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**Dissensus in Post-2012 Russian Art: Self-Perceptions Vis-à-vis the West**

MA thesis

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## **Dissensus in Post-2012 Russian Art: Self-Perceptions Vis-à-vis the West**

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### **Abstract**

This research looks into the dissensus in post-2012 Russian art, particularly music and performance art. The goal of the study is twofold. First it attempts to reveal the main Russian identity patterns as presented by the non-conformist artists. Second, it tries to reveal how these artists depict the Russian identity in regard to the West. To that end, the thesis employs the concept of dissensus introduced by Jacques Rancière (2010), which is the indirect dispute with the established framework of the consensus or the hegemonic discourse defining what is taken for granted and viewed as ‘the proper’. The selected sample of artworks is analysed using the Making Identity Count inductive discourse analysis method to recover the relatively stable national identity discourses. Nevertheless, this research uses it as an efficient tool for revealing the identity patterns that guide the meaning creation process of the selected dissident artists. The main conclusions of the research are as follows. The dissensus in post- 2012 contemporary Russian art deconstructs the hegemonic identity patterns opening opportunities for potential new identifications. The research also shows that the West – Russia identity dichotomy is not relevant as depicted in the selected sample of artworks. Moreover, among the selected dissident artists this dichotomy is subjected to constructive criticism.

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## 1. Introduction

Vladimir Putin's return as president of the Russian Federation in 2012 marked the start of the new official conservative authoritarian political and ideological agenda that abruptly penetrated the society and became even more expressed with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The cultural sphere was among the first ones to be affected by this turn with the infamous Pussy Riot's Punk Prayer performance in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour and the arrest of the three members of the art group. Despite this restrictive environment the Russian art scene has been dynamic with a significant number of artists tackling socio-political topics especially saturating the music sphere with political content starting from 2018 (Tolokonnikova, 2019). Contemporary Russian art is a case on point for researching how art and politics interact.

Despite the increased academic attention towards the art scene of post-2012 Russia, there is limited concentration on art forms that go beyond the traditional art institutions and take the streets, public locations and the virtual space. Additionally, the main focus of the academic literature on Russian dissident art has been on understanding it in opposition to the hegemonic discourse without diving deep into the content of the artworks and the alternative identity discourses that they are contributing to. Finally, there is limited attention paid to how the West is depicted in the art scene and how the dynamic political interaction between the West and Russia, as well as Russian identity's complex connection to the West, are reflected in the perceptions of dissident artists of the post-2012 Russia. Moreover, the academic pieces which touch upon this topic often ignore the multiplicity of the identity layers of contemporary Russian artists running the risk of reducing the multidimensional reality to a simplistic opposition between the 'anti-Western' state and the 'pro-Western' dissident artists.

The objective of the thesis is to reveal the main identification patterns as presented in nonconformist Russian art, understand how it challenges the hegemonic discourse as well as disclose the depiction of those patterns vis-a-vis the West. For that purpose, I employ the concept of dissensus brought forth by Jacques Rancière (2010). According to Rancière, politics and aesthetics should not be viewed in isolation from each other, since both have the potential to challenge the accepted manners of perceiving the world through altering of what he calls the ‘distribution of the sensible’ (or the accepted manner of perceiving the world). The commonly shared distribution of the sensible is defined as the consensus. It is the dominant state of acceptance and legitimization of the hierarchical order, the functioning of the community as a unity, where differing views are muted. Dissensus, on the other hand, is the indirect dispute with the established framework which defines what is taken for granted and viewed as ‘the proper’ (Rancière 2010). In politics, dissensus is a challenge to the existing order that might result in subjectivation, but in art it takes the form of an aesthetic rupture, or the process of dissociation, disidentification (Jonson 2015). Artists therefore use multiple tactics such as ambiguity, openness to interpretation, radical action etc. having the goal of disrupting or altering perceptions, questioning how the world is organized, how the lines are drawn between what is speech and what is noise, what is an object of discussion deserving right to exist and what is not.

This theoretical framework entails that consensus and dissensus cannot be viewed in isolation from each other or from the place and time in which they are functioning. For that reason, firstly I discuss the consensus in Russia after 2012 which is based on negative identification which firstly identifies the enemy (embodied by the West) and counterposes the identity of the Self to the former. The key idea here is that this negative identification discredits the possibility of an alternative social order (Jonson, 2018). Since the consensus is embedded in identity, it is therefore logical to look into the identity discourses prevalent in dissident art and see whether and how they challenge this logic of identification and make alternative social order possible. The discussion of the hegemonic discourse is instrumental in addressing the main research objective as it creates ground for tracking how dissensus deconstructs the existing identity patterns of the consensus and lays ground for

potential new identifications. To do so, this research concentrates on performance art and music as more engaging art forms and applies the Making Identity Count (MIC) inductive discourse analysis method. It is important to note that while the MIC method is aimed at reconstructing the relatively stable national identity discourses, this research employs the method with the purpose of revealing the logic of identification and identity patterns that are reflected in the selected sample of artworks. These patterns are then put into the perspective of the consensus in order to understand how they challenge the established distribution of the sensible. Accordingly, the thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the main Russian identity patterns as presented in nonconformist Russian art?
2. How nonconformist artists depict the Russian identity in regard to the West?

This thesis is structured in three chapters. The first chapter introduces the theoretical framework proposed by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière and introduces the key concepts of the study. The second chapter discusses the research design, sampling rationale and data selection; and the Making Identity Count method with its specific application. The final chapter firstly analyses the consensus, or the hegemonic discourse in Russia after 2012 and the official cultural policy which defines the limits of what is acceptable as art and what topics are allowed to be raised. Second, it presents the findings of the analysis of 64 artistic texts, organized in identity categories. Third, it maps where Russian identity is in regard to the West as depicted in the selected sample of artworks. Finally, this chapter puts the official consensus and the dissensus in art into the perspective answering the research questions. The conclusion summarizes the key findings and implications for future research.

## 2. Dissensus: Art and Politics

Research on art and politics bases itself on the presumption that art is not merely a way of reflecting the external circumstances and realities, but plays a formative role in the social life. Art's participatory nature allows people to partake in and manage their social and political actualities (Heble, 2000, p. 78). While exploring the role of art, researchers employ approaches provided by art theory, art history, philosophy, cultural studies etc. At the same time, political science and international relations can provide insight on the role of art in societal developments. As Möller (2016, p. 1) suggests, art can be considered a form of political discourse and what is more, a contribution to it, which can take relatively subtle forms open to interpretation or be directly critical. Art and politics should not be seen as two independently constituted spheres: there is an aesthetic dimension in politics and a political dimension in aesthetics (Mouffe, *The art of critical art*, 2012, p. 91; Tanke, 2011, p. 140).

