Among the prominent representatives of Moscow Actionism can be named Anatolii Osmolovskii, Avdei Ter-Oganyan, Oleg Kulik, Aleksander Brenner whose actions are characterized by aggressiveness, use of bodies accentuated on nudity, violence, blood, vulnerability, provocative actions, and vulgarism with an attempt to evoke shock and "spontaneous impact" on audience (Jonson 2015: 27-28). Conversely, Moscow Conceptualist movements in the Soviet Union the actionists were striving for actions and were opposing themselves to contemplative approach (Jonson 2015: 27). Moscow Actionism despite its distinct approach to Conceptualists inherited similar goals in which they "play" with the state power in attempt to profane it and juxtapose to it the position of the ordinary man in its vulnerability (Jonson 2015: 27). It was also characteristic to Moscow Actionism to perform on the terrain of power such as art-group ETI (Expropriators of the Territory of Art) in the formed of bodies laid down the Russian curse word, often censored, "dick" (khui) just in the front of the Lenin Mausoleum, thus the context was an substantial element (Jonson 2015: 27). The elements of nudity and explicit aggressiveness can be found in Kulik's performance *The Mad Dog* where the artist was totally naked, behaving like a dog and biting strangers (Smith 2019). The Moscow Actionism did not directly

involve in politics, however its members began challenging the consensus with authorities (Jonson 2015: 29).

With a new millennium new art-groups and artists emerged in Russia. In the first decade of 2000s, such groups as Voina and Bombila expressed their disagreement with the existing social and political order who employed such aesthetic elements as mockery, laughter, jokes, irony, absurd and parody which are linked with Bakhtin's concepts of carnival and grotesqueness (1984) (Jonson 2015: 130). Voina group was also playing with aspects of the state power, thus one of the most known action *Dick Captured by the FSB* in 2010 conceived as mockery over Federal Security Service, or in 2008 staged the orgy in Moscow Zoological Museum known as *Fuck for the heir Puppy Bear!* to criticize the absurdness of the elections (Sturdee 2011). Group Voina by that time realized the importance of mass media and therefore attempted to draw its attention towards the actions of the group members (Jonson 2015: 150). Voina proved itself to be experimental in terms of testing and establishing the borderlines between the life and art (Jonson 2015: 153). Lena Jonson in her book *Art and Protest in Putin's Russia* (2015) claims that the dissent art of Moscow Actionism and their successors attempted to emphasized the polarization between the state power and the civil society (us versus them) and transformed in the form of political protest, if not replaced it (2015: 158).

Another well known group is Pussy Riot who staged their performance *Mother of God, Put Putin Away* in the Moscow cathedral of Christ the Savior in 2012 was very successful as Jonson writes: "It was extremely successful in the sense that it and all that followed placed the focus on a series of delicate issues in Russian society and politics – the lack of public political debate and lack of a voice in elections, the authoritarian character of the regime, the close links between the church and state, the political dependency of the courts, the growing influence of the church, the role and behaviour of the Patriarch, and corruption in both church and state" (Jonson 2015: 183). Pussy Riot foregrounded the critique against the oppressive regime of the Russian state apparatus, and through this "dialogue" with power both in terms of content and form it becomes possible to relate the group with their predecessors. This overview described how through artistic innovation and change of the political climate in Russia the critique against the state power was articulated as well what are the common elements were employed by different artists to fuel this critique.

The status of "artistic" of Pavlensky's actions is very debatable and demands thorough discussion considering the fact that his actions brought a polarization in public discourse where some consider his works as actionist art, meanwhile other define them as hooliganism, including state's legal institutions. Despite the "deviant", in terms of the social and legal norms, aspects of Pavlensky performances, it is still possible to attribute his works to actionist art. In all likelihood, the elements of Pavlensky works can be traced in Viennese actionism that originates in 1960 (Broadhurst 1999). The artists of Viennese actionism envisages bodily art and performance not only in terms of its physical aspects in a sense that the body belongs to one single individual, but it is also a social body: "Through the actual mutilation of the body, the reality of its social encoding and the mutilating function of social encoding itself are attacked" (Green 1999: 16). This statement can be explained by the fact that the social body (i.e. society) is composed of individual bodies. Each single body possess a social meaning, the role it performs in the society, and a possibility to articulate its meaning or its social identity differently.

Pavlensky's artistic works resemble those of the tradition of "Moscow Actionism" of the 1990s (that partially originates from artistic movement of Necrorealists which emerged in the end of 20th century (Brooks Platt 2014), Oleg Kulik, the Voina protest group which is famous for staging an orgy in biological museum of Moscow right before the president election day of Dmitry Medvedev in 2008 (Walker 2014), Anatoly Osmolovsky (1991), Alexander Brener (Golovastikov 2013), Oleg Mavromati (*Don't Trust Your Eyes*, 2000) (Sneider 2016). After the collapse of the Soviet Union new issues related to freedom of expression and media have arisen, which were further addressed by young contemporary artists as Pavlensky and Pussy Riot. The political climate became the focal points for critique by the means of art (Somers Cocks 2017). Taking into account above mentioned artists it is not mistaken to say that such radical forms of art as actionism are symptomatic to Russian political and social contexts beginning from 1990s.

In their artworks artists attempted to criticise the political life which was the result of economic, criminal and political manipulations (Jonson 2015: 27-28). The Russian actionism not always had the political implications though. However, there is a correlation between the state's authoritarian regime and political motivations of artists to protest against it (Shuman 2017: 7). The Russian actionism as an experimental artistic movement emerged in -90s. In fact, the Russian actionism acquired its political meaning

only in 2000s, after the performance of Oleg Mavromatti, where he publicly crucified himself, and eventually fled to Bulgaria (Kovalev 2007: 6-8).

Pyotr Pavlensky is a controversial Russian artistic and political figure who is known for his radical forms of aesthetic expression with a primary use of medium his own body the main aim of each is critique of governmental techniques of control and oppressive, as well as forced psychiatric medicalisation. Pyotr Pavlensky was born in Russia, in Leningrad in 1984. He was studying in the Saint Petersburg Art and Industry Academy named after Shtiglits (Martinovich 2012). Pavlensky together with his partner Oksana Shalygyna founded web-magazine "*Political Propaganda*" (Artchronika 2012).

Pavlensky explains why he is engaged into political art by saying that the political is omnipresent and affects any locus of the social and personal life. He also cites (supposedly Charles Forbes René de Montalembert) that even if a man has no interest in politics, politics still will affect him. In this phrase, Pavlensky implies that politics is mere instrument of control over population exercised through media, psychiatric institutions, education system, the Criminal code (Radio Svoboda 2014).

Discussions about Pavlensky are usually accompanied by his political art actions for which he was repeatedly accused in hooliganism, imprisoned for several times, criticised and misunderstood by some and praised by others. Among his (in-)famous actions are: *Stitch* (2012), *Carcass* (2013), *Fixation* (2013), *Segregation* (2014), *Freedom* (2014), *Lubyanka's Burning Door* (2015) and attempt of arson of the Bank of France (2017). At the moment, Pavlensky fled from Russia (2017) in France in search of political asylum. Each of his actions articulates a specific idea which has political implications and will be discussed in the thesis (Nechepurenko 2018). To gain more precision, the discussion and analysis will address to the political potential of art in formation and articulation of a discourse. Thus, based on Pavlensky actions the issue of questionable medicalisation of diagnoses is analysed as a political tool of hegemony, as well as (ab-)use of media and security services by the government to establish control or monopoly over information and freedom of expression. Another issue that Pavlensky attempts to address is related to low or lack of political engagement in Russia. The political disengagement and indifference among Russian people was demonstrated by Levada Analytical Center in the poll *Russian Public Opinion 2013-2015*, around 80% of Russian population do not want to be politically active or do not feel that they have any influence on economic and political life (Levada 2016: 56-59).

The corporeal form of art is relatable to Pavlensky works in a way that he mostly deals with body modifications techniques causing physical changes to his body in the form of pain and damage. Besides, body is used as one of the most basic and primary means or medium to deliver his message or effect on the target audience. In order to understand what is performance art to which actionist art belongs it will be fruitful to have a look on Marvin Carlson definition cited in the thesis of Varvara Esipova (*Body and Pain in Contemporary Art. On the Phenomenon of Petr Pavlensky*, 2017: 20): "Performance art, a complex and constantly shifting field in its own right, becomes much more so when one tries to take into account, as any thoughtful consideration of it must do, the dense web of interconnections that exist between it and ideas of performance developed in other field and between it and the many intellectual, cultural, and social currents that condition any performance project today. These include what it means to be postmodern, the quest for a contemporary subjectivity and identity, the relation of art to structures of power, the varying challenges of gender, race, and ethnicity, to name only some of the most visible" (Carlson 1996[2004]: 4). Based on this quote, performance art can be understood as a constantly developing niche of art the existence of which is motivated by socio-political and cultural factors, for instance the need to problematize political issues related to abuse of power against some individuals or social groups (LGBTQI+ community, political dissidents, use of propaganda to justify illegal Crimea annexation, etc.).

Amelia Jones proposes a classification of bodily art in her work *The Artist's Body* (2012: 23-43), where the notions of the "*authentic*" *activists artist's body* and *technologised, dispersed artists' body* are of high relevance to Pavlensky's works. The former deals with use of a body as means for political resistance that covers any social issues, meanwhile the latter addresses to the body through the usage of media and technologies, where the artist's body is re-articulated and multiplied by photographs, videos and other types of visual and textual information through diverse web-sites. Another category *The body in pain/ The personal is political*⁷ is operational in the case of Pavlensky since it emphasizes the use of individual body with inflicting pain on it, where as a result the subjective feelings of the artist become also of the viewer who may experience empathy towards the performer (Jones 2012: 23-43). It is through the response to the feelings or to an absolute lack of response the personal becomes the political. Either

⁷ *The Personal Is Political* originates from the second wave of feminism in the end of 1960 and beginning of 1970. One of the prominent author who was developing the concept of *The Personal is Political* Paula Rust who said that that the personal can be at the service of the political, or resist to it (1995).

a subject engages into a dialogue with the state power and apparatus based on the evoked feelings and tries to question the status quo, or s/he totally ignores what one feels, expresses no dissent to the existing political order and thus maintains the hegemony. In addition, as it was mentioned above, the context, namely the time and space where and when the performance is staged is of a greater importance to the performative forms of art, as well as a possibility to interact with public, to transgress the established norms and codes of conduct (Fischer-Lichte 2015). Art theorists and practitioner Gómez-Peña Guillermo insists on understanding of artwork as the extension of artist body which is the centre of different intersected meanings, including political, semiotic, social (2001). Gómez-Peña also assumes the idea that the body of a performer is a metaphorical "sociopolitical body" that can resonate with a viewer's individual feelings (2001). Esipova in her meticulous semiotic analysis on the role of pain claims that one of the essential elements in bodily performance art between the public and individual is the presence of pain that reminds people about their "corporeality" (2017: 29). The bodily art deals mostly with subjectivity and its performative roles like gender, sex, social status by addressing as aesthetic aspects as well as political and personal ones (Jones 1998: 12-14).

It is true that Pavlensky's art has strong political implications as it reported by *The Economist*: "Many think that the "political" in his work overshadows the "art". In Pavlensky I see two main components: the citizen, who has political views, and the artist, who has artistic views," said Dmitry Ozerkov, director of contemporary art at St Petersburg's famed Hermitage Museum. "Each of these domains can be analysed: for some he is an artist, for others he is a political activist." Ozerkov argues, as many do, that Pavlensky's art, while interesting, is too fleeting, too tied to the politics of the moment, to leave a powerful imprint on history" (Sneider 2016). Taking this claim into consideration, it is possible to conclude that Pavlensky is an activist who uses artistic means for political purposes. A deeper look on Pavlensky art can be taken from his manifesto *The Bureaucratic Convulsion and the New Economy of Political Art*, where he says: "The voice of *vlast* (power/state) says: 'Listen, repeat, obey!' The voice of art says: 'Speak, refute, resist!'" (Sneider 2016). It is also remarkable, that Pavlesky deliberately chooses the places for his actions with primary focus on the cultural value (Red Square, Lubyanka). Transgressive actionism at first look does not fit into the category of traditional forms of art, though there is one commonality which is characteristic for both traditional and contemporary arts - the use of metaphorical language, tropes which are

created to approach social, sensitive from the perspective of art, problems (Golovastikov 2013).

Pavlensky explains that the actions are staged in public places for purpose. His actions are spontaneous interventions which are not regulated by institutions or the state apparatus. However, they are conditioned by the political situation since his artistic works are reactions on the hegemonic practices of the state apparatus (implementation of oppressive laws, control over media, forced medicalization) and how this state apparatus constructs the civil society and those who disobedient to its rule. Thus, Pavlensky says that the public space allows to reach the larger audience and "speak" freely, "authentically". The way how and where the artist articulates his message undermines the possibility of the state control over the situation prior and during the actions (Shkola Chto Delat 2013).

For Pavlensky, art always has political implications. The artist says that art either affirms some statement, political project or agenda, or denies it. Decorative art having no critical relation to politics does not challenge the hegemonic status quo and therefore serves to the purposes of the existing order of things. Political art, on the contrary, can question the established dominance within public discourse and thus undermine the hegemony of the state apparatus. Pavlensky argues that the main function of art is emancipation of the subject from the oppressive state apparatus (Kiselev 2016).

In this regard, there is a very interesting observation that political implications of artists are motivated by authoritarian tendencies in Russian politics, which are expressed in the form of oppression of the freedom of expression and lack of independent media (shutting down of a TV channel Dozhd) (BBC 2014). It is also symptomatic to the Russian actionism to target its audience primarily in the face of masses, as it is explained by Gimellshteyn: "The political action is addressed to the masses and is designed to deconstruct, and then restore on a new social basis. At the sight of political action - in the logic of public correspondence - not the life of a person, but the life of the community" (2016: 155-162).

Pavlensky repeatedly emphasises in his artistic works and interviews that government is oppressive state apparatus that strives to establish absolute control over its subjects via punitive and medical institutes, and the most remarkable is that civil society sustains these practices by abstaining from active political engagement: "When I did the Carcass piece with the barbed wire, I was not just saying how wonderful our legal system

is – people are inside this wire, which torments them, stops them from moving, and they feel pain from every movement. I was also saying people themselves are this barbed wire and create the wire for themselves" (Walker 2014). Pavlensky's actions are the political projects of resistance. The artist attempts to challenge the dominant discourse, by assigning specific meaning to the authorities through the critique of Putin's regime. We can see that from how Pavlensky approaches the state apparatus by claiming its governing techniques as manipulative and oppressive.

In this regard, it is valid to state that Pavlensky makes a part of the counter-hegemonic discourse to which we can relate Voina and Pussy Riot as well as some representative artists of Russian actionism. Thus, similarities between these artistic protests compound a counter-hegemonic discourse of resistance. Despite different socio-historical contexts, both Viennese and Russian actionism movements construct the other in the form of authorities (Green 1999).

Since authorities conceive of Pavlensky actions as artworks they condemn the artist in hooliganism (Walker 2017), thus devaluing and neutralizing his works. Among these cases when Pavlensky was forced to undergo a medical expertise in Moscow's Serbsky psychiatric centre for cutting off of earlobe (Hartog 2015). Another detention and consequent charges followed when Pavlensky set an arson at Lyubanska Security Services' door, in 2015 (FSB) (Walker 2017). Intervening into public spaces by staging of radical artistic actions Pyotr strives to challenge the status quo of hegemony. In his works, Pavlensky exposes diagnoses of the society that spouts up from hegemonic discourse. A lack of freedom of expression, limited access to the independent media, as well as medicalisation of sane prisoners are symptoms of the oppressive state apparatus. Disarticulation, i.e. a critique of the oppressive state apparatus is a key element for the construction of the resistance movement: "(...)perform diagnoses about social reality, build proposals. Acting in networks, they build collective actions that operate as resistance to exclusion and fight for social inclusion" (Gohn, 2011, p. 336). Pavlensky builds up an identity for the authorities by characterising some of its methods as oppressive and unacceptable from the perspective of human rights. The aesthetic expressions of Pavlensky are of a greater importance, mainly because the artist becomes discredited by the local authorities by being sent to psychiatric hospital for medical expertise, as well as being brought into court and accused in hooliganism.

Ehle mentions in her work that due to the "postmodern fluidity of truth" and openness to multiple interpretations and political representations the state apparatus can revert the critique aimed at it and address it back to the "expeditor" (2017: 19-22). The set of the strategies that the state applied to discredit Pavlensky and disqualify him as an artists involves not only repeatedly used appeal to psychiatric institutions in attempt to prove artist's insanity, but also to condemn Pavlensky for hooliganism which instantly overshadows the artistic component by the legal one. Thus, the state uses Pavlensky's works as precedent to impede his critique, render it invalid and "segregated" as an instance of "unhealthy part" of the larger social body. It is natural that the hegemony envisages the counter-hegemonic intervention as a threat, i.e. other, and by all means attempts to delegitimize it by undermining the opposition in the face of the public.

By his artistic interventions Pavlensky tries to disarticulate the hegemonic discourse, namely deconstructing the state apparatus. Thus, Pyotr reveals what kinds of techniques the government uses to exercise its control over subjects. It is exactly in this process of disarticulation Pavlensky portrays the image of the counter-hegemonic discourse's other, and as a result defines himself in relation to that other. As a master signifier, or a nodal point, Pavlensky uses this Other to build up chains of equivalences and differences within which the meaning articulation takes its place. We can find in this artistic critique as well as in the entire movement of the Russian actionism a source of a hegemonic struggle. The radical aesthetic means of expressions are characteristic to the Russian actionism movement, and are defining features for this discourse of resistance. The actions of Pavlensky should be observed in relation to the Russian (Moscow) actionism, in which we can see the construction of the identities, where the oppressive state apparatus is depicted as an antagonist. The aesthetic means of expressions of Pavlensky as well as other members of the Russian actionism demystify and challenge the authorities, by disarticulating their identity within the chain of equivalences where the state's governing techniques are represented by such predicates as "oppressive", "manipulative", "controlling".

In his works Pavlensky repeatedly uses his body as a primary means, thus endowing his works with biopolitical implications, which points at the fact that physical bodies are the terrain for political and ideological contestation (Foucault: 1980: 55). Thus, radical performances of Pavlensky where artist uses techniques of flesh mortification are very illustrative in terms of questioning of monopoly over people's body. It is legitimate

to state that, on the one hand each human being possess some degree of freedom over his body, however on the other hand this freedom in some regards is contested by social institutions and government which try to intervene into the personal space and exercise their control over people's lives, for example anti-gay propaganda law in Russia “to protect morality”, in 2013 (BBC 2017). Here, it becomes visible how the boundaries of private life and personal sovereignty of human beings are interfered by authorities, especially when it comes to issues related to the freedom of expression, sexuality, gender, political dissidence, etc. Pavlensky art works are aimed to subvert the status quo of existing power relations within political discourse by criticising the way how authorities indoctrinate its subject citizens, speaking the language of Michel Foucault, imposing the regime of truth and knowledge by the means of control, manipulation, and domination. Taking into consideration the fact that body is inherently political it is reasonable to assume that within specific context a body does have a meaning and value which are the products of hegemonic discursive struggle. Furthermore, these meaning and value may vary depending on the context and therefore their social and political features and functions are also subjected to a change, which in its turn can re-shape the field of discursivity rendering some actors as legitimate, meanwhile depriving others from their legitimacy. The potential meaning that a body may acquire is articulated and structured within discourse, thus a citizen may be considered as a obedient subject, a political dissident, or a source of institutional and political power.

In the work *Trajectory of Subject in the Space of Politics and Arts: The Artist, his Body and State Apparatus (Pavlensky's Case)*, 2018 Vyacheslav Kombarov argues that Pavlensky's body as a means of aesthetic expression is understood as signifier which alludes to the socio-political issues which happen to be signified (Kombarov: 16). The author brings about the idea of subjectivation where he explains how visual experience of audience that witnessed Pavlensky's works transforms into intellectual, i.e. ideas and values Pavlensky tries to denote (Kombarov 2018: 16). From this it follows, that visual experience links audience with intellectual and ideational. It is first through the visual perception the articulation of the message takes its place and enables the unfolding of the meaning and discussion within the public by the means of mass media, as well as other participants of the discourse and discursive event. The perception of the artist's works slides from visual to intellectual and if the communication of artist's ideas is successful, then there is a room for normative implications which can be raised in following

discussions. Thus, the aesthetic means allow to reach a new understanding of the subject and the state, to explore the relations between them, to see how one affects another and what consequences this intercourse between the power and the civil society brings about. Altogether, aesthetic means of expression grasped through the visual perception levered up and extended to the field of intellectual and normative through further elaborations discursively construct the identity of the hegemonic state apparatus, civil society, and of the artists.

To identify what performance art means the reference to Marvin Carlson's definition might serve very well for this purpose. According to Carlson, performance art is flexible in terms of its meaning and depending on different tradition can conceal distinctive elements. However, the most valuable and relevant features the Carlson brings about involve the relation of art to the power structures among which can be found such notions as race, gender, understanding of democracy, ideologies of regime (Carlson 1996[2013]: 6). This definition of performance art is fruitful since it allows to link the aesthetic element communicated through visual perception with ideas related to social injustice and abuse of power.

It is also fruitful to see what other well known artists and art critics say about Pavlensky's action *Fixation*. Thus, the gallerist Marat Guelman say that the action is distinct from what actionists typically attempt to produce in terms of effects: "they burst into the territory of fear, they break down prejudices, they laugh in the face of power. In this case, however, we don't see any of that energy, because this is not an act of protest, but rather a signal of defeat" (Eshun et al. 2013). Oleg Kulik, famous performance artist in Russia, argues that Pavlensky's art: "continues the traditions of [Kazimir] Malevich, of [Vladimir] Tatlin's mechanical theatre, of the work of Collective Action and of practically the whole Nineties actionism" (Eshun et al.). From this quote it is seen that Kulik identifies Pavlensky as a successor of Russian actionism and Moscow Conceptualism, who is portrayed as an avangardist through its relation to Malevich. Kulik also names Brener, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina (members of Pussy Riot group) and Pavlensky as martyrs who through their actions and performances demonstrated a true love of Christ (Eshun et al. 2013). Art critic Galina El'shevskaya who asserts that Pavlensky continues the tradition of Viennese Actionism of 1960 thus placing the artist in within the art of Russian Actionism and defines his works as living art (El'shevskaya n.d.).

3. Methodology

The methodological part of the thesis attempts by the means of discourse and contextual analysis to understand how the meaning and identities of the social actors constructed. Namely, this part will investigate how Pavlensky defines the state apparatus, and how his artistic articulatory practices speaking the language of Laclau and Mouffe attempt to challenge its hegemonic status. As a material for the analysis will be taken articles from different media, interviews with Pavlensky and about Pavlensky, to see how his actionist art is constructed from the point of view of other art critiques and experts. The given work will research the relations between Pavlensky's art and the Russian state apparatus, namely how the artist strives to unveil the mechanisms of control, manipulation and oppression exercised by state institutions as security service, media, medical institutions and prisons. In the beginning, the thesis provides a methodological framework with a detailed explanation of the relevance of discourse analysis and its toolkit description. Afterwards, the thesis will undertake a closer look on Pavlensky works by addressing diverse media articles and interviews, and finally one of the core texts *Manifesto* will be analysed in the light of Pyotr's artistic projects.

Another methodology employed in the case-study of Pavlensky's action *Fixation* consists of three approaches: pre-iconographical, iconographical and iconological proposed by Erwin Panofsky (1955). This methodology allows to see how the formal elements, themes, concepts inlaid in the artwork of Pavlensky are related to the socio-political context and what interpretations based on these relations. Thus, this synthesis of descriptive and interpretive approach analyses Pavlensky's work in depth and contextualizes it within the theoretical frame of the (counter-)hegemonic construct.

The choice of the interviews as a primary material on which this research relies on is justified by the fact that via media sources Pavlensky reaches out public discourse. In his interviews Pavlensky gives an extensive explanation of his actions and the role of the political art. It is through these interviews becomes possible to analyse how Pavlensky portrays the state apparatus and how the artist attempts to challenge its hegemonic status. The interviews and articles presented below supply with a substantial material on the basis of which it is possible to conduct an analysis of counter-hegemonic discourse articulated by Pavlensky. It is worthy to note, that the publishers and media taken for the

analysis are independent and are not financed by the Russian government which should ensure the better quality of the research material.

The choice of credible media as information sources is justified by their core values like independence from local institutions, freedom of expression, openness, trustworthiness based on ethical journalism, transparency, professionalism, accuracy, fact oriented. In the given thesis numerous reports and interviews were cited from such media as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, The Guardian, Colta.ru, BBC, and art online magazines: The Calvert Journal, Widewalls. These sources ensure relevance and quality of the news by providing exhaustive amount of material for study. In this research the material used from these media presents along with interviews also the reports on the performances of Pavlensky.

3.1. Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis provides tools for understanding social, cultural and political phenomena by investigating the meaning of a particular text. In every text relations between signs, i.e. words, sentences, utterances constitute the system of meaning. Discourse analysis is used to scrutinise the social meaning, i.e. representations, given to specific utterances, enunciations and practices. One of the methods of discourse analysis is textual analysis that examines the relations of predicates within one specific text, such as verbs, adverbs, adjectives and nouns (Milliken 1999: 232). Predicate analysis allows to see what predicates prevail within studied text which can point out to representation that dominates particular discourse (Neumann 2016).

Through the discourse analysis it is possible to see how Pavlensky via his articulatory practices such as actionist art along with interviews and text of *Manifesto* endows the state apparatus with the meaning. And how this meaning can challenge the hegemonic status quo as well as unveil the mechanisms of control, oppression and manipulation. The hegemonic representations can dominate the field of the social and discursivity, whereas counter-hegemonic representations tend to subvert this dominance (Neumann 2016: 3-5). Representations are not the things themselves, but only their manifestations, the way how they appear and what meaning they deliver to the participants of discursive event (Neumann 2016: 33).

Discourse analysis employed in this thesis is to understand how the artists can challenge the hegemonic discourse by articulated altered meaning through the enunciations, performances, lectures and any other sort of meaningful social actions. Application of discourse analysis as a method reveals the implicit mechanisms of language domination, revealing the concealed meaning as well as bridging up diverse texts and utterances which are constitutive to a particular discourse. Moreover, discourse analysis as a strategy explores the ideological structure which is overlaid by enunciations of participants of discursive event as well as shaped by non-verbal, extra- and paralinguistic elements, (elements related to any form of the meaningful social action and non-verbal components of speech process such as: gestures, tone of voice, register of speech, etc.) (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Fairclough 2003; Neumann 2016).