The study of international relations can be categorized into mimetic and aesthetic approaches. The first approach is an attempt to delve into the origin or the 'real' meaning without the use of interpretation, while the aesthetic approach assumes that representing the political is in nature interpretative (Bleiker, 2009, pp. 19-20). This divide is apparent considering that mimetic approaches believe social science aims to find out the objective facts about the world, while the aesthetic approaches believe interpretation is inevitable and representations are necessarily non-identical with the represented. In fact, this difference is the space of the political; and representation in and through language is unavoidably a political matter (Bleiker, 2009, p. 2; Möller, 2016, p. 6). The political reality is not out there, but rather comes into being through representation process. Prioritizing representation means acknowledging that the political event itself cannot determine the way it is seen and thus, representation is a question of prioritization, imposition of order upon different sets of 'truth claims' or the reality (Bleiker, 2009, p. 21). The understanding about a fact cannot be isolated from the relationship of the researcher or the viewer to and with that fact, thus making comprehension a process of organizing events and phenomena. This

view is in a sharp contrast with the positivist approach to social science where the researcher is seen as a ‘detached observer, [who] can produce value-free knowledge’ (Bleiker, 2009, p. 31). The so-called aesthetic turn in international political theory expanded the understanding about the location of politics thus also broadening the conception of where politics can be possibly challenged and revealing vulnerabilities of states and great powers (Steele, 2017). Research on politics and art, then, is multidisciplinary in essence. Aside from social science methods, it borrows approaches from philosophy, visual studies, anthropology etc. An example is how since the 1980s poststructuralist and feminist thinkers started to challenge the established culture of political analysis through researching visual representations in order to broaden the understanding of the political (Bleiker, 2009, p. 30; Möller, 2016, p. 6).

### *Political vs. Critical Art*

Basing on the existing literature, Möller (2016) indicates two important dimensions of art: political and critical. Art is political if it helps to understand the existing power relations and, in many cases, challenge them through various types of engagement (engaging in and supporting political, social movements, joining different organizations, activism). Surely, not all artists intend to be politically engaged, but the important question is not whether they intentionally tackled political matters, but rather their artwork’s potential to alter the existing discursive frames in the political landscape. Political art may contain a critical element, yet it may also be a way to merely reconstruct the politics of the elites, align with or even mask the existing political order, in which case the critical dimension is absent. Political art according to Möller (2016, p. 2) also contains a moral element, which depends on the artistic aim of preserving or challenging the existing power relations. Art is critical if it goes beyond simply recognizing established versions of facticity (similar to political art, but much broader). These two dimensions of art are not binary: political art may be critical, but critical art is in essence political, since its function is to extend and redefine the understanding of what is known or what is considered worthy of being known (Möller, 2016, p. 2). Let’s note that critical art is not necessarily progressive and might support suppression, violence and even genocidal policies. Aesthetics, then, should be seen as a

way of enlarging the conventional understanding about the political and move beyond the commonsensical, taken-for-granted dimensions of political practices through art which goes contrary to the logic of habit (Bleiker, 2009, p. 11).

Although useful as an exercise, this categorization may conceal many aspects when used for analysis. Contrarily, Chantal Mouffe (2012) does not focus on categorizing art as political or non-political. She suggests that all artistic practices have a political dimension. The political in her view is concerned with the ‘symbolic ordering of social relations’ where exactly ‘its aesthetic dimension resides’ (Mouffe, 2013, p. 91). She instead proposes to delve into possible *forms of critical art* (defined similarly with the previous accounts: a set of practices that disturb the dominant hegemony and highlight the existence of alternatives which eventually affect the political order).

The critical paradigm, though, may contain some shortcomings. Holden highlights how researchers have been using the term ‘critical’ as a way of imposing some hierarchy, where the so-called elites do ‘critical’ work, and they are somehow privileged compared to the ‘uncritical’ majority. This dichotomy in aesthetic IR is problematic because the word critical becomes a floating signifier and researchers using this term in many cases do not endow the term with any meaning or act upon it, but rather use it in the context of the above-mentioned ‘critical/uncritical’ dichotomy (Holden, 2006, p. 806).

Jacques Rancière highlights another drawback of criticality (2004). He writes ‘critical art is a type of art that sets out to build awareness of the mechanisms of domination to turn the spectator into a conscious agent of world transformation.’ (Rancière, 2004, p. 45). He has multiple objections with this approach. Firstly, awareness is not necessarily transformative and ‘the exploited rarely require an explanation of the laws of exploitation.’ Secondly, it depends on its own extrapolation of a passive spectator, which it supposedly activates. Finally, critical art is stuck in the process of circulating stereotypes that denounce stereotypes, media representations that critique media, asking the spectator to discover the signs of capital through transforming things into signs (which capitalism itself already does) etc. Critical art attempts to produce a sensory form of strangeness which evoke rupture within the continuity of representative cause-effect scheme. But is there really

reason why this sensory oddity should bring understanding of the world? Even if it does, there are no reasons to claim that this comprehension will serve as a driver for change. Therefore, intellectual awareness does not directly cause political action, Rancière suggests (Rancière, 2009, pp. 73-74). Therefore, in order to promote political change art must be radical. By being radical it can cause aesthetic rupture and disidentification, which can then lead to political subjectivation (Rancière, 2010). In this research, I do not employ the concepts of political art or critical art, but focus on Rancière's concept of dissensus in art, which is discussed later in the chapter.