In order to understand the meaning articulated by Pavlensky to challenge the hegemonic discourse of the Russian state apparatus it is necessary to undertake both contextual and textual analysis. In the given work the discourse analysis will be unfolded within three distinct but interrelated dimensions: text, context and interpretation. The primary focus of textual analysis is onto specific utterances which contribute to the formation of a discourse. Thus, the interviews of Pavlensky along with his *Manifesto* will be meticulously analysed to see how the artist employs different meaning to produce counter-hegemonic articulation. The similar approach will be used to analyse the artist's action *Fixation* as a text that includes such components as theme, symbols, poetic devices (use of irony), relation to social context and other texts. As for contextual analysis, the object of study should be the very process of enunciation, the conditions of discourse formation as a part of specific event or set of actions. In this regard, the context of Pavlensky's artworks will be taken as a part of the object of analysis. Special attention will be paid to spatial and temporal relations which play a significant role in Pavlensky's art. Lastly, the interpretation reveals the meaning which is behind the discourse, namely conceived, distorted or implied images, symbols, agendas, ideologies, interests of members of discursive event as significant parts of discourse formation. The use of metaphors by Pavlensky in his works, allusions to prison and psychiatric practices and their relation to the society. In addition, there is an important aspect of dialogical relations which are operational to discourse analysis in a way that the meaning between texts and contexts are constantly negotiated and interrelated. According to Bakhtin, texts are always dialogical in a way that any utterance is linked to another one, and due to the difference

between these elements a text acquires its meaning (Bakhtin 1986a: 69). Dialogism makes possible the fact of competing texts and discourses since it implies the negotiation of meaning and definitions, and therefore it is an essential part of hegemonic struggle, where the particular i.e. a specific system of values, political agenda, norms, information become universalised and thus acquire their domination over the field of discursivity (Holquist 1981: 427, Butler et al. 2000).

Discourse analysis employs a set of strategies and instruments for creation of analytical framework for which the linguistic studies are of a great use. In the given research, special attention is given to content such as metaphorical expressions, use of wordings, collocations, genre. As a justification of the need for analysis of all these elements might serve the assumption, that specific use of language is driven by agent's intentions and political interests (a participant of communicative event). Since any social phenomenon is discursively mediated the meaning which Pavlensky assigns to the state apparatus in his interviews and commentaries constitute a central part of the research (Laclau and Mouffe 1990: 101).

The analysis of text accounts for lexical units and the relations between them, thus it involves the meaning mediated by deixis (pronouns, adverbs, nouns, etc.); verbs for indication of actions and their situation within temporal and spatial dimensions, specifically when and where the action has taken its place; rhetorical devices such as metaphors, synecdoches, metonymies; syntactics as a set of rules for producing, enabling and constraining meaning. Thus, individual metaphors, speech acts and collocations can serve to legitimize the position of a participant of a discursive events or to question the status of his opponent.

3.2. Contextual Analysis

Contextual analysis' aim is to grasp the meaning from particular event, i.e. it helps to understand the situation within which discourse emerged and articulated by discursive actors. In the analysis of context a special attention is paid to symbolic relations within which participants of the social event interact. Thus, contextual analysis chiefly deals with social rules, norms, values of discourse participants, it emphasises the meaning given to the event, and the way how social agents portray each other and constitute their self-image. In contextual analysis intentions and political and personal views of Pavlensky,

his understanding of the state apparatus will be subjected to the analysis. Contextual analysis can be divided into two branches: situational and intertextual. In this research a situational analysis prevails by bringing up a detailed description of social actors, actions, circumstances and preconditions of discursive formation (confrontation of political interests, promotion of the political agenda, etc.), it also tries to resolve such questions such as why the discourse emerged at all, what are the intentions of its participants, and how they contribute to the communicative event. Though, in the given research it is barely possible to define why specifically the political-critical art of Pavlensky emerged as such, nevertheless it is feasible to find the relation of Pavlensky art as a reaction to the political situation in Russia.

The strategy for contextual analysis involves the correlation between discourse and the social locus where it emerged. In this regard, for the part of contextual analysis it is essential to determine the roles of social actors, their intentions, interests, the way they communicate their ideas and portray the image of the other. The ideas and intentions of the participants of the discursive event are also communicated by the actions they undertake. Thus, the way how the justice system interprets Pavlensky actions (a mere hooliganism) and keeps him under the custody are essential to the contextual analysis. Through conferring of the meaning participants of the discursive event acquire their identities and meaning. Above of that, the research of the context also entails the study of social frames, which in a way can be understood as grammatical constraints for social interaction. Thus, frames predefine the possibility of participant's actions, since values, norms and, generally speaking, cultural codes are incorporated within these social structures, both implicitly and explicitly. Through conferring of the meaning participants of the discursive event acquire their identities and meaning.

One of the methods of textual analysis examines the relations of predicates within one specific text, such as verbs, adverbs, adjectives and nouns (Milliken 1999: 232). Predicate analysis allows to see what predicates prevail within studied text which can point out on representation that dominates particular discourse (Neumann 2016).

3.3. The Aims of Discourse Analysis

It is through discourse a particular regime of truth can establish a sort of monopoly over meaning (Milliken 1999). Discourse analysis is aimed to reveal the mechanisms of

dominance and resistance, and the way how social actors are engaged into production of power relations which stem from particular utterances and texts. In this regard, texts and utterances are the resource of power which can be used by social actors by changing of the meaning. Thus, by the use of language and discursive practices like performance social agents through their actions and utterances can shape the configuration of power relations. This thesis analyzes how Pavlensky through his political art attempts to undermine the hegemonic status quo.

The way how social agents interpret a particular event can significantly influence the consequences of discursive struggle. To make it clear, one and the same event can be regarded as a meeting, riot, terrorism, emancipatory activism, etc (Tenorio 2011: 193). Different interpretations engender different consequences, as it will be seen in the case of Pavlensky that some people envisage his actionism as art, other as hooliganism.

Discourse analysis deals with strategies and structures of hegemony and counter-hegemony, or alternatively speaking with mechanisms of dominance and resistance (Van Dijk 1995: 18). Thus, manipulation of mass media, political indoctrination, cultural hegemony, ideological setting of social institutions (universities, system of healthcare, religion, museums, etc.) as well as a resistance against these constitutive elements of society incorporated in the form of critique, analysis, reflection, opposition, counter-culture become central object of discourse studies. The intersection of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses produces struggle in the form of meaning negotiation. This meaning negotiation results into exclusion/inclusion, de-/legitimation, naturalisation of a discourse, critique against the regime, etc. In discourse analysis texts and context are considered as a resource of power, and therefore the way how actors of a discursive struggle use diverse texts, images, utterances, what norms and values they envisage as legitimate defines the way how both dominance and resistance are exercised (Van Dijk 1995: 20). The specific use of words or means of aesthetic expressions by Pavlensky inform the audience about his values as well as portray the image of the other in face of the state apparatus, against which the counter-hegemonic discourse is incorporated.

In the given thesis texts are be considered as the components of the social events. The texts are shaped both by social structures and practices, and by the participants of these social events. (Archer 1995, Sayer 2000). The role of the social agents in text formation is of high importance, since it is the participants of the social events who shape the relations between the textual components, by endowing them with specific meaning

and connotation (Fairclough 2003: 22). Thus, how Pavlensky defines the hegemonic state apparatus and explains his actions are the instances of how texts are shaped by the participants of the social event. According to Fairclough, social practices are regarded as vehicles that mediate discourse and language as well as the social processes such as production of knowledge, mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, techniques of control and indoctrination, any sort of action and interaction, beliefs, values, backgrounds, interests, intentions, ideas (Fairclough 2003: 25). Therefore, artistic works of Pavlensky are the means how the artists transpose his values, delivers political interests and intentions to destabilize the hegemonic status quo of the state apparatus discourse and its practices.

In more technical language, discourses can be characterised by genres, styles and representation (Fairclough 2003: 26). Discursive genre is the way how the meaning is articulated, i.e. interviews, artistic actions, manifesto, media which are extensively presented in this work. Representation as a part of discursive events stands for the meaning of specific social actions or texts incorporated within one single discourse. This is the meaning given by the participants of the discourses, both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. The style defines the composition and function of social identities of discourse participants, especially the way they portray self-image and the image of the other. This is especially relevant since the way how Pavlensky defines the state apparatus is an articulatory practice to challenge the counter-hegemonic discourse.

Fairclough defines two types of textual relations within which discursive and textual relations are realised: internal (syntagmatic which are actually presented in the text) and external (paradigmatic which are implied or indirectly referred to) (Fairclough, 2003: 36-39). The external relations account for extra- and paralinguistic features such as social practices, participants of discourse, intertextual connections, social structures such as institutions, intentions of the social actors, values, norms. These external relations appear in the actions of Pavlensky which are thoroughly discussed below. Thus, it will be demonstrated how commentary on his artistic works are related to the prisoners' practices, segregation and forced medicalisation as a political instrument, as well oppressive laws. The internal are incorporated within linguistic terms and involve such components as semantics of specific enunciations, grammatical elements including: verbs, nouns, adjectives; lexical: expressions and collocations; and phonological: pitch and tone of

voice, types of fonts, etc. The relevance of this approach is justified by the fact that most of the material for analysis is retrieved from the interviews.

4. Artistic Works of Pavlensky

In order to understand the political position of contemporary Russian artist Pyotr Pavlensky and his artistic works it is necessary to review some of his interviews and lectures where he discusses the meaning and purposes of the actions. Among one of this interviews was published on *Platfor.ma* (Marchenko 2016). In his interview which was given in June 2016, in Ukraine, Pavlensky reflects on the governmental techniques of control over citizens in the form of security services, prisons, psychiatric establishments (Selivanov 2016). In his lecture Pavlensky says that the state power tries to exercise and retain its control by instrumentalising science, medicine, psychiatry and to contest its dominance is a duty of everyone. The artist says that in Russia it is not the authorities who serve the people, but on the contrary, it is people who should serve the state power. Here, Pavlensky says that the state power uses terror in the form of the security service (FSB) as a mechanism of control over the civil society. He also says that freedom that the civil society enjoys is a prison of everyday life since it is confined by legal structures, normative and cultural constraints where people are jailed in the paddock that renders them obedient. He continues that the aims of the political art are opposed to the apparatus of the state power, to resist against its control (Selivanov 2016).

He claims that the regulatory mechanisms and surveillance over people is guaranteed by these very people. He explicitly distinguishes between two alternatives by emphasising that there is either power (authorities) that serves people, or people who serve the power (Shkola Chto Delat 2013). Thus, Pavlensky says that authorities tend to instrumentalise or establish a sort of monopoly over diverse domains of social life endowing them with specific meaning, functions and purposes, including: religion, science, philosophy, psychiatry. Under this claim it is possible to see how critical the artist is regarding people's freedom and authorities attempts to effectuate control over this freedom. According to Pavlensky, the power in Russia is in hands of Federal Security Services which is headed by Putin as an official representative of this institution. In Pyotr's opinion the prison is an institution which is a political means for authorities. In order to be efficient in the "management" of prisoners it manipulates people by dwelling on their basic needs, such as hunger, sleep, communication, hygiene, health. Thus, prison authorities structures the relations between prisoners and their ward guards and establishes the order by pressing on people's natural needs and fears to get punishment. Pavlensky continues, that prisoners have to obey to such mechanisms of control and

through the time the life deprived of freedom becomes a sort of habitude, i.e. prisoners take commands as it their normal part of life. In fact, one can observe naturalisation or normalisation techniques, where imposed conditions becomes natural and the only thinkable for an individual. Further, the artist compares the prison as an institution and freedom of a regular Russian citizen by underlying the degree of this freedom. The only difference he draws is that prison as an institution is just more confined in space, meanwhile the freedom of an individual is the same jail regulated by law and other institutions assigned to get control over population.

In his lecture Pavlensky says that it is crucial to resist against cultural and social standardization which the artist associates with chauvinism and exclusion from the public space. From this it follows, that Pavlensky insists on constant resistance and disarticulation of the hegemonic discourse that establishes the monopoly over meaning (Shkola Chto Delat 2013).

Pavlensky explains that his actions are to create a precedent to show to the audience the political situation in Russia, which he defines as "masochism". This definition is remarkable since it denotes how the civil society enjoys the "pain" inflicted by the state apparatus. In this respect, Pavlensky wants to say that the civil society by expressing no dissent against the oppressive laws maintains these relations with the state power, and thus reproduces the hegemonic order (Gromads'ke Telebachennya 2013).

Pavlensky argues that in his actionism he does not count on immediate impact on the society. The artist elaborates that his actions are the texts which are infused within the socio-cultural space to influence the civil society in its future political decisions, such as participation in protests, explicit and public expression of the dissent against the authorities, which potentially can lead to mobilisation of the social groups (including a gesture of solidarity with subalternities) based on their political interests and needs. As the artist explains, the way how he overcame fear to make these actions can serve as an example for other people not to fear the state power. This purpose of Pavlensky actions can be understood as an attempt to produce a shift in the balance of power relations and increase the political engagement among the civil society (Gromads'ke Telebachennya 2013).

According to Pavlensky the state power by the use of media attempts to establish its totalizing narrative through the monopoly over the meaning in the public discourse. For Pyotr, art attempts to contest this monopoly by renegotiating the meaning in

accordance with an idea of an artist. This negotiation of meaning engenders the discursive struggle where the participants of the competing discourses articulate their demands, intentions, interests, ideas and values. Pavlensky says, that political art works with instruments of the state power such as media, medical institutions, security services, justices system and employs them in the critique against the state power (Gromads'ke Telebachennya 2013). The artist himself designates this discursive struggle as a "war of naming". It is through naming the identities of the discursive events are created and articulated (Kiselev 2016).

In Pavlensky's words, the state considers its citizens as productive units, meanwhile their lives are mere resources for realisation of authority's goals. The issue for Pavlensky is that specific power relations regulated by state authorities deprive people not only from freedom, but also from their individuality, confining their responsibilities of choices these people can make. The artist insists on contradistinction of art and state, where the former is impelled to resist the power of the latter (Marchenko 2016).

In his interview, Pavlensky says that the forms of art that interest him the most are those which reveal the real state of affairs, therefore he abstains from decorative art to deliver his ideas (Walker 2014). The resonance his performances produced can be found in the reaction of the state apparatus the legitimacy and the authoritative status quo of which, according to Igor Tsukanov (art collector), become threaten (Somers Cocks 2017).