### *Antagonism vs. Agonism*

In her earlier works Mouffe, was attempting to break away from Habermasian 'discourse of consensus' and advocating for the concept of political antagonism. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) propose, radical democratic politics is based on antagonisms, thus tensions should be viewed as politically productive forces (Miller, 2016). Later, Mouffe brings to light the aesthetic implications of political antagonism. Art is considered as one of the ways for challenging the established hegemony and developing towards *agonistic politics*, where differences are not compromised for reaching a consensus, but coexist in a 'positive' confrontation while having in mind that there is no solution to these conflicts. On the one hand, there is antagonism understood as a confrontation for its own sake and agonism, on the other, which is a term attempting to highlight the key role played by disagreement. Critical art accordingly reveals these differences. Further, through provoking the human imagination and emotions, aesthetics makes us perceive and experience things differently, thus affecting people's consciousness and providing significant potential in the construction of political identities and new forms of subjectivity (Mouffe, 2013, pp. 96-97). This is precisely the function of critical art. Nevertheless, deidentification and manifestations of refusal alone are not enough for construction of new forms of subjectivity, there also has to be a component of constructing alternative models of politics and offering approaches of collective identity (Mouffe, 2013, p. 93). Mouffe claims, that artistic and cultural practices can materialize their critical potential only if articulated in different levels of struggle (through the creation of a 'chain of equivalence') and the belief that art activism alone can

introduce radical change is a misconception (Mouffe, 2013, p. 99). If the art does not leave its 'natural environment' and spread further into more social groups it is less likely to have real impact.

An important drawback of Mouffe's framework is its Eurocentricity. In one of her interviews, she admits that her theory is linked to the situation in Europe and in other political contexts the role of critical art will be completely different (Hendrickx & Hillaert, 2012). Nevertheless, the main problem with Mouffe's theoretical framework is covert liberalism, which according to Rancière is problematic. He insists on separating liberalism from democracy. Liberal theory is top-down and starts from the state, which by law or force decrees equality to the passive people. Democratic politics, contrarily, are bottom up. People engage in political action and bring about change in the state through active participation and constant search for the right way of articulations in order to make themselves understood. Therefore, liberalism is another form of hierarchic consensus, which is organized with the goal of being 'right' (May, 2010). Of course, it may be better than other *police* orders (see *Dissensus in Politics and Art*), but still contains caveats to the emergence of democratic politics (Chambers, 2013).

As opposed to Mouffe, Claire Bishop translates political antagonism to the aesthetic terms and proposes that an equivalent would be 'relational antagonism' which implies confrontation, discomfort, instability and relations of dissent rather than mutual respect and pluralism. She looks into various forms of socially engaged art which equip aesthetic antagonism, often evoking feelings of unease and discomfort (Miller, 2016, p. 173; Bishop, 2012). Aesthetic antagonism may include practices which are often criticized from the normative point of view. According to Bishop, artists may create works which are exploitative and degrading, as well as instead of constructing alternative discourses they may simply recreate the socio-political problems that they attempt to criticize. As she convincingly argues, by so doing aesthetic practices can bring the spectator back from utopian idealism to the issues on the ground.

It is important to highlight that these theoretical viewpoints diverge mainly based on normative judgements, where artworks are viewed not only in the context of the aesthetics

but also ethics, politics and sociality (Miller, 2016). Questions such as ‘Is it ethical to use exploitative methods to send a message to the audience?’, ‘Is art supposed to propose alternatives or reproduction alone is enough?’ are raised among art critics. Since this research is not about the artworks themselves, but their socio-political imageries, it will not attempt to evaluate the ethical (in a narrow sense) dimension of the artworks.

There are different approaches in academia to the way aesthetic experiences can contribute to or bring about social and political change. Robin Wright (2011) and Ales Erjavec (2003) express similar views that great upheavals are preceded by value shifts which circulate in the cultural sphere prior to being articulated in political terms. Erjavec proposes that visual arts and culture have an important role in articulating and at the same time consolidating the public moods and values. While speaking about the developments in 1989-91 in the Eastern Bloc he claims that these socio-political upheavals were reflected in arts and culture. What is more, he claims that art was one of the driving forces for the shift away from communism and it has been a vital force able to visualize public demands before they were even formulated in political terms (Erjavec, 2003, p. 7). Likewise, Boris Groys (2010) proposes that the discourses of Moscow conceptualism and Sots-artists affected the way people perceived the world and contributed to value changes in the society through ridiculing the Soviet ideology even in somewhat anarchistic manner.

According to Hank Johnston (2009) artistic production is often a more prevalent sphere of resistance under repressive regimes instead of political activism, since a) artistic autonomy is in conflict with control, b) the state takes many measures to repress this autonomy and c) ambiguity of the artworks and the popularity of artists makes it costly for the state to apply restrictive measures. Therefore, arts might serve as an important prelude for social movements by showing resistance before the demands and messages are articulated in the society (Johnston, 2009, pp. 3-29).

Bleiker proposes something similar about art’s progressive potential, claiming such endeavours have the power to propel a slow transformation of societal values. Significant historical events, he claims, develop around gradual ‘transversal transformation’ of values through cultural and aesthetic experiences (Bleiker, 2000, p. 183). An example on point is

the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was preceded by the spread of Western European culture in East Germany through music, literature (especially existentialist and post-structuralist traditions) and other forms of art. Despite government's denunciation of these values, and labelling them as a tool of ideological propaganda of capitalism, these cultural expressions were able to challenge the fundamental principles of the hegemonic political discourse, thus creating solid grounds for the fall of the Berlin Wall (Bleiker, 2000, p. 181). In Foucauldian terms these cultural and artistic experiences altered the system of exclusion thus affecting the discursive assumptions on what is right or wrong, moral or immoral (Bleiker, 2000, p. 175).

The above-mentioned paradigm is valuable, however West-centric as the overwhelming majority of the scholarship on this matter. In *Rules for Radicals* Saul Alinsky (1989) mentions a key requirement for the understanding of political change: to recognize the world the way it is and not what we would like it to be. This is to say that while it would be preferable to follow the path of a civilized and painless transformation and end up with an agonistic society, we cannot disregard the realities that we face. While valid in particular environments, Bleiker's view ignores the radical art practices, which discard the idea of slow evolutionary transformation and use methods which are provocative. Radical art attempts to expose injustices of the existing system and insists on radical ideas, approaches and changes. Radicalism, nevertheless, should not be confused with extremism or fundamentalism, since it manifests itself differently depending on the socio-political and material environment. In authoritarian contexts radicalism takes different forms since there are more taboos in the society and the 'screws are tightened' regularly by ruling elites (Adams, 2005). As a result, art's radicality should not be measured in comparison to the general art sphere, but in the context of the environment in which the artists are functioning. Radical art is vulnerable to being appropriated and patronized by collectors, companies and even governments if they are deemed 'acceptable' and not threatening to the status quo. This can serve as an obstacle but Pil and Galia Kollektiv claims that despite the absorption of art by consumerism it does not lose its critical position, since this collapse of

boundaries paradoxically offers a new space for political engagement (On Claims of Radicality in Contemporary Art, 2015).

Boris Groys (2017) highlights two artistic strategies designed to influence the world: persuasion and accommodation. The first strategy attempts to trigger the imagination of people and affect their consciousness, and as a result these changed people would change the world. Therefore, art should speak a shared language with the spectator in order to appeal to it. The political effectiveness of art then depends on artwork's popularity or likability by the public. According to Groys this view is somewhat idealistic since likable artwork is not necessarily transformative and artists as well as spectators are well aware of it and are distrustful of banal art pieces (thus the unwillingness of avant-garde to share an easily accessible language with the public, since they did not believe in the ability of touching the souls of people and creating a society where they would be willing to live). The second artistic strategy for change is the production of an environment, material world rather than messages. In this case there is no need to have a shared language with the spectator, since art in this case simply alters the environment where spectators accommodate themselves to these new conditions. As a result, art can be implemented as ideology or as technology (Groys, 2017, pp. 54-56).

Groys also mentions that art's transformative ability is embedded in the process of disidentification. He describes it as an attempt to illustrate the artist's difference from oneself, or in other words the refusal of the artists to be identified according to the common parameters that are imposed to define us. Artists reclaim the right of their 'sovereign self-identification'. However, identity is not a matter of truth but a matter of power, since the struggle against imposed identities is a struggle against the society, the state institutions and mechanisms that introduce certain taxonomies and hierarchies of identities. He takes it a step further to claim that contemporary artists engage in politics of nonidentity: 'Art says to its spectator: I am not what you think I am (in stark contrast to: I am what I am)' (Groys, 2017, p. 67). This view echoes Rancière's concept of dissensus, which is adapted for this thesis and discussed below.

Prior to introducing the concept of dissensus, it should be mentioned that this research accepts that art reflects and affects the political environment in the society. It also accepts that this effect is not directly observable and measurable. Art's effect on the world is not necessarily immediate, calculable or intentional (On Claims of Radicality in Contemporary Art, 2015). However, art's potential to facilitate political change is connected to its radicality, since it is precisely how disidentification starts and possibility for creation of new subjects emerges.

### *Dissensus in politics and art*

The vast majority of scholarship (including the authors mentioned above) which in one way or another touches the topic of interaction between politics and aesthetics tend to isolate artworks from their social dimension. They contrast realism with avant-gardism, autonomous art with the culture industry etc. French philosopher Jacques Rancière, on the other hand rejects these dichotomies and refuses to draw sharp lines between aesthetics and politics (Rancière, 2010; Rancière, 2009). He does not attempt to illustrate that the two are connected, but to dive deeper into the ways in which they are linked and understand how are certain practices being defined as artistic or political. This is not to say that art and politics are the same, but simply, that their interaction is more complex. In a sense, this is a relationship between two 'internalized others': politics of aesthetics and aesthetics of politics (Rockhill, 2014).

Rancière provides a broader map of art's capacity for driving political change. 'Aesthetic experience' he claims 'has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations.' (Rancière, 2009, p. 74). Aesthetic endeavours do not produce prescriptions of what is to be done. Rather they are a collection of connections that reframe the relations between bodies, their environment and the way they are set to adapt to it. Aesthetics allows for a creation of novel prospects of collectivity, however under the condition of absence of direct cause-effect relationship. 'The aesthetic effect is initially an effect of dis-identification' (Rancière, 2009, p. 74). Rancière finds that political change is possible through subjectivation, which he claims is always preceded by dis-identification. Aesthetic community is in its turn a

group of dis-identified persons. Thus, the aesthetic effect is political since political subjectivation proceeds via dis-identification. This dis-identifying effect is not ‘calculable’ since on the one hand it escapes artistic strategy, while on the other this very strategy completes the dis-identification process leading to new types of individuation which negate any form of political subjectivation (Rancière, 2009, p. 74). This is precisely the reason why radical art is necessary: to start the process of dis-identification. An example could be Russian avant-garde in 1910s which was confrontational and provocative in its attempts to discover new forms of expression, a new ontology. Although avant-gardists did not articulate political ambitions, their artistic endeavours were political in essence (Gurianova, 2012).

Rancière highlights that the fundamental characteristic of both politics and art is that they challenge the accepted manners of perceiving the world (together with creating, distributing and redistributing the sensible world). He introduces the term ‘distribution of the sensible’ as a space where social orders are reinforced and reflected. This is a notion referring to the configuration of what is visible, audible and sayable, as well as a complex of individuals and voices that can act as a subject in certain spatial and chronological circumstances (Jonson, 2015, p. 6). The shared/accepted distribution of the sensible defines what is possible and/or expected. Rancière calls this consensus, which he defines as the dominant state of acceptance and legitimization of the hierarchical order, the functioning of the community as a unity, where differing views are not accepted. Consensus entails an entirety of views that largely share ethical values thus ignoring and even eliminating the dissenting outlooks (Rancière, 2010, p. 100). This entirety of views is preserved by the *police* which is opposed to *politics*. *Police* bases itself on inequality between the members of the society and functions as a mechanism for making the hegemonic order natural. As opposed to it, *politics* operates on the assumption of equality attempting to overstep the commonsensical hierarchy created and guarded by the *police* (Tanke, 2011).

Dissensus, on the other hand, is the challenging of the *police*, and a manifestation of *politics*. It is the dispute (not necessarily an open conflict) with the established framework which defines what is taken for granted and viewed as ‘the proper’ (Rancière, 2010). This

hidden conflict manifests itself differently in politics and in art, although it has the same function – to break away from ‘the proper’. In politics, dissensus takes a form in subjectivation, or the process of appearance of new political subjects consisting of people who either did not raise their voices or were not audible in the society. In art, dissensus results in aesthetic rupture or the process of dissociation (Rancière, 2010). In order to create this dissociation, artists may use multiple tactics such as ambiguity, openness to interpretation, intervention etc.

Any account of the interaction between politics and art should be viewed in the context of the distribution of the sensible. In other words, what are the ways in which art is thought to be parted from or connected to the broader distribution of the sensible and other ways of doing and making. Art is assigned one of the parts in the system of meanings and supplies which define the relationships between things in the world.

In attempts of reconstructing the conceptual linkages which have been used to define art and its role, Rancière introduces the notion of regime of art. It is a system of principles which permits certain practices to be accepted as art (identity attributed to art) and determine its role vis-à-vis other practices (how art contests the distribution and its attributed identity). Although art can challenge the distribution of the sensible, it should not be treated as ‘politics by other means’. ‘Art challenges what is sensible, thinkable, and hence possible, on the condition that it not surrender its identity as art.’ (Tanke, 2011, p. 75).