It is also remarkable, how important media and the Internet in general for Pavlensky. In fact, the form of expression of Pyotr's ideas is not solely confined by the means of body, on the contrary, Pavlensky believes that his actions continue even during the court hearing. Speaking about pragmatics of artistic messages the dissemination of the news on his works through the Internet and media is of a high importance (Sedacca 2015).

The action *Fixation* took its place on November 10, 2013 and coincided with Police Day celebrated in Russia. According to *The Guardian* Pavlensky explained his artwork as "a metaphor for the apathy, political indifference and fatalism of modern Russian society". During his action he nailed his scrotum to Red Square in front of the wall of Kremlin. Pavlensky was charged with a case on "hooliganism motivated by hatred of a particular social, ethnic or religious group" (Walker 2014). Pavlensky actions are not only the critique against the system and its institutions, but he also tries to protests against

the apathy of people, their political disengagement. The origins of the idea implemented by Pavlensky in his actions can be found in the stories of Gulag, where prisoners nailed their scrotum to the trees as a protest against inhuman treatment and conditions they lived in. Thus, Pyotr metaphorically associates Russia with a prison system.

Interestingly, that the Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky was very sceptical regarding artistic status of Pavlensky work and recommended to visit psychiatric hospital if one wishes to see Pyotr (Grani.ru 2013). This claim depicts an official position of the Ministry of Culture towards what Pavlensky is doing. Basically, if one considers the official discourse as hegemonic, then it becomes clear where is the intersection of counter-hegemonic struggle takes its place, namely on the clashing point of different interests. Thus, Medinsky tries to delegitimize Pavlensky actions from their artistic status by claiming that if one wishes to see such art can visit psychiatry museum. Moreover, Russian television reported about *Fixation* as an attempt for committing of suicide (Sedacca 2015). This fact proves that the authorities attempt to discredit Pavlensky since his actions threaten the state apparatus which is exposed to the critique of the artist.

Fixation action was highly appreciated by a number of art experts in diverse fields who shared their opinions in social media and popular magazines, namely: Kirill Serebrennikov (director), Marat Gelman (gallerist), Vladimir Dubosarsky (artist) (Snob 2013), Alexandr Cheparukhin (music producer), Alexey Medvedev (film critic), Lucine Dzhanyan (artist), Sergey Anashkin (film critic), German Vinogradov (artist), Yelena Kaluzhskaya (head of the Information Department of the Sakharov Centre) (Hanzharova 2013), Irina Kosterina (culturologist), Andrey Velikanov (artist, philosopher), Roman Volobuev (film critic). One of the reasons why *Fixation* acquired such popularity and considered to be successful is that the artist does not express the struggle between two forces (authorities who have power and those who try to contest the legitimacy of these authorities and their actions), but rather he accentuates attention on the failure, total subordination to the authorities who have power over citizens (Golovastikov 2013). By this, Pavlensky reveals the oppressive character of power relations which constitute the hegemonic order, within which citizens are reluctant to take a part in critical assessment and questioning of the political order. In fact, by this political indifference people passively support the existing state of affairs, meaning that by avoiding political participation Russians do contribute into the hegemonic order where the free media are censored (TV channel Dozhd') and the authorities have almost limitless power to

intervene into private lives of its people (anti-gay propaganda law of 2013). In all likelihood, by letting a state to interfere into private life there remains less lacuna in which people can operate themselves, making (political) decisions, express their freedom and support to other political forces, etc.

Pavlensky action called *Freedom* has taken its place on February 23, in 2014. During this action Pyotr and a group of other people set fire of tires surrounded by Ukrainian flags and were making noise by beating the sheets made of metal. The place where happening was organised is situated where Tsar Alexander II was assassinated in 1881. This action was a replay of famous Maidan protests in 2013-2014 in Ukraine. After this event Pyotr has been delivered for the custody where, as he claims, he has been physically violated, however medical expertise reported no injuries were inflicted to him during the detention (Pieniążek 2016). Later, during the court procedure Pavlensky paid to sexual workers to attend the court as witnesses. For engaging sexual workers Pavlensky was criticised by feminists, since witnesses belong to vulnerable social group and could experience further difficulties both from the side of local authorities and society in general. By this act, Pavlensky expressed his attitude to the justice made within the walls of the court, mocking on the legal institution that makes a part of the state apparatus. However, Pyotr also received a bunch of support for organisation of his action. One of the guest from Ukraine, journalist Natalya Gumenyuk said that the action *Freedom* is staged as a gesture of solidarity for those who were protesting during Maidan event (Volchek 2016).

During his interview Pavlensky compares Maidan events happened in 2014, in Ukraine, with the overall situation in Russia. The artist says that people in Ukraine due to Maidan ceased to be the objects of power, whereas the political situation in Russia is dictated not by the will of the civil society, but by the hegemonic state apparatus. Pavlensky explains that Maidan should undertake the form of everyday life and in the mindset of the civil society. His interpretation of Maidan as an overthrow of the dictate of power implies that the civil society should become more critical and aware about the distributed power relations and what effects they produce on the society (Gromads'ke Telebachennya 2013).

Another work of Pavlensky is known as *The Carcass* and was held on May 3, 2013 (Walker 2014). Pavlensky personally commented on the meaning of his action: “A series of laws aimed at suppressing civic activism, intimidation of the population,

steadily growing number of political prisoners, the laws against NGOs, the 18+ laws, censorship laws, activity of Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media, promotion of homosexuality laws – all these laws aren't aimed against criminals, but against the people. And at last the Blasphemy law. That is why I organized this action. The human body is naked like a carcass, there is nothing on it except the barbed wire, which by the way was invented for protection of livestock. These laws like the wire, keep people in individual pens: all this persecution of political activists, governmental repressions is the metaphor of the pen with the barbed wire around it. All this has been done in order to turn people into gutless and securely guarded cattle, which can only consume, work, and reproduce” (Velimirović 2016).

The Carcass is a pure imitation of what natural carcass looks like. The barbed wire associated with a restrictive zone which is not allowed to be crossed is a clear illustration of repressive nature of the law. Through the repressive laws the state apparatus exercises its control over the civil society. The government itself creates the manageable and loyal citizens by means of confining their freedom of expression. Subjects become the products of the ideological production effectuated through the media, voluntarily subjecting themselves to the control of the local authorities. New regime of truth is established and mediated to the citizens who do not question, since the reality they live is at stake – all mythologies, world views and systems of beliefs can be ruined. These myths should be constantly supported by the mass media and delivered to the audience.

The action *Carcass* was staged near the legislative assembly on Saint Isaac's Square, next to the Mariinsky Palace which are symbolic places for Pavlensky. Pavlensky says this administrative centre of Saint-Petersburg is the symbolic centre of the state power. In his lecture Pavlensky explains that any action that individual makes results in pain. In this regard, the artist implies that any expression of freedom is punished by the state apparatus. Thus, the state produces the society of obedient subjects where even the slightest deviation from the imposed norm becomes a violation of the laws. This way the state creates new normativity beyond which any action is an extremism (Shkola Chto Delat 2013).

Segregation (2014) is one of Pavlensky actions where the artist cut off earlobe as a protest against forced psychiatric treatment of political dissidents. The action

took place over the wall of Serbsky psychiatric hospital which is famous for giving false medical sentences to political dissidents during Soviet times (Luhn 2014). In 2012, after protests related to presidential election on Bolotnaya Square, Mikhail Kosenko was subjected to psychiatric treatment based on questionable, fabricated sentence, which attracted the attention of Amnesty International (Luhn 2014). Besides, the case of Nadiya Savchenko (Ukrainian military servant) who was condemned in death of Russian correspondents and was subsequently subjected to medical evaluation in psychiatric hospital can also illustrate the attempts of interested groups to use medicalisation in political interests. These were not the single cases, among those who were subjected to detention and medical expertise was Alexei Chirny who criticised Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea and who was subsequently accused for terrorism (KhPG 2014). Finally, Pavlensky himself was forced to undergo similar procedures on mental health evaluation after his actions, including *Fixation*, *Segregation* and *Freedom*. Pavlensky comments on his performance: "Armed with psychiatric diagnoses, the bureaucrat in a white lab coat cuts off from society those pieces that prevent him from establishing a monolithic dictate of a single, mandatory norm for everyone" (Luhn 2014).

One of the controversial episodes of Pavlensky biography is related to Vaclav Havel International Prize for Creative Dissent. In 2016 Pavlensky was nominated as a winner for his well known action *Threat*, however eventually the award has been withdrawn due to Pavlensky's support of Primorsky Partisans. Pyotr has accused the commission for supporting of "police terror" when Human Rights Foundation decided to renounce the award. HRF justified this decision by claiming that any form of violence used in the fight against oppressive state apparatus is not acceptable. In fact, Pavlensky wanted to give away the prize that amounts to 42 000\$ for support of Primorsky Partisans, a group of six guerrilla war who were fighting and protesting against abuse of law and corruption by Russian government and who were eventually sentenced to jail for murdering of officers in 2010. Later, it turned out that Pavlensky's intention was to spend the awarded prize for legal support of Primorsky Partisans, however his explanation was met with refusal to grant the prize, for what the committee has been accused by Pyotr as "totalitarian" (Balmforth 2016).

On the fourth of May, 2017 Pavlensky confirmed that he has been given political asylum in France (Interfax 2017). On the 16th of October, 2017 Pavlensky set fire on the entrance of the Bank of France, on the Place de la Bastille, in France. The message

Pavlensky attempted to deliver by this arson says that on the place of monarchs came bankers, thus criticising the domination of "financial powers" (Colta 2017). Pavlensky claimed that Bank of France is historically oppressive when it comes to revolutionary incentives raising in France (Radio Liberty 2018). It is worthy to note that this arson organised by Pavlensky and for which he has been convicted for prison was met rather with misunderstanding than support in France.

Among the artists circles Pavlensky is regarded as controversial figure. This controversy though is also reflected in the Russian political discourse where one can witness a polarization. Pavlensky's actions provoke different reactions and split the public into two major camps, where one is supportive to his actionism, another one accuses the artist for his artistic works. Here provided the names of some of the art critics, artists and curators whose opinions largely reflect the overall acceptance of Pavlensky actions in Russia. Some of the artists, curators, art critics, editors, journalists, and film directors are explicit proponents of Pavlensky art, meanwhile others tend to criticize his works by claiming them as naïve, vulgar and grotesque, or absolutely disqualify as art. The supporting camp involves Yury Albert (artist), Ilya Budraitskis (artist, historian, publicist), Oleg Mavromati (artist, actionist), Dmitry Ozerkov (art critic, gallerist), Yekaterina Dyogot' (art critic, curator), Linor Goralik (writer, poet, curator), Pavel Bardin (film director), Yelena Kostyleva (artist, performer), Avdey Ter-Oganyan (artist-actionist, gallerist), Kira Dolinina (art critic), Igor Skaletsky (artist), Vladimir Ovcharenko (founder of the gallery "Ridgina"), Maria Roguleva (art critic), Lev Rubinshtein (poet, publicist, literary critic), Faina Balakhovskaya (art critic), Milena Orlova (chief editor The Art Newspaper Russia), Yegor Koshelev (artist), Anton Litvin (artist, gallerist), Gleb Napreyenko (art critic, art historian), whereas Pavlensky work was met by condemnation from the side of Yelena Kovylyina (poetess, journalist), Alexandr Shaburov (artist, member of art group *Sinie Nosy* (*Blue Noses*)), Anna Montgait (journalist, TV host) and misunderstanding by Vladimir Paperny (writer, culturologist, architect critic), Polina Osetinskaya (musician) (Ryzhenko 2013).

Those who are supportive towards Pavlensky's actions tend to refer to the idea that artistic works of Pyotr are symptoms of the Russian regime and can be considered as a reflection of despair, inability to establish a constructive dialogue between authorities and citizens. Art critics and artists emphasise importance of the choice of medium - artist's body, as a territory of ideological contestation as well as a primary victim of political

violence. In one of his lectures Pavlensky talks about the state apparatus as an apparatus of violence. By equating the state apparatus with a system of violence the artist implies that the Russian political system is an enemy against which the civil society should mobilize to resist. Also, by saying that there is a violence in the form of the state Pavlensky implicitly states that there is a victim against which the violence is employed. Pavlensky says that any violent action that the state apparatus implements is justified by it as a care and protection of its citizens (Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival 2014). From this it follows, that under the pretext of care the state apparatus can use the means of control, detention, manipulation, exclusion, humiliation, oppression to ensure the wellbeing of the civil society. Using this excuse, the state apparatus can eliminate or neutralize the political opposition in its interest by veiling up its violent actions by care and protection.

It is true that Pavlensky's actionism is full of controversy which can be seen from opposite opinions regarding both aesthetic value and ideational aspect, form and content respectively. Some of critics and artists attribute Pavlensky to the tradition of Russian political actionism which includes group Voina and with their provocative performances and actions; others accuse Pyotr for his radicalism by questioning his sanity or by blaming him for attempting to catch media attention through mere hooliganism (Ryzhenko 2013). Juri Lotman provides an explanation on the basis of which it is possible to infer why the actions of Pavlensky have such much rejection. Perception of art, both its aesthetic expression and content (signifier and signified) are predefined by previous experience (Lotman 1977: 287-289). What Lotman means that the way how the artistic model is perceived largely depends on the pre-existing models of the receiver. Under the model understood a sign that replaces an object during learning processes, and the art is "analogue" of the object expressed by artistic means (Lotman 1967: 130-131). Thus, if the target audience in its majority fails to recognize the artistic text, it is because their mental models, i.e. the systems of representations are referred to the experience of a different kind. It is most likely, that the society where flesh-mortification or self-damaging are conceived as psychic disorders or extremely deviant practices will not recognize artistic works where these radical elements of aesthetic expressions are presented.