He proposes that there are three different modes of perceiving, practicing and ordering art - regimes of art. Prior to discussing them it is important to mention that these regimes cannot be reduced to any certain style or period.

*Ethical regime of images:* In this regime art as a distinctive sphere does not exist. The roots of this regime go back to Plato’s Republic, where the ultimate goal is to sustain the consensus or the harmony of the community through myth. New images and narratives have a potential to disturb this harmony, thus ‘art’ should be contained considering two main criteria: image’s faithfulness to an idea (in the Platonian sense) and its effect on the

community. Any imagery that may interrupt the integrity of the community will have ethical effects and somehow become a part of people's habits. In such circumstances art is not only undermined by politics, but is not even recognized as something distinct and autonomous. The implication is that when assuming the ethical regime, art is often disregarded since it does not serve the preservation of the community (Tanke, 2011, p. 78).

*Representative regime:* Aristotle's Poetics is the origin of this regime, where he attempted to provide art with some autonomy from the common distributions, while adjusting to the ethical concerns. Art is accepted as autonomous inasmuch as it imitates serious and complete action (while sustaining the causal order of events) flavoured with pleasurable as well as dramatic components leading to the catharsis of pity, fear and similar harmful emotions. In that sense, art can be considered ethically positive and socially functional. In this regime, art should align itself with the hierarchical vision of the community and restrict not only its content but also form. In the representative regime, the distribution of the sensible dictates what the art subject can be and how it should be represented. As a result, it also determines the high and low subjects in the common hierarchy and the way in which they should be dealt with, prioritizing some genres over others (Tanke, 2011, p. 80).

*Aesthetic regime:* This regime totally rejects the normativity of the representative regime. The subject here is not presupposed to be linked to a certain mode of presentation, moreover, the relationship between the artistic cause and the spectatorial effect is indeterminate and depends on analysis and reflection. Art is the object of aesthetics and there are no rules of how and what to create. Additionally, the strict boundary between art and life that was assumed by the representative regime was revisited. Art entered into different spheres of life including homes, markets etc., with which it also gave birth to promises about the future. While under the representational regime art recreates ideas about human nature, under the aesthetic regime it concerns itself with questions about the future of humanity through producing texts which speak of emancipation from habitual thinking. In this regime art is transformed through interaction with life and can influence life with 'aesthetic values' (Tanke, 2011, p. 85). This relationship is persistent inasmuch as art remains a separate domain of life while paradoxically attempting to prove that it is more

than art (which ensures its ability to affect life), thus binding together autonomy and heteronomy. This is precisely what allows art to have some political agency which demonstrates itself as a refusal to be a part of the common daily meanings. Aesthetics is political, since under this regime art creates gaps in the understanding and connections between bodies, places, times etc. thus, introducing a dissensus to the shared meanings (Tanke, 2011).

According to Rancière (2009) art should be an intermediary to which the artist and the audience can relate, rather than a somewhat 'instructional' phenomenon which explicitly indicates the artistic work's political purposes (if it has one at all). Another concept, which should be mentioned here is what Rancière calls aesthesis: 'an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality' (Bishop, 2012, p. 18). Artistic experiences, even those which try to depart from the political dimension, challenge the coordinates of the sensible (through experiences which are opposed to the existing distribution of the sensible), thus enticing the audience to question the existing world order and consider the redistribution of that order (Tanke, 2011, pp. 73, 107; Eschenburg, 2014). This happens exactly due to the viewer's 'autonomy of experience' in relation to art and freedom of interpretation and response (sometimes indeterminacy of the aesthetic experience) (Bishop, 2012, p. 27).

One remark to be made here is that the idea of the artist and the interpretation of the spectator need to be connected through a third object: the spectacle. Although it does not allow for an undistorted transmission, it mediates between and at the same time separates them. By doing so it always keeps the tension between the social and art contributing to intellectual emancipation (Bishop, 2012, p. 278).

A final remark here concerns the difference between Rancière's framework to Foucault's archaeological method (as well as to Žižek's, Laclau's, and Badiou's concept of subjectification (all of whom draw on Lacan)). Since multiple scholars have noticed several levels of similarities especially with Foucault, Rancière himself makes a comparison (Tanke, 2011, p. 66; Rockhill, 2014, p. 50). In describing the conditions for discourse creation, Foucault introduces episteme (the common space of knowledge for a given time

period) and Rancière – regime. Archaeology attempts to describe the system of rules for the creation of statements and visuals and their interactions. Rancière agrees that his methodology is similar, but claims that it is ‘more open to the event than Foucault’s, but without any Benjaminian messianism’ (Elliot, 2008, p. 2). Regimes are not mutually exclusive and usually intermix, they also allow for exceptions. According to Rancière Foucault’s methodology seems to be embedded in some historical necessity, and what he is trying to do is to ‘de-historicize these systems of conditions of possibility’ (Tanke, 2011, p. 77).

This thesis takes dissensus as a starting point for the analysis of contemporary Russian art considering the opportunity provided by the framework to explore how art contributes to political subjectivation. The terms *non-conformist art* and *dissident art* are used interchangeably to refer to artworks under examination, meaning that they contain a component of dissensus.

## **2.1. The Case of Russian Non-conformist Art**

Contemporary Russian art is a curious case for exploring the relations of art and politics. Russia has a long tradition of dissident art starting from early avant-garde of the past century, Soviet dissident art, Moscow actionism and all the way to contemporary waves of political art with prominent artists such as Pussy Riot and Piotr Pavlensky. On the one hand, dissensus in Russian art is increasingly suppressed, but still, it manages to create content that is diverging from the mainstream discourse creating anxiety for the government and fuelling discussion among the public and in media. Despite the ‘tightening of the screws’ by the government since 2012 a new wave of actionism managed to emerge. Together with that many musicians started to engage with socio-political topics especially saturating the music sphere with political content starting 2018 (Tolokonnikova, Надежда Толоконникова: #MeToo, Верзилов, НТВ и жизнь без политики (Nadezhda Tolokonnikova: #MeToo, Verzilov, NTV and life without politics), 2019). As Albert Melucci (1989) mentions, in complex societies conflict emerges in the spheres which are

under excessive pressure to conform the system, thus we might find an interesting connection between the state censorship and constant suppression of the art sphere and the growing number of artists increasingly speaking out about their political views.

The literature on Russian non-conformist art is quite diverse and, in a sense, non-systematic. Some scholars engage with the topic through the lens of art criticism (Platt, 2018) or art history (Bishop, 2012), cultural studies (Beumers, Etkind, Gurova, & Turoma, 2018), others view it in the context of politics and IR (LenaJonson & Erofeev, 2018; Jonson, *Art and Protest in Putin's Russia*, 2015). The latter direction in its turn, includes a diversity of lenses such as power and biopolitics (Makarychev & Yatsyk, 2015; Makarychev & Medvedev, 2018; Yatsyk, 2018) and feminism (Rutland, 2014). Research also focuses on different time periods, engaging with Russian dissident art starting from early avant-garde, Soviet dissidents, Moscow Conceptualism, early post-Soviet years and up until 2010s (see section 2.2 for details). The literature is scarce when it comes to the recent or the so cold post-2012 period (Jonson, 2015; Sharafutdinova, 2014). The main topic of research after 2012 is mainly focused on Pussy Riot and Piotr Pavlensky (Nelson, 2018; Bodin, 2018; Wiedlack, 2015; Yusupova, 2014). Works on Russian contemporary art and politics include a variety of art forms: from art that is usually confined to more traditional institutions like galleries, museums and theatres, to more engaging forms such as film, theatre, poetry music, actionism and performance art. In order to set up a clear background for the research questions of this thesis, I present below some of the most relevant academic works per each research question, which are formulated as follows:

1. What are the main Russian identity patterns in nonconformist Russian art?
2. How nonconformist artists depict the Russian identity in regards to the West?

*RQ1: Identity patterns in nonconformist Russian art*

In her 2018 article Ingrid Nelson explores Russian dissident performance art and highlights the changes in form and content after 2012. She demonstrates that the political developments in Russia in 2012 affected the conceptual and aesthetic characteristics of the new dissident art. She puts this in the perspective of post-Soviet art groups such as Voina

and Pussy Riot and the post-2012 works of Piotr Pavlensky (Napreenko, 2017). While the general guerrilla methods and political messaging and action beyond the traditional art institutions stayed similar, the new performance art was dark, brutal and reflected the logic of violence, which shows that the artists perceive the situation as serious (Nelson, 2018).

Lena Jonson is one of the most authoritative scholars of Russian art resistance. She has authored and co-authored volumes devoted to understanding the relations of art and politics especially in the era of Russian conservative-authoritarian regime. In her 'Art and Resistance in Putin's Russia' she also takes 2012 protests as a focus point and attempts to understand how dissensus in art starting from 2000 affected political subjectivation and contributed to the 2012 protests. She applies the above-mentioned theoretical framework proposed by Rancière and in that sense this thesis follows her journey, while applying the framework to a different set of data. However, Jonson frames her research in terms of culture and counterculture. According to her, the emerging art practices which express social and political disagreement are creating a counterculture or even a subculture of resistance to the values and notions of 'the authorities and established society' (the culture) (Jonson, 2015, p. 5). This thesis avoids such framing, since it implies/assumes a certain extent of marginality or unpopularity of dissident art. This research, on the other hand, examines Russian non-conformist art as a form of cultural resistance without making claims to its (in)significance and/or classification in cultural terms. This is a research choice made here in order to avoid going into the discipline of cultural studies, which might shift the concentration of the study.

In her inquiry Jonson studies artefacts, ideations and performances and organizes the researched artworks into three categories depending on where they stand in relation to the consensus. The first category - engaged art, is confrontational and contains openly political messages. The second one, art of another gaze, is a very delicate form of expression with an almost invisible questioning of the political setup. Finally, dissent art is confrontational with the mainstream discourse but uses more indirect methods such as laughter and absurd (Jonson, 2016). This thesis will use these categories as guidelines.

Another book which Jonson co-authored with Andrei Erofeev, examines the artistic strategies of resistance that have been used after 2012 (up to 2013) under the new conditions of censorship and increased state control with a focus on visual arts and theatre. Here also the three categories of dissensus in art proposed by Jonson are used to include counterstrategies of resistance as compromising with the government, engaging in political activism in parallel to artistic activities, direct criticism and proposal of novel alternatives (Jonson, 2018). This empirical study includes interviews with prominent artists, who share their thoughts on art and politics in Russia, which will be of use for the analysis of artists' self-perceptions.

In his article produced in scopes of Art Riot (exhibition and web-site), Alek Epstein inquires Russian art activism in Putin's era. Apart from mapping the important players in the field (looking beyond the few well-known artists and beyond Moscow) and highlighting their significance, he briefly mentions some prevalent subjects of these artworks. The range includes support for arrested activists, expression of discontent against the unchanging elites, solidarity with LGBT+ community and the suppressed. Despite a relatively dynamic actionism scene Epstein concludes that there are no actionsists working productively and resulting in public resonance (Epstein, 2018).

While revealing many aspects of the Russian dissensus art, above-mentioned academic works do not look into the prevalent narratives of the artworks, while it is a vital task in understanding the possible spheres for change. Most of the academic literature has been studying Russian dissident art by framing it in opposition to the hegemonic discourse, but what this study will aim to do is to take a step ahead and analyse what exactly are the cornerstones of these artworks. Only then will these counterdiscourses be compared to the hegemonic discourse. In other words, the art sphere is not looked at as a contingent to the hegemonic discourse but a self-reliant community of new discourse creation which challenges the consensus. This is important especially considering the increased role of digital platforms and especially YouTube in Russia and can reveal what these alternative discourses are adding to the Russian socio-political sphere of life.

One exception is a 2019 research article by Anastasia Denisova and Aliaksandr Herasimenka, who look into the discourses produced by Russian rap music (Denisova & Herasimenka, 2019). They examine the works of three rappers, who engage in politics (both dissidents and pro-government). Taking a step further they analyse YouTube comments to understand the public reaction to the selected artworks. A valuable conclusion that will inform this thesis is that YouTube comments are often utilized as a space to express political opinions and initiate discussion around topics which cannot be easily discussed in public, because of the absence of platforms for social dialogue (Denisova & Herasimenka, 2019).