4.1. Discourse Analysis of Pavlensky's Actions

In his action *Seam*, by sewing his mouth in front of the Kazan Cathedral in 2012 Pavlensky points at the ban on publicity and freedom of expression. The artist claims that Russian society is frightened to speak freely and he diagnosis it with a massive omnipresent paranoia that government is supervising people (Like-A, n.d.). By this action Pavlensky reveals the mechanisms of control by asserting that there is no freedom of expression in Russia. This action has a strong correlation with another one called *Fixation* (where Pavlensky nailed his scrotum on the Red Square in 2013) (Like-A, n.d.). The action was performed on the Red Square, and for Pavlensky it's a symbolic place - the *heart of the state*. Red colour is another component of the action that Pavlensky mentions in the context of its Soviet past is historically associated with police, state power and security services. The red colour intermingles with another action called *Stitch* where Pavlensky sewed his mouth with red thread that symbolizes the oppressive laws of the state apparatus against the freedom of expression. Speaking culturally, Pavlensky juxtaposes red and black, where the former stands for oppression and control, whereas the latter denotes individual freedom (Volchek 2017). Thus, the red stands for oppressive character of the state that does not tolerate any political alternatives and immediately considers them as threats to the state, which eventually eliminated by coercive measures as imprisonment. Pavlensky equals the state where the authorities exercise their control over the civil society via media, security service and psychiatric institutions with jail (Snob 2013). This comparison allocates the identities to the civil society and the state. Thus, the civil society acquires the role of obedient prisoners, where the authorities are the "ward guards" the primary responsibility of which is to apply punitive measures in case of disobedience and ensure a total control over these prisoners. Pavlensky describes the state apparatus not as a person in Kremlin, but as a system of bureaucratic responsibilities dispersed throughout the institutions (Snob 2013).

When Pavlensky discusses the performance of Pussy Riot staged in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior he defines Russian Orthodox Church as a commercial, pro-Kremlin structure, bureaucratic apparatus of the state power and clerical institution, institution of repression of subjectivity. In his own action *Seam* Pavlensky demonstrated how the state apparatus sews the mouth of the civil society which is used as a metaphor to show the implementation of oppressive laws. Church becomes equally the instrument of the state propaganda. Pavlensky in his saying that church is "schizoid structure" he intends to

discredit this institution. And since the state apparatus relies on the Russian Orthodox Church as a religious institution, it is possible to see how Pavlensky implicitly criticizes the state itself (Shkola Chto Delat 2013).

His message was to show that civil society is politically indifferent and impotent. Also, by indicating the fact that the symptoms of silence in the society reached a massive scale it becomes visible that people themselves support the hegemony imposed by authorities. The Russian civil society in its majority does not resist against the oppression of freedom, as it was seen in the case of Pussy Riot, when the band was convicted to jail for two years after their performance in 2012 (hooliganism motivated by religious hatred) (RT 2012). Thus, the civil society maintains this hegemony by having no explicit criticism on lack of freedom of expression.

In *Carcass* performed in 2013 Pavlensky accuses the state for the laws and regulations that government implements, which are in fact not against the criminals, but to frighten the civil society, to make it as obedient as possible. Amongst these laws he lists the following: the Russian "foreign agent law" (which has negative connotations from the Soviet past), anti-gay propaganda law, censure law, 18+ law (Like-A, n.d.). It is in this artistic work he put a wire around his naked body. This wire signifies these repressive laws implemented by the government, whereas his naked body is associated with the entire civil society. Both people and the state create this wire and maintain the repressive laws (Walker 2014). Pavlensky says that by enforcement of these laws the authorities attempt to turn the citizens into obedient subjects who will not question the political situation and the hegemonic status of those who are in power (Like-A, n.d.). Here, the artist constructs the meaning of authorities as an oppressive state apparatus that empowers itself via implementation of repressive laws.

In the action *Freedom* which took its place in 2014, Pavlensky expresses his support for Ukrainian Maidan, by commenting on it that "the struggle against imperial chauvinism continues" (Like-A, n.d.). The action was performed on purposefully chosen place and date near to the Church of the Savior on Blood, in Saint-Petersburg. It was February 23, Defender of the Fatherland Day. In his action, Pavlensky was calling people to celebrate Maidan and everyone's freedom. During the action there were Ukrainian flags and burning tires on the bridge, which meant that there is no way back (Like-A, n.d.). It is remarkable, that Pavlensky undertakes a discourse where he defines the Russian state as an empire. He intentionally associates the authorities with the Russian imperial past in

attempt to criticize it for "chauvinism" (Vizual Culture Research Center 2014). During the action firemen were called to extinguish the arson of the Lyubyanka's doors. Here Pavlensky associates the fire with a revolution, and says that Russia is exceptionally efficient in neutralizing of "fire". This means, that the state apparatus in Russia is structured in that way that it successfully undermines any revolutionary or politically alternative movements (Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival 2014).

In *Segregation*, 2014 Pavlensky cut his earlobe on the wall of Serbsky Psychiatric Institute Pavlensky attempted to draw people's attention to how the government uses medical institutions in political interests. This action is referred to Van Gogh's madness who cut his ear, thus Pavlensky says that use of psychiatry by the "police apparatus" allows the later to define who is insane (Like-A, n.d.). Thus, there were cases when political opponents and dissidents are put under the custody of psychiatric institutions (Okrest 2016). Amongst those victims of political pursuits are: Mikhail Kosenko (Radio Svoboda 2014), Nadezhda Nizovkina (Za Volyu 2012), Albet Imendayev (Newsru 2006). By saying that the state is "police apparatus" Pavlensky denies the Russian government as a democratic institution. According to Pavlensky, segregation is a separation which is aimed to establish a homogeneous society where the diversity in political interests and support is reduced to the minimum (Snob 2014). This leads to a conclusion that the Russian government strives to totalize its control over people, and those who do not support it are doomed to be segregated from the society.

As Pavlensky says: "The knife separates the body from the earlobe. The concrete wall of psychiatry separates sane society from insane patients. By returning to the use of psychiatry for political purposes, the police apparatus regains the power to determine the border between sanity and madness. Armed with psychiatric diagnoses, a bureaucrat in a white coat severs from society those elements that impede a monolithic dictate of the norm, the same for all and necessary for everyone" (Beard 2014). The claim that it is police apparatus that defines the sanity implies that in order to be declared as insane an expertise of qualified psychiatric institution is not necessary. In fact, it is the authorities who have a right and power to segregate the unhealthy parts of the social body in the pursuit of its interests. Thus, the medical institutions becomes the instrument of the state power. Pavlensky attempted to demonstrate that it is the state that has power to qualify the sanity of its citizens, and due to the fact that authorities can discredit mentally sane

citizen in the sake of the state's interests should produce a distrust in which the hegemonic status and its dominance are under attack.

Pavlensky says that in a psychiatric hospital, a person becomes objectified - an object of diagnosing. In this regard, any form of dissent or disobedience can result at the verdict on person's sanity. To be sane, a patient should demonstrate a total obedience to the hospital and agree to medical procedures and treatments, otherwise it will be considered as mentally ill (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 27).

Pavlensky claims that the state authorities "...want to neutralise their opponents. And they have three ways of doing this: the first is to frighten people into ceasing their acts of resistance. The second is to jail them or place them in psychiatric hospitals. The third, and the most convenient for the authorities, is when a person simply leaves the country" (Bennetts 2014). Pavlensky in his political actionism always refers to "the larger social body" via his own bodily actions (Russia for All 2013) (Nordgaard 2016: 98). Pavlensky argues that his body serves as is model of the social one, and by the means of "auto-aggression" the artist demonstrates on the basis of his body what happens to the civil society in its whole (Chuvilyaev 2013).

Action *Threat*, 2015 where Pavlensky set an arson at Lubyanka Russian Security Service door was performed to unveil the mechanisms of terror that the state uses to keep people in fear and control. According to Pavlensky, "military servants are to liquidate any expression of freedom" (Like-A, n.d.). Keywords that the artist uses to describe the ways how authorities communicate with the civil society are terror, fear and control. It is through the fear and terror the state establishes its control over citizens and thus protects its hegemonic project. What does Pavlensky emphasize is that the possibility of threat from the government is omnipresent, and as far as the security service can reach people there is no guarantee for the protection of human rights, and the freedom of expression in particular. In one of his interviews Pavlensky claims that FSB (security service in Russia) is a terrorist organisation (Sneider 2016). After the action Pavlensky was fined for setting fire on Lubyanka door and the decision was explained that the door is a part of cultural heritage since so many important Soviet figures for imprisoned there, including writers and artists (Walker 2017). This fact engenders a conclusion that the persecution of political dissidents and artists are a part of Russian cultural heritage, which again contributes to the statement that the state is a big prison.

During his interrogations Pavlensky accused the state apparatus for objectification of people (Snob 2014). The state apparatus transforms institutes and people who serve in mere instruments to pursue its political interests. Thus, the state reduces the status of a human being to an object, a function to sustain its hegemony and domination within a political discourse. In this dehumanization the state privileges its political interests over protection of human rights, which eventually leads to the control not only of the political space, but also a private one, as it was seen in discriminatory law on anti-gay propaganda (Like-A, n.d.).

The action *Threat* is a mockery of the security system of FSB. The fact that someone intentionally set an arson in front of the security service camera at the main entrance undermines the status of FSB as a guarantor of protection since it cannot secure itself from such assaults. This arson questions the ability of the security service to protect itself from and prevent the situation that puts FSB under the threat. As a guarantor of the protection FSB in the action *Threat* fails to prove itself in its primary function to ensure security and safeness. Thus, FSB becomes undermined in its failure related to its primary functions and as a part of the state apparatus its hegemonic status is questioned, since it is counter-hegemonic intervention that takes over the security services in the instance of the action. All these demonstrates how the artistic practice puts in question the hegemonic status quo of the state apparatus.

Pavlensky also criticizes justice system that force people to submit to the Criminal Code (Okrest 2016). The artist condemns the justice systems and the expansion of the Criminal Code "in all directions". By calling the Criminal Code a monster he attributes to it the negative features, portraying the justice system as an enemy of the civil society.

According to Pavlensky each his work of political actions is "an assertion" of other projects he performed (Soshnikov 2016). Thus, each his artistic work supplements and empowers the messages communicated by other actions. All his actions are to subvert the legitimacy of the ruling authorities, to unveil the mechanisms by the use of each the dominance is established. Pavlensky reveals what physical impact "social and political injustice" inflicts (Nordgaard 2016: 87). The way how the authorities react on Pavlensky's works, namely putting him into custody, conducting numerous psychiatry tests and imprisoning him reflects how influential for the state apparatus the artists critique might be (Nordgaard 2016: 104-105). Pavlensky compares art and politics in the Putin's Russia

explicitly demonstrating the clash between these two that "the voice of the state power broadcasts: listen, repeat, obey! The voice of art claims: speak, refuse, resist!" (Sneider 2016).

Pavlensky claims that misunderstanding of his political actionism amongst masses is motivated by the impact of media propaganda (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 7). Media are portraying Pavlensky either as a hooligan or as a person required a psychiatric assistance. Thus, the authorities leave no room for alternative opinion which could be competitive with accusations against Pavlensky.

Pavlensky uses his own naked body as a reference to a larger social body. According to the artist, the naked body has no markers as clothes or accessories, and therefore it resembles and immediately alludes to other bodies, despite their origin, social status, gender or political interests (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 8). Thus, Pavlensky says that the security service, ambulance service, or just any other person are the part of the social body.

Pavlensky criticizes the authorities, because for them it is important to create "predictable" individuals who act in accordance with prescribed laws and rules (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 9). A person who has alternative political views is dangerous to the state, because one can destabilize the dominant political agenda and regime and be a threat for the established hegemony.

For Pavlensky an ideal form of the society is anarchy (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 10). The artists defines it as "an emancipation of imposed paradigms, resistance and disobedience to enforced laws" (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 9). Most of their resources people spend to serve the state apparatus that objectifies them (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 43). The artist say that the state apparatus and its power are the mechanisms of violence which are systematically applied against people. In addition to that, Pavlensky says that his main opponent in political art is decorative art (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 13). Political art works with the mechanisms of the state power and control, subjecting it to critical evaluation, meanwhile the decorative art serves to maintain the hegemony (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 18).

In one of the interviews Pavlensky defines Russia as a "props-kingdom" (*царство-бумафория*) which gives a meaning of imitation of the democratic system. From this it follows, that the way how Russia defines its political system under the label of democracy can be understood as an attempt to conceal its authoritarian regime. In

saying this, Pavlensky undermines the self-positioning of Russia both in domestic and international discourse as a democratic political actor (DW 2017).

These interviews with Pyotr show how he defines the state. The discourse of Pavlensky is about attributing a specific meaning to the notions as "state apparatus" and "authorities" within specific context. It is via his actionism and interviews he articulates a counter-hegemonic discourse to question the status quo of hegemony. Thus, the words "state apparatus and authorities" are the empty signifiers to which the artists assigns the meaning, transforming them into nodal point. This meaning allocation to specific signs is called articulation. It is through this articulatory practice the signs acquire new identity (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105). Pavlensky articulates the elements (the signs) in such manner that they become moments, signs with a temporarily fixed meaning, which eventually form discourse.

From the interviews we can see that the words "authorities and state apparatus" stand not only for Putin regime and his government as such, but also for the institutions which are under state's control such as: media, psychiatry, security and military services, ministry of culture, prisons, justice system, the Criminal Code, church. This nodal point establishes the chain of equivalence within the discourse of Pavlensky (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 127). The meaning of the signs within the chain of equivalence is constituted in relation to that nodal point (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 112). Thus, these elements of discourse become (temporarily) fixed and transformed into moments. This nodal point forms the chain of equivalence within Pavlensky's discourse with the moments which possess the meaning of totalitarian state, empire, prison, police state, police apparatus, monster, bureaucratic system, terrorist organization, chauvinism, "schizoid structure".