Another exception is Ilya Kukulin's article the main argument of which is that the Russian society in the 2010s entered a stage of covert breakdown in moral values and standards to be followed. As a result, the state of social stagnation and exposure to the Western pop-culture resulted in emergence of what he calls 'a "hybrid" subaltern in Russian society' 'perseverating the reproductions' of revolt (Kukulin, 2020, p. 79). Although popular as a type of narration, it was self-ironic and did not really aim to drive social improvement. Currently this type of narration is being pushed into the background compared to rap charged with political content. The latter is focused on the perceived problematic nature of the state which acts through violence and psychological pressure (Kukulin, 2020).

This research then attempts to fill two gaps in the empirical literature. First, while most authors focus on traditional art institutions such as museums, galleries, theatres etc. this thesis looks into art which goes out to the streets, public spaces and goes viral in the online space attracting the attention of the government, media and the public. In particular, I look into performance art and music, which especially during the past few years are enjoying an increased attention. The selection is not arbitrary and is based on the fact that art institutions, publishing houses and government funds are reluctant in hosting and accommodating the needs of artists who engage with 'taboo' topics. Therefore, artists are left with no choice, but to go into the streets, public spaces and online platforms which are not easily controlled and censored.

Second, there is a sufficient amount of research devoted to the Soviet and post-Soviet protest art, as well as a special focus on 2011-2012 anti-government protests and the scandalous Pussy Riot affair. However, academia has not devoted much attention to the post-Pussy Riot period, arguing that in post-2012 Russia the art as a means of political activism has declined due to censorship and the possible controversial public reaction (artists labelled as an internal enemy). This is often interpreted as the ‘death’ of political actionism and a lack of political engagement of artists, which was crushed by the authorities (Mitchell, 2018; Epstein, 2018). Nevertheless, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, artists found new strategies for resistance which deserve scholarly attention.

#### *RQ2: Depiction of the Russian identity in regards to the West*

The most striking artworks of the past decade by Russian artists such as, art group Voina, Pussy Riot or Piotr Pavlensky appeared in the spotlight not only in Russia but abroad (especially the West) due to their political content, radical approach and provocative messages. Although the artworks follow the logic of the Moscow actionism, the roots of such art can be traced back to Viennese Actionism originated in Austria in 1950-60s. As an attempt to reflect on World War Two, artists including Otto Mühl and Hermann Nitsch created radical and often times controversial actions using sexualized bodies, animal blood and other ‘terrifying’ visuals, which at the time overstepped the boundaries of the ‘normal’ (Meduza, 2015; Monocler, n.d.). Similarly, the Russian contemporary artists are pushing the boundaries of what Kremlin’s conservative policy deems acceptable. The post-2014 attempts of portraying Russia’s moral superiority over the West (Kremlin, 2013) result in treatment of any non-conformist art as a promoter of the destructive emancipatory agenda of the liberal West and thus, censorship and repressions. Despite the new oppressive climate and hegemonic anti-Western and anti-liberal discourse, Russian dissident artists have been able to shape a fresh strategy and engage with socio-political topics. These dissident artists, utilize European traditions of actionist art and the Western born practices of cultural resistance, while claiming self-sufficiency and managing to create authentic pieces dealing with domestic circumstances (Shortparis, 2020). Literature on Russian contemporary art largely leaves this controversy aside, with only few authors touching

Russian identity's connectedness with the West. Below I present a few articles that tackle the topic although solely focusing on Russia and Europe rather than the wider West.

Makarychev and Yatsyk (2015) view the post-2012 developments in Russian cultural sphere in the context of Europe–Russia relations, where 'Europe' is understood as a social construct (Makarychev & Yatsyk, 2015; Yatsyk, 2018). They illustrate how the conservative turn in Russian politics was articulated in cultural terms and how these changes affected the Russian-European communication in terms of artistic discourses and imageries. The study is framed around the concept of biopolitics: while the hegemonic discourse promoted by the state is a form of biopolitical conservatism, the counterdiscourses of cultural resistance commonly instrumentalize the sexualized scandalized body in line with the European traditions of protest art. The research takes the Pussy Riot affair as a case study (Makarychev & Yatsyk, 2015). Further Makarychev and Medvedev (2018) use the same framework of biopolitics to analyse Piotr Pavlensky's art. One of the main takeaways of the latter research is that the shrinking political space of Russia pushed the individual body to act as a new space for politics while also turning into a social body burdening itself with the role of collective protest.

A research by Marco Biasioli (2020) illustrates this complexity quite accurately. He argues that state policy affected the music sphere after 2014 Ukrainian crisis giving a rise to the New Russian wave and causing indie (defined broadly) musicians to switch their preferences from Anglophone music to Russophone. Triggered by Western sanctions the discourse of Russia as a part of Europe faded into the background and new sentiments focusing on redefining national identity became a method of opposing to the Western values. Pussy Riot had already shaken the bases of the Anglophone Wave in 2012 and 2014 served as a trigger to start a search of new music identity, which is based on the dismissal of the Other and revival of Russian rock and post-punk (with a common nostalgia for the pre-Putin period). This shift to the Russian language and the content about the daily life through unrefined sound was associated with the end of the European project and was seen as a sign of authenticity and return to the roots (Biasioli, 2020).

The previously mentioned academic works run the risk of simplifying the complexity of the discourses put forth by the Russian contemporary artists and ignoring the multiplicity of the identity layers, which in no way can be reduced to the state – anti-European, dissident artists – pro-European or promoting European values. Kabakov and Groys (2017) briefly touch the topic of identity among Russian artists. If in the Soviet period Moscow conceptualism saw the world in terms of us and them (the West), now the situation is slightly different. The end of Cold War and the questioning of the Western-centric model of knowledge transformed the understanding of the West as ‘them’ and artists very often do not take the West as a point of reference. The growing nationalist sentiments however leave gaps for the noncritical approach (Zaytseva, 2017, p. 3).

This research, then, firstly examines the self-perceptions of Russia vis-à-vis the West by non-conformist artists in attempts to uncover the patterns of Russian identity that are connected to the perception of the West and Russia’s position in regard to it as depicted by the dissident artists of the post-2012 Russia.

### **3. Research Design, Data and Method**

This research project is a single case study of the discourses in Russian non-conformist art after 2012, in particular performance art and music (including the visual component of the music videos). First, let us understand why specifically these two art practices were selected.