Pavlensky often refers to the mechanisms of the state apparatus, by saying that one of its primary functions is to exercise control over people. We can also observe that this function composes the chain of equivalence. One of the state's main preoccupations is to neutralize its opponents, and this neutralization is made of three moments mentioned by Pavlensky: to frighten, to jail or to put under the custody of psychiatric hospital, to make the opponent to flee the country. According to Pavlensky's discourse, this nodal point of "the state apparatus" comes along with its function. This function contains the moments within the chain of equivalence: manipulation of media, terror over the civil

society and enforcement of the repressive laws, objectivation of people, dehumanization, segregation, liquidation of any expression of freedom, mechanisms of violence.

This analysis demonstrates how Pavlensky defines the hegemonic discourse that says: "...listen, repeat, obey!" (Sneider 2016). However, it is also crucial to see how the artist positions himself. First of all, Pavlensky juxtaposes the political art and decorative art, by saying that the former is to unveil what the state's mechanisms of control are, whereas the latter serves the regime by concealing them (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 18). Thus, the political art is opposing the state: "...speak, refuse, resist!" (Sneider 2016). By defining the state as a prison, the artist allocates the meaning to the civil society by calling them prisoners, meanwhile the ward-guards are the mere objects to serve the regime. In addition to that, Pavlensky seeks to emancipate people from the oppressive state (Pavlensky & Belyayeva 2016: 9). When the state enforces anti-gay propaganda law, it does it under the pretext of protection from undesired content, whereas the law itself is used against the LGBTQ community. The artist disarticulates the hegemonic discourse by criticizing it.

Marc Bennetts in *The Calver Journal* explains that Pavlensky juxtaposes "little man" to the state power (Bennetts 2014). Pavlensky's aim is to "suck the authorities into his art", and by doing this he intends to destabilize the control of the state apparatus over the civil society. Pavlensky works with the instruments of the state power including: psychiatry, state propaganda, security services, justice system and media. In this regard Pavlensky undertakes the position of the civil society and those who fell a victim of the repressive laws, media manipulation, psychiatry, security services.

In different interviews Pavlensky repeats his ideas. Repetition of articulatory practices such as utterances and ideas effectuate the meaning fixation within discourse and thus maintaining and reproducing it. The critique that Pavlensky iteratively expresses along with his ideas is how the counter-hegemonic discourse is crystallized.

This analysis demonstrates how Pavlensky constructs the identity of the state apparatus. To build up an identity it is crucial to define a common enemy, a reference for othering - a nodal point (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 127). It is worthy of noting, that Pavlensky's discourse also appropriates the meanings which portray "self" as an emancipatory, liberating and critical, as it seen from the previous analysis. In addition, by condemning the state apparatus Pyotr endows the identities of the state subjects with the

meaning of being oppressed, controlled, abused, deprived or limited in the freedom of expression, politically impotent.

Media along with aesthetic means of expressions play a crucial role since they allow to channelise the meaning Pavlensky tries to articulate. Thus, through the corporeal materiality, visual techniques and legal setting (court trials of Pavlensky) allow to deliver the content of artistic works, and thus engage into hegemonic struggle. And this struggle results in meaning production and identity building both of the social agents of discursive events, as well as in actionism movement and in socio-political institutes. The bodily techniques that artist implements in his works are destabilising for the status quo of the hegemony, since Pavlensky tries to criticise the state apparatus and its oppressive practices by using extreme means of the aesthetic expression and associating his body with a society. Indeed, embodied art is peculiar since addresses the personal and sensual, considering that the flesh mortification techniques used by Pavlensky are chiefly excluded from the public discourse, and self-harming in official medical discourse is usually related with mental disease. Bearing in mind a Lotmanian concept of the functions of art, it is possible to infer that artistic works allow us to engage into virtual experience of the performance. Thus, the audience by contacting with an artistic work, can relate itself to the creator's experience, or on the contrary, try to distance itself from provocative visuals. The way of experiencing a piece of art, according to Lotman, is comparable with an experience of playing a game (Lotman 1998: 226). By interacting with art, a spectator is engaging in virtual experience, a simulation of a real event. Thus, artistic piece can provide a different perspective on a situation, or its possible consequences. Thus in Pavlensky art, the artist engages audience to experience the effects of the totalitarian state which was characterised by total control over media space, use of psychiatric treatment and juridical system in political interests.

4.2. Case Study Analysis of the Action Fixation

In order to understand how political-critical art of Pavlensky is related to the concept of counter-hegemonic intervention it is necessary to investigate what are the constituent elements his actions involve, their conventional meaning and how they are related to the larger socio-political context. The object of this analysis is one of Pavlensky actions described earlier in the work known as *Fixation*. As it was stated earlier, the thesis deals

chiefly with socio-political rather than artistic aspects of Pavlensky's work, therefore the significant part of the analysis positions the action *Fixation* within the theoretical frame of the notion hegemony. This decision is made in favour of research question to understand how artistic practices in the form of critique (either implicit or explicit) challenge the hegemonic state apparatus.

Since the aesthetic element of Pavlensky's works chiefly deals with visual experience to be delivered to the audience the main focus of the thesis is normative and intellectual values which are articulated as components of the counter-hegemonic construct. Also, the works of Pavlensky are explored as discursive events the meaning of which is at the core of the research, whereas the aesthetic element is less relevant for the analytical purposes as such. This decision is motivated by the fact that the most of the material for both discursive and contextual analysis is extracted from the interviews, lectures, conversations and *Manifesto* of Pavlensky and through presented analysis the social and political issues are thoroughly discussed within the context of the hegemonic construct. It is worthy to note that aesthetic means of expression complement and have a constitutive power to the whole discursive event within which the work of Pavlensky is produced. Nevertheless, the present paper by recognizing the works of Pavlensky as artistic practices briefly refers to the formal aspects, but again solely as to the parts inherent to the discursive event.

The present analysis is built up on the principles proposed and developed by Erwin Panofsky in his work *Meaning in the visual arts* (1955) where the author provides analytical tools for study of artwork. The methods of Panofsky involve: pre-iconographical reading that stands for purely formalistic description, iconographical method allows to relate artistic motifs (compositions) with themes and ideas presented in the work (conventional signs and symbols), iconological deals with the social context to which the work of art is referred and based on this relation develops further interpretation (Panofsky 1955: 53-62). The choice of this method is motivated by the fact that the accurate description of formal elements, their symbolic and conventional meaning and relation to the broader socio-cultural and political context make the interpretation reliable and thus reveals a deeper meaning of the artwork.

Pavlensky's deviant art is often referred as "living-pain sculptures" which allows to see his works as artistic expressions alluding both to bodily and sculptural aesthetic dimensions (Brooks Platt 2014). The examples of "living-pain sculptures" can be found

in works *Carcass* and *Fixation*. Thus, the aesthetic dimension of sculpture implies statics, a frozen moment, however it still can express the moment of dynamic action, in addition to that, sculpture possesses three dimensional form which can be visually accessed from different points of space, and finally for sculptural forms of art is characteristic the material element it is made of, texture and colour (or absence of such in case of translucent glass sculptures), such as body which is extensively used in the case of Pavlensky. For Pavlensky to be an artist means to endow an art with its particular symbolic code, both contextualize and conceptualize a work of art historically, and finally articulate the message to the audience simultaneously informing that this is a work of art. In addition to that, Pavlensky says that in order to become an artist one must do something exceptional, which cannot be done by others (Brooks Platt 2014). One of the key elements of Pavlensky art is the engagement of the authorities, representatives of the state power, and this element can be traced in each of his works. Thus, Pavlensky states that his aim is to engage the authorities as "involuntary participants in the production of my art" (Beard 2016). The case of Pavlensky is peculiar since his artistic practices framed as counter-hegemonic articulation in fact involve the elements of the state apparatus to work against this very hegemony. This sort of reversion is of great interest since it appears that the state apparatus serves the purpose of Pavlensky's political art to complement his works, allowing the artist to reach the concluding point in his message. In this regard, it is active participation of the state power in the form of psychiatry, security and justice services makes these counter-hegemonic interventions possible, which are aimed against the oppressive state apparatus of which these very services make part.

Lambrot in his analysis *The Body, Public Space, and Audience Participation Within the Work of Pussy Riot and Pyotr Pavlensky* (2016) of Pavlensky's work *Fixation* compares the image of the artist's naked body with bent knees and back along with spread arms forming a pyramid to the "Putin political power-vertical" (Lambrot 2016: 13). In addition to this reading, this power-vertical is sustained by the subjects of the state apparatus. In fact, seeing Pavlensky's body as a social body of the civil society it is legitimate to interpret this pyramid as a metaphor where people are objectified and serve to one sole purpose to sustain this vertical and maintain the status quo of the state power. And when the security services come to Pavlensky to "liberate" him and thus liquidate this intervention into public space this part of his work continues and is supplied with a new rather ironic reading in which the state authorities by being a part of the action

complement the artwork. This strategy of turning the state apparatus to act against it by its own means is called *détournement* and was initially developed by Guy Debord (1956: 6). This is also peculiar, because both state and non-state funded media engage in a massive production of Pavlensky images, though accompanied with different messages. It is through the mass media the first encountering of his works and audience's perception takes place. Thus, it is seen that mass media actively engages in dissemination of the artist's works and involves more people into visual experience (which eventually resonates with aesthetical and intellectual formulations). However, it is still to be defined if this popularization of Pavlensky's projects works against him and raise negative sentiments within the civil society, or on the contrary fulfils artist's intentions to articulate his message about the current political situation in Russia (two options are both possible in the same time). Also, how the state bureaucracy deals with all documentation and records on Pavlensky's "hooliganism" as the authorities define it contributes to this process of dissemination in which the state distribute and at some degree reproduce the action of Pavlensky in the form of criminal records. This technique of *détournement* is connected to the concept of *subversive affirmation* developed by Inke Arns And Sylvia Sasse: "Subversive affirmation is an artistic/political tactic that allows artists/activists to take part in certain social, political, or economic discourses and to affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them. It is characterised precisely by the fact that with affirmation there is simultaneously taking place a distancing from, or revelation of what is being affirmed. In subversive affirmation there is always a surplus which destabilises affirmation and turns it into its opposite" (Arns and Sasse 2006: 445). This tactics is very characteristic of Pavlensky's works in which the artist undertakes state's intentions to protect its people from harmful information in the internet or in mass media and thus tightening its control over the internet or news agencies. What Pavlensky does is he overturns the protectory intents and portrays them as in the form of oppression and manipulation.

This pyramid as a static figure is organized according to its intrinsic rules that allow it to maintain its form and position. So is understood the organization of the state structure that prescribes a total subordination to the will of authorities rendering its component as objects of the rule serving as the foundation of this figure. Also, by nailed scrotum it is possible to see the impotence of the civil society to disrupt or move this power-vertical as fixed blocks of the pyramid. Marat Guelman, the gallerist, describes

Pavlensky's works as performances, says that in fact the tradition of nailing of the scrotum comes from jail and custodial establishments where prisoners in the act of their despair to attract authorities attention pierced and fixed their bodies to the floors or stools (Ekow et al., 2013). Pavlensky uses his naked body as means of expression which denotes the vulnerability but also an inevitability because there is nothing left to be taken from this social and individual body. This work demonstrates that there is no other way to reassert and speak for itself but only through the painful fixation of already succumbed body presented in silence.

Since pyramid reflects only static, fixed and organized elements embedded according to the prescribed grammar of the state power there are only two ways to disrupt its system - either by an immense "earthquake" which might be a revolution, or through the period of time when each block of its whole structure is subjected to the corrosion and is no more capable to serve its purpose to maintain this pyramid. Immobility and fixation are characteristic to this artwork since they inform about the impossibility to change the state apparatus, resist to it as well as to perform any individual act which does not conform to the state ideology. By the fact that pyramid is a static figure any form of mobility or movement is corresponded for it with a threat which should be immediately neutralized by the state apparatus to secure the stability and its control over the whole structure. A pyramid as such is a monolithic manifestation of Putin's regime represents the state's power which is also justified by the fact that for the place of the action was chosen the Red Square and the day of when the artwork was performed is the Russian Police Day (police and security services as elements of the state power), November 10, 2013 (the Red Square has a historical and political connotation since it used to be a headquarter of the Soviets, it is the official residence of the Russian President, glorification and commemoration parades are lead through the Red Square for the Victory Day the ninth of May, and it served as royal citadel during the times of the Russian Empire). Thus, both the space and the time chosen for the artwork in fact contextualise simultaneously docile, succumbed and fixed, immobile and immovable body of Pavlensky within the symbolic "heart" of the Russian state power.

As a monolithic structure all its elements should be aligned with the principles of the power-vertical which pierces from the top to its foundation all the layers of the social, in which both private and public lives are embedded. But also by being monolithic it refers to homogeneity and uniformity, the aspects which can be traced in another work

of Pavlensky named *Segregation*. *Segregation* was performed to highlight the abuse of power by the state to discredit political dissidents as mentally ill. By dissecting so-called "unhealthy parts" of the regime which can potentially infect partially or completely the whole system. And this segregation is motivated by what the state determines as a norm and deviation, and the latter is known as a political dissent, and the cut parts of it are political dissidents. Those who have power can make decisions through the psychiatric institutions on the sanity of the political opponents. Segregation is an act of discrimination which comes along with establishing of a norm through the social and political homogeneity. Once the social and political homogeneity is attained, meaning a unanimous support of the regime and its ideology by the state subjects, it becomes easier to retain control and exercise the power over the civil society because there are no challenges or obstacles which must be overcome. The state eliminates the possibility of the political divergence by delegitimizing the political opponents by the means of forced psychiatric treatment or manipulation of mass media, and by doing it reducing the difference within the monolithic, homogeneous structure. In homogeneous social structure the state apparatus expects the civil society respond in the same or similar ways making impossible to deviate from the propagated norm. Since the majority associates with the accepted norm it does not tolerate any form of resistance exercised against the state, therefore any attack or critique pronounced to undermine the legitimacy of the state apparatus can be interpreted by this individual who belongs to that majority as a personal assault and threat to his or her own wellbeing. To support this claim it will be beneficial to refer to Levada report that possibly explains why Pavlensky's actions were largely unwelcomed by the public is that around 70% of the population support the rule under Putin and his politics as it shows Levada poll from the period 2012-2015, and this indicator demonstrates that any critique of his regime is most likely will fail to reach any popular recognition (Levada 2016: 116-119). Segregation is not only act of separation, it is a way of constructing of the society where the division on them and us acquires its place. Through segregating the state legitimizes itself by allegedly ensuring its expertise by qualifying political dissidents as insane. By doing this the state asserts that it has enough credibility to define who is sane and who is not. In this act the authorities implicitly define themselves as sane, whereas anybody who is resistant to their decision over the state of mental health of the political dissident risk to be put under the psychiatric custody.

In *Fixation*, Pavlensky accuses the status quo of the hegemony and the position of the civil society in Russia. By nailing the scrotum and portraying the apathy of social and political engagement of the state's subjects Pavlensky implicitly refers to the causes of the conditions which engendered this political unwillingness to oppose or question the authorities. In doing this, the artist in fact articulates the critique against the state apparatus by emphasizing its oppressive character which resulted in this apolitical attitude of the civil society. By constructing Putin's regime as oppressive Pavlensky negatively qualifies the state apparatus and this is the point where the hegemonic order is questioned. By recognizing the fact that the state is oppressive it brings to the next questions "who is the one who is oppressed?" and "why the oppressed experiences the lack of the political engagement?" From it follows, that on the one hand Pavlensky constructs through the metaphor of apathy the civil society as a victim of oppression, and on the other the state apparatus as an aggressor. As this polarization appears between the aggressor and the victim it leads to the conclusion the object of this aggression is in need of protection and power to resist. These power relations between the oppressor and the oppressed therefore reveal the normative and ethical dimension. From these relations it is seen that the oppressor abuses its power to subdue the victim of the oppression to its own interests and needs. As the oppression takes its place it becomes evident that the oppressed is deprived of the rights to express itself freely and therefore cannot reach a sufficient and distinct from official agenda political representation within the public discourse, and thus to voice its needs and articulate its individual identity. The normative element is raised when the state becomes (implicitly) accused for the oppression and oppressed subjects it produced. Thus, the state becomes the criminal which intervenes and violates the rights and freedoms by stealing them under the pretext of protection of the civil society. This statement resonates with Sarah Wilson who speaks about Pavlensky's actions as of "incriminating evidence" (Wilson 2017: 113). Therefore, the individual expressions of the civil society are conditioned and confined to the greater degree by the oppressor unless they do not absolutely conform the interests of the state apparatus. It is under the oppression the society has less possibilities to resist against it, because the more the state regulates individual and political life of its citizens the less rights people have to oppose the regime. Remarkably, but because the civil society in its majority does not resist against the oppression exercised by the state apparatus it in docile and active manner supports its hegemony by daily reproducing people's political disengagement.

Another crucial aspect presented in the works of Pavlensky (*Stitch, Carcass, Segregation*) is silence, which was meticulously analysed by Asia Bazdyrieva in her work *When the Silence Speaks: Political Art of Petr Pavlensky* (2016). Silence is the result of the repressive laws implemented by the state apparatus. Bazdyrieva suggests that silence in Pavlensky works means that one cannot freely express its dissent against the state power without a fear of being jailed (Bazdyrieva 2016: 7). In addition, silence is referred to all those who are deprived of the voice within the political and public contexts and therefore relates to the social groups who cannot speak for themselves freely or due to other circumstances (political dissidents). One of the bright examples that confines the right to speak is the implementation of Federal Law No 398 (2014) extended the power of the state to control the internet website over the content which limits the freedom of expression and critique against the state which might be eventually considered as a form of extremism (Hartog 2015).

Ehle Kate in the MA thesis *Corporeal Canvas: Art, Protest, and Power in Contemporary Russia* (2012) comments on the means of expression of Pavlensky's works through his own body by claiming that "the body becomes a space for autonomous expression, striving to transcend external mediation through the representation of extrinsic forces intrinsically" (2012: 8). By framing Pavlensky works as autonomous expression especially in the case of Fixation where his body represents power-vertical that pierces the all levels of the social and political from the top to the bottom this statement acquires a new value. Since the pyramid is a monolithic structure that intervenes into personal and public space self-humiliation (i.e. piercing and nailing the scrotum) becomes a challenge posed to the total control of the state power. Infringing self-harm is act of questioning of the state's monopoly over the human's body. In this regard, the state's power to control both individual and social bodies from self-harming becomes at the stake. This sort of flesh-damaging does not only question the monopoly, but in fact it is an expression of the resistance against the state's control. Pavlensky by his act exposes his body to the public and through it defines the inability of the state's total control over it, by showing the possibility of being a master of one's own body, proclaiming the right to undertake a decision on how to act upon personal corp. Kehle in referring to Giorgio Agamben's concept of *bare life*⁸ (1998) argues that body is a terrain

⁸ In short, *bare life* denotes such conditions of human existence to which legal and political representations are not applicable anymore, thus a subject is deprived of certain rights, e.g. *homo sacer* as an example of some extreme cases of prisoners, slaves, or outlawed. *Bare life* is also characterized in

over which the power is exercised and where it can find its possible representation (2012: 78). Thus, the use of body as a medium incites the discursive struggle by the capability of body to represent a particular discourse. It is initially through the body Pavlensky addresses the socio-political issues, communicates them and by doing this aligns the state power with the meanings he employs (oppressive, manipulative, etc.). Having this in mind, it is legitimate to state that the resistance against the power stems from the body which is represented as a discursive construct, which in its turn inscribes the dimension of the normative where the oppressed body is seen as a ramification of the oppressor's actions. The given claim ideally resonates with Foucauldian argument that body is a locus of meanings and place where language resides by intersecting the human corporeality and giving to it social (and political) values (1984: 83). This observation is especially fruitful since it allows to envisage the body as an element of discourse and renders it approachable in terms of discursive analysis. Thus, Pavlensky's body within the context of his artwork can be read as a text, to study the relations of it with other texts and contexts by extrapolating the meaning of his body to the larger social one and learn from the personal experience that the artist exposes to the public to what the civil society is subjected to.

Ehle employs in her analysis Bakhtin's concepts of carnivalesque and grotesque (1984) which stylistically communicate subversive elements of artistic works (2017: 36-41). By denoting Pavlensky works with carnivalesque and grotesque aspects it becomes possible to see how challenging might be for perception and reading of his performance art by the audience whose cultural code does not normally associate self-humiliation with artistic practices. In fact, grotesqueness and carnival culture are opposed to the normal life and this is an exemplifying instance of counter-hegemony as the use of subversive elements in relation to normativity within public space. This is also relevant to the presence of pain exposed to the public which disrupts the normativity and transgresses what culture prescribes as normal. Both, publicly exposed pain, mute and docile body along with the grotesqueness of "living-sculpture" in Pavlensky's works such *Fixation*, *Stitch* and *Segregation* are counter-hegemonic interventions that invade the field of public discourse by challenging the normativity by their very presence. These are the common motifs that interweave Pavlensky's actions into a pattern of subversion. Since the

opposition to politically qualified life which allows to enjoy certain rights, like those which qualify a man as a citizen or a member of a community (bare life refers to Greek *zoe*, whereas politically qualified stands for *bios*).

subversive elements appear in the public space their presence question the control of the state over the public places. The state power becomes no more capable of ensuring its absolute dominance within the domain of the public life and therefore is forced to react on the precedent to reclaim its power again by liquidating these interventions physically, legally and ideologically (through mass media). This is how the state's power becomes challenged and the hegemonic order disrupted, though only in few instances since there is no ultimate subversion.

What does make Pavlensky look grotesque and how to define this rather ephemeral, polysemic word that denotes untypical, blurred, bizarre and strange properties? It is also worthy of noting that in the definition of grotesqueness there is no escape from cultural relativism, since in different cultures and genres this notion might vary from one person to another. First of all, the grotesqueness appears from the intersection of the context and "displaced" elements presented within it which are determined as grotesque. This is the context of high ambivalence and ambiguity, where the norm is confronted by what is estranged to it. In Bakhtinian sense the grotesque body of Pavlensky is the result of degradation since it is connected with "the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and reproductive organs" (Bakhtin 1984: 21). Geoffrey Harpham in his work *The Grotesque: First Principles* defines grotesque as a structure of estrangement which renders the inhabited world of individual with uncanny and alien rules, forms and feelings (1976: 462). Grotesque threatens the conventions of the normal order of things, undermining their logic and encountering spectators with nonsense, and with this grotesque for an author functions as a liberating technique for representation which makes it possible to come up with personal innovations in terms of content and form (Harpham 1976: 463). Grotesque is used in when there is no other way to respond or act upon the situation, thus through the grotesqueness artists can approach the fear and terror and make it more bearable, less overwhelming (Harpham 1976: 464).

In the action *Fixation* Pavlensky is seating in not typical posture, at least for the public place. His legs and arms are spread in different directions to support the whole body and in order to stay in balance he is "nesting" on the ground (in Russian slang "balls" have an equivalent of "eggs"). His body is fixed to the cobblestones by the pierced scrotum which brings about a sort of irony in which the phallic element (with which the scrotum is closely associated) which in patriarchal, traditional context symbolizes potency is not capable anymore to signify its conventional meaning. This

image of "nesting" acquires a new semantic value by being contextualized within the patriarchy with traditional values where motherhood, i.e. "nesting" is a basic preoccupation of women who in many countries until 20th century did not have access to politics and equal political representation as men, and as a result of it were less privileged and objectified in domestic context. In this interpretation the patriarchy is figured as a model for oppressive state apparatus, and the impossibility to resist against it is articulated by fixation itself. Thus, the allusion of objectivation of women implies the state's purely utilitarian and instrumentalising approach to the civil society. The symbolic dysfunction displaces the functional, potent human body in the context where it has no power to act or resist. It is paradoxical because within the context of patriarchal discourse the phallic properties are valued over female ones and by demonstrating artificially produced impotence the artist undermines the dominance of masculine symbols. Pavlensky's subdued body in the given context can only expose its symbolic impotence, and thus through this artificially produced image the artist evokes grotesque features. Another component that communicates the grotesque style inherent to the action *Fixation* is that Pavlensky intentionally has chosen the place (the Red Square) and time (the 10th of November Russian Police Day) to amplify his image. Nude, impotent male body is confronted by the symbolic power of the Russia state configured by the spatial and temporal components. The grotesqueness is represented by juxtaposition of ubiquitous power of the state apparatus and impotence of the civil society. This artificial contrast is made to emphasize the position of the powerless "little man" in relation to the omnipotent state. Thus, the aesthetical constituents of the action are artificially and intentionally produced by the artist to inform the grotesqueness and irony which are essentially subversive to the state's image by positioning it within the row of such signifiers as oppressive, objectivising, criminal (in a sense of violating human rights and freedom). And *Fixation* is also a mockery on the state, because the artist creates the situation where the state should "dismantle" this grotesque statue, the product of degradation, which is ironic since the policemen "emancipate" Pavlensky from fixation which is in itself is (partially) the result of the state's oppression. The origins of the grotesque are found in fear and terror against which the laughter and mockery function as a weapon that neutralize these feelings: "In the sphere of imagery cosmic fear (as any other fear) is defeated by laughter" (Bakhtin 1984: 336). In *Fixation* Pavlensky demonstrates the degradation of the social body by using his own as a model

for the Russian civil society. Pavlensky's grotesqueness is definitely a mockery on the state at least because he acts in inappropriate way on the "sacred" territory of power, disrupting its order with what seems to it as chaotic.

Varvara Esipova in her master thesis *Body and Pain in Contemporary Art (On the Phenomenon of Petr Pavlensky)* argues that pain is an important aspect of performance art since it reminds the audience about its own corporeality (Esipova 2017: 29). Since the pain is a common feature which is characteristic to all human bodies then it brings to the conclusion that through the experience of pain Pavlensky attempts to relate the audience to his personal feeling and by doing this he projects his artwork at the whole "social body". This vein of reasoning assumes that each member of the Russian civil society is on the place of Pavlensky or somehow related to the painful experience and humiliation of him.

In his works Pavlensky uses his own body as a medium and when his corp becomes the object of the audience's attention a question of subjectivity is raised. When it comes to Pavlensky's actions as *Fixation* or *Carcass* there is a sort of double objectivation that comes into play. First instance of objectivation is purely formal, specifically when Pavlensky's body becomes a medium of aesthetic expression, a mere means to communicate the artist's ideas. The second instance of objectivation is related to the intention of the artist to claim that the civil society is nothing more but the instrument of the state's power, for example the allusion to the pyramid as a power-vertical in which the people are both the source and instrument of the state apparatus' power. This reduction of subject to the means of state's control appeals to dehumanization, and again raises a normative dimension in which the state in pursuing its interests instrumentalises the civil society and thus questions the rights and freedoms of people. This observation leads to the conclusion, that in order to criticise the state apparatus for its objectivation of the civil society Pavlensky intentionally reduces his own status of subject to the object of art and symbolically of state's power and control. This metaphor of objectivation presumes that the subject who is reduced to the object *à priori* cannot have any political representation since it has no interests or rights, and its sole purpose is to serve to the will of its proprietor. This inference resonates with Mariam Shuman's argument that actionism envisages state and civil society in dichotomous relations, in which the will of the state is not equalled with the interests of the civil society (2017: 7-8).

Referring to *Fixation zek* practices (prisoners) in the context of the social body inevitably brings to the idea that the society is nothing more than a prison. Here appears another polarization between the state and the civil society. In this case, the state performs the role of guard wards, whereas the civil society is depicted as prisoners. Analysing this situation of the civil society in the light of prison culture evokes a few elements characteristic to inmates. First of all, it defines the legal status of prisoners who cannot reach sufficient political representation and thus articulate their demands. Being confined by prison walls the inmates have no freedom in their actions except those which are allowed by the institution. Disobedience or any act of protest in prison can result in punishment and be used as a justification of severe and cruel treatment by the authorities. Second of all, the organization of inmates lives in prison implies that the authorities have a regulatory and supervisory power over the prisoners and thus the state apparatus intrudes into personal space of the civil society.

The fact that the state treats Pavlensky's actions as mere hooliganism indicates how the official, hegemonic culture excludes it as artistic text, devalues it and convict the artist in making a crime (Lotman 1977). This is an instance of hegemonic struggle where the field of dominant culture attempts to discredit any critique aimed against it, qualifying as a fact of the criminal act. Pavlensky and his sympathisers, on the contrary define Pavlensky's action as an artistic practice by referring to the traditions of Viennese and Moscow (Russian) actionism, thus inscribing into his works a legitimate status of artistic.

Pavlensky's works in the context of contemporary Russia are the symbolic symptoms of the socio-political situation in the state. Through Pavlensky works one can see the relations between the state power and the civil society. The humiliated, pierced, naked, "modified", "silenced" and subjected to pain body of Pavlensky are the motifs found in his actions and characteristic to them. However, Pavlensky as a martyr is not competitive interpretation since the artist does not suffer for the good of other people, or strives to reach mystical experience, e.g. as a revelation. Pavlensky communicates how degradable the situation in Russia by referring to the state apparatus as a bureaucratic machine which strives to retain its power through coercion and ideological indoctrination. Pavlensky does not suffer for others, he implicitly attacks the state apparatus by exposing the effects of its power over the civil society. The artist uses his body exposed to the pain as an instrument to make people conscious about the manipulative and controlling techniques of the hegemonic state apparatus.

The interpretation of Pavlensky's *Fixation* as a monolithic pyramid also suggests a correlation with mausoleum where the body of Lenin is placed and preserved, and exposed to the public. The idea that leads to the comparison with Lenin mausoleum is fuelled by the fact that both the date and place chosen for the action are closely related with the Soviet past. Both mausoleum and the pyramid serve the same burial purposes where the bodies of deceased, usually important historical and political figures are located. The pyramid of Pavlensky is mirroring the mausoleum which denotes the important role of Lenin and communism not only in the USSR, but also its palpable influence in today's Russia as a celebration of the Victory Day on the 9th of May (use of Soviet symbolic and Lenin's portraits during commemoration parades) and general sentiments of older Russian generations to the Soviet past. The pyramid of Pavlensky is juxtaposed to the mausoleum informs about the state's control over the bodies of its people, and it shows that society is deadly silent, immobile, and impotent to undertake any action against the political oppression. In this metaphor the society is already buried in its inevitable condition of apathy under the monolithic structure. Thus, the state "preserves and uses" the social body in the favourable conditions of the state's interests. The state can use symbolic importance of the dead body of Lenin and speak through it, so it does by the means of mass media allegedly voicing the will of the people in defence of its own interests. Whereas Lenin mausoleum for many is a sacred place, the pyramid of Pavlensky is profane counterpart of it. This is a carnivalesque "reversion" that desecrates the symbolic state power (Bakhtin 1984). *Fixation* is a grotesque pyramid that desecrates the sanctity of the Lenin Mausoleum as a symbol of the Russian state power and its relation to the Soviet times. In the mausoleum there is a body of the leader, meanwhile the pyramid of Pavlensky embodies the social body of succumbed people, which again constructs this dichotomy between the state and the civil society.

4.3. Manifesto of Pavlensky

Pavlensky framed his message as Manifesto. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary manifesto is: "a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer"⁹, a similar definition is given by Collins Dictionary: "a public declaration of

⁹ Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manifesto>, accessed March 21, 2019

intent, policy, aims, etc, as issued by a political party, government, or movement."¹⁰ There is a key element presented in both definitions that helps us to understand to whom the message is addressed. Both definitions highlight that the message embed within the Manifesto is addressed to a larger audience, meaning that it is presented publicly. Thus, the title establishes a potential receiver in the face of the civil society.

In his *Manifesto* Pavlensky starts with a sentence: "*Political art and authorities*" where the political art is put into opposition to authorities (Colta 2016). Here, it is possible to assume that political art is a means of resistance against the authorities. Political art entails the tools for criticising of government, it is capable of revealing the oppressive character of the state by sensitising socio-political issues. The political art is how Pavlensky defines his actionism, and in this very first line he defines it in relation or rather in opposition to authorities.

Further, he characterises the Criminal Code as an ideological apparatus that entails all possible forms of action or inaction within one single territory confined by boundaries of a language and the state. Pavlensky also defines subordinate subjects of the state as a biomass which is controlled by the Criminal Code. In this regard, Pavlensky envisage the Criminal Code as a mechanism of control exercised by authorities over people, which imposes duties and responsibilities in a way that people become obedient subjects of the state. At the same time, these very subjects become the material for the state from which it acquires its power. The artist states that the primary enemy of the Criminal Code as any form of freedom. Here, Pavlensky compares obedient subjects with domesticated animals caught in paddock. This metaphor hints about absence of freedom and total subordination to the authorities. In his *Manifesto*, both people and authorities are portrayed as interdependent.

Pavlensky describes mass media as a voice and will of authorities. Here, the artist implies that the state holds control over and exercises its power via mass media. The information delivered by mass media is easily manipulated by the government and can immediately distract people's attention from important matters. Pavlensky tries to reveal the oppressive character of the state in terms of freedom of expression. It appears, that the authorities can create their own narratives and myths to establish and maintain their power over subordinate subjects. Pavlensky states, that via mass media authorities

¹⁰ Collins Dictionary, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/manifesto>, accessed March 21, 2019

succeed to allegedly represent the opinion of the majority. In fact, the popular support and opinion is what the authorities intend to "protect" by the systems and institutions of law enforcement, penitentiary and health care. Pavlensky emphasises that the authorities are concerned with public support because their source of power is derived from subordination of the people. By obeying the authorities and consuming mass media products people voluntarily reproduce the system of values, identities. It is through these rituals the popular consent is reached and the status quo of hegemonic discourse of the authorities is maintained. The artist says, that through media the will of authorities becomes legitimized. In his text, Pavlensky describes security and military services (Siloviki) as an instrument of suppression and persecution, rather than protection or peace-making. Pavlensky states that the role of Siloviki is to protect popular opinion against everything that can challenge the status quo of the authorities. Through the security services the authorities can exercise their power on the freedom of movement and thus confine the subjects territorially.

The institution of psychiatry for Pavlensky is another way for the government to maintain and protect the hegemonic discourse from counter-hegemonic intervention. By the means of medical institutions, namely psychiatry, the authorities can eliminate the potential threat by forcedly medicalizing disobedient subjects. Forensic Psychiatric Examination can be used as a very convenient argument for questioning subject's mental health, and thus legally justifying further medicalization.

Pavlensky also envisages education system as a method of control. Schools and universities inform the subjects about norms and values. Thus, individuals are expected to act within normative framework imposed by authorities. Educational institutions create the subjects which are potentially obedient to the authorities and can fit into established hegemonic discourse. School and university subjects such history might have political implication communicated by the authorities.

Penitentiary system such as custodial areas, prisons and psychiatric hospitals for Pavlensky performs four major functions: segregation, control, punishment and deterrence. Pavlensky believes, that penitentiary system as a part of ideological apparatus is vulnerable to the critique of an artist. He supports his claim by the fact that due to the social and mass media the flow of information is not always homogeneous and might have alterations depending on the type of media. Thus, it is not possible for authorities to keep total control over the flow of information. For any political regime it is important to

sustain *phobias* if the subordinate subjects begin to disrupt or question the narrative of authorities' power, which is the primary aim of the political art, according to Pavlensky. Diverse discourses engages into struggle for the control over meaning. Different mass media articulate the chain of equivalence in accordance with their nodal points competing for hegemony.

In his *Manifesto* Pavlensky makes a distinction between two types of art. First type is *decorative*, that serves the ideological apparatus, and the second one is *political* one which is considered as a counter-hegemonic intervention. Pavlensky claims, that the aim of the *decorative art* is to hide the the oppressive character of the state. This type of art does have its aesthetics and ethics, form and content, it might entail the system of values and ideals which sustain and reproduce the hegemonic discourse. Pyotr compares *decorative art* with prostitution, claiming that the only concern of the artist is to serve the one who pays the most, i.e. the state. *Political art*, on the contrary, tends to subvert the existing state of affairs, it intervenes into public discourse, reveals the mechanisms of control and oppression, as well as criticize the ideological state apparatus. Pavlensky argues that the *political art* resists the narrative of power of authorities, i.e. it questions the status quo of the hegemony, the norms, values and the popular consent between those who are in power and the obedient subjects. *Political art* performs an emancipatory function, it unveils "decorations", make the mechanisms of control, deterrence, oppression and segregation visible. The narrative of power is how the authorities secure and empower their hegemonic discourse. In the manifesto Pavlensky says that, the stability of the state is guaranteed by how much control the authorities can exercise over population through media or institutional settings.

5. Conclusion

Art as an articulatory practice produces new meanings which can question the hegemonic status quo. It is through the articulatory practices a political representation takes place, where the participants of a discourse acquire their identities and communicate their interests. This work illustrated that the hegemonic discourse and the fixation of the meaning is subjected to the change. A possibility of the resistance against the hegemonic political project is omnipresent since the power relations are distributed among the social structures and agents whose interests eventually might collide with those of the hegemonic apparatus.

The political art of Pavlensky is an example of this resistance that represents how the state apparatus produces the obedient subject to serve its interests. It is through political art becomes possible to see how the subjects become the products of the political structures, either through the ideological means, or coercive methods, in which both ideological and repressive state apparatuses perform their functions. It is also important to mention, that Pavlensky do not necessarily engages in the discursive struggle along. In fact, from the evidence presented in the work it is seen that there is a supportive camp who positively reacted on Pavlensky works. This means, that art projects can foster the mobilization of the subjects of the common political stance and interests.

The analysis presented in the thesis demonstrated how through the counter-hegemonic artistic practices Pavlensky attempts to disrupt the consent between social dominant group and the civil society as its subordinate, to renegotiate the power relations between the state and its subjects. In fact, the artist attacks specific instances of the state-apparatus by defining it as oppressive. What Pavlensky does is articulating the critique which discloses the implementation of laws and their oppressive and discriminatory character in terms of freedom of expression or law of anti-LGBT propaganda, abuse of power by the state in production of fabricated verdicts on the matter of mental sanity of political dissidents and opponents, manipulation of mass media in political interests of the state, control over the Internet and right to express a dissent without being persecuted. All these elements bring up the normative dimension in which the state apparatus figured as an oppressor which employs diverse leverages and strategies to attain and retain power, which negatively qualifies the authorities from the perspective of the oppressed. Pavlensky engendered alternative, critical stance in the form of counter-hegemonic discourse against the state apparatus in which the latter is subjected to the critique. It is

through counter-hegemonic discourse the artist raises the awareness about the oppressive character of the state apparatus and those against whom this oppression is exercised. Thus, it becomes evident who are in need sufficient political representation within Russian public discourse, mass and social media (LGBTQI+ community, political dissidents and opposition).

The study of art has a potential in political science. In fact, from the pragmatic perspective art can raise the awareness within public discourse on oppressive character of the political regime, as it was demonstrated from this study. Political artists possess tools to unveil the mechanisms of control and manipulation exercises by institutions and political actors. The case of Pavlensky demonstrates how art can produce a change within a public discourse, bring about a discussion on political matters to the public. A great role is played by digital media that allows to facilitate the distribution of information and create new possibilities for political resistance in the form of counter-hegemonic intervention. The study of Pyotr Pavlensky's actions illustrates that contemporary art has a potential to transcend the boundaries of galleries and actively engage into formation of social relations and identities.

Discourse theory and analysis were employed in this thesis to understand how exactly artists critically engages in *disarticulation* of hegemonic discourse, what are the means of the artistic critique, and what are the effects of this counter-hegemonic intervention. It is through discourse becomes possible the construction of the social identity and its representation. By analysing discourse of the participants of the discursive events the present work allows to see on the basis of the presented data how Pavlensky constructs the identity of the state apparatus and positions himself and the role of the political art in discursive struggle.

In the context of political science artistic practices can be conceptualized as a counter-hegemonic discourse. This assertion implies that the artists by the artistic means can produce a shift in the balance of power relations by criticizing the state apparatus. This shift in the balance of power relations is represented in the polarization between the opinions of art experts, and in the fact that those who are familiar with works of Pavlensky either supportive towards him, or reject his actionism by naming it as mere hooliganism and vandalism, or try to discredit the artist by claiming his insanity. Though, due to the research limitations it is not possible to estimate what is the overall acceptance of

Pavlensky works in Russia, it is still possible to access how the information about the artist is disseminated in media.

The outlined conclusions might be used in further studies of how artistic practices can contribute in the formation of the social and political discourses. It is essentially fruitful to investigate how art actually influence individual subjects by conducting interviews and collecting data on people's reaction. From the perspective of the theory of hegemony developed by Laclau and Mouffe it would also of the great use to study how artistic projects can mobilize the population to undertake political decisions and engage in political debates. Since political art attempts to sensitize the social problems and raises the awareness of the civil society on these issues, it will be useful to learn from specifically targeted groups how the political art changes the political situation for these informants.

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