*Why performance art?* There is an emerging view that fine art is irrelevant to people’s lives, therefore for increased social impact artists cannot limit themselves with traditional art institutions (On Claims of Radicality in Contemporary Art, 2015). Performance art in today’s Russia is provocative and takes place in public space increasing its visibility and escaping censorship. Performance art in Russia has turned into a mode of resistance and especially the so-called Third wave of actionism uses long-term actions or performances to multiply its effect in the society (Pavel Mitenko, 2017). Contemporary dissident artists are breaking free from traditional institutions which are no more an appropriate environment

for free expression and therefore, artists attempt to appeal directly to mass media in attempts of gaining social significance (Groys, 2018).

*Why music?* In the past few years many Russian musicians, who actively use YouTube to share their music and videos, have been tackling socio-political matters. In just 3-4 years there was a boom of political content in music in Russian YouTube, which was followed by state's attempts to cancel the concerts of the musicians, occasional accusations of propaganda of drugs, hooliganism etc. Interestingly enough, even people who have not been identifying themselves as artists have released songs on YouTube on political topics (Nejniy Redaktor (blogger) and Alexander Gudkov (humorist)), which shows that this is an increasingly popular strategy of resistance among Russians, which is also perceived as an effective method of communication with the public (Siegień, 2019).

The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the main Russian identity patterns in nonconformist Russian art?
2. How nonconformist artists depict the Russian identity in regards to the West?

Rancièrè's theoretical framework on which this research is based upon suggests that interaction between politics and art should be viewed in the context of the distribution of the sensible. Thus, firstly I will analyse the consensus and identify the police distribution of the sensible through looking at the political context in Russia from 2012 up until now. This will reveal the logic of differentiating between speech and noise and between the groups who are seen as political subjects and those who do not have a voice. It will also show which topics qualify as political objects worthy of discussion. The discussion will focus on the officially promoted cultural policy, since that is the sphere which affects the art environment and defines what is considered art and what not in the first place. As a result, we will uncover the regime of art which the consensus bases upon.

Afterwards, this thesis will look into the selected sample of dissident artworks and trace the logic of identification through using the Making Identity Count inductive discourse analysis method. The goal is to understand how dissensus in contemporary Russian art challenges the interpretation of the sense which is thought to be undisputable and self-evident.

Looking at the identity patterns that appear in the selected artworks will show the ways in which they reject, deconstruct the meanings that the *police* makes of the sensible and propose another world.

### **3.1.Data**

The sample of this study comprised of in total twelve artists was selected with a precondition that they have political artworks that are non-conformist. If this condition was met, the sample was filtered according to at least one of the following two criteria.

1. *Popularity and critical resonance in the media*: Factors such as YouTube views, appearance on TV and exposure through mass media were considered.
2. *Hinderance of the artistic activities by the authorities*: Intervention by the authorities such as arrests, cancellation of concerts or discussion by high officials were accounted.

Below I present the artists that matched the selection criteria and give a brief introduction about each of them. After the list of artists was finalized, I looked into their creative content selecting the artworks that were political. In the first stage or the initial gaze at all of the content per artist, the more vibrant pieces were selected for a closer analysis leaving behind the artworks that were repetitive in terms of themes. For the complete list of selected artworks see Appendix 1.

#### *Criterion 1*

Darya Serenko: In 2016, Poetess Darya Serenko initiated an action called Silent Picket, during which she travelled through metro in Moscow having a small poster tackling social and political matters. In two years around 600 people engaged in the action from 11 different countries travelling around with their own posters. The topics raised were LGBT rights, interethnic conflicts, political developments such as protests, women's rights, poetry, propaganda etc. Recently Serenko published a book about the action. The strength of this action was its silence and low amount of risk, which allowed for a larger number of

people to get engaged. The action enabled for a direct and instant dialogue/discussion with the passers-by (Panin, 2018).

Shortparis: This experimental band originally from Novokuznetsk started their career in 2012. Singing mainly in French in the beginning, the five members of the group decided to switch to Russian. The texts are created by Nikolay Komyagin, the lead singer. Their popularity boomed in 2018 after the release of the album *So Steel Was Tempered* and especially the music video *Scary*, which contained symbols and triggers reminding of some painful topics for the Russian public. The most eye-catching ones were the references to the Beslan and Kerch terrorist attacks and the issue of migrant workers. They are known as the best Russian live band due to their experimental theatre style performances.

Monetochka: Liza Girdimova was just 17 when her homemade songs went viral on YouTube. With her soft and childish voice, she would sing about a variety of topics ranging from daily life to political topics. Her key talent being writing poems, she managed to make her texts ironic and funny even while singing about serious political matters. As she moved from Yekaterinburg to Moscow, she released two albums *Colouring for Adults* and *Arts and Crafts*, which made internet sensations increasing her popularity.

### *Criterion 2*

Pussy Riot: This feminist protest punk rock and performance art group (or a movement as the founding members frame it) was founded in 2011 in Moscow by Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Yekaterina Samutsevich and Piotr Verzilov. All three were previously members of the anarchist art collective *Voina* famous for a few scandalous performances. On February 21, 2012 five members of the group dressed colourfully and wearing balaclavas held a punk performance *Punk Prayer* at Moscow's main Orthodox Cathedral praying to Virgin Mary asking her to 'chase Putin away'. Three of the members were convicted of "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" sentenced to two-year imprisonment (later one of them was freed and the sentence suspended). Their performance and arrest caused a heated discussion not only in Russia but worldwide and especially the West.

Piotr Pavlensky: After the arrest of Pussy Riot members, Piotr Pavlensky conducted an action in St. Petersburg which brought him visibility. He stood near Kazan Cathedral having his lips sewn together and holding a poster in support of Pussy Riot. He was detained and sent to a psychiatric examination. In fact, it happened to him multiple times since his actions were full of self-mutilation: cutting his earlobe, rolling in barbed wire, nailing his scrotum etc. Although all his actions were provocative and resulted in police intervention, the ones that caused the most distress for authorities were *Freedom* and *Threat*. The former one was a performance in support of Ukraine's Maidan protesters, after which he was convicted of vandalism. The latter was an action where he set the FSB headquarters door on fire. He was sent to a psychiatric unit, then to prison for seven months awaiting trial.

Katrin Nenasheva: This performance artist/actionist originally from Krasnodar deals with the topic of isolation of certain people from the society. Her long-term actions made her popular in the art circles and she is considered a representative of the 'Third wave of Russian actionism'. Her media exposure increased after her performance *Don't Be Afraid*, aiming to raise awareness of the problems of women in Russian prisons. She wore a prison uniform for a month and on the last day, as a symbol of emancipation shaved her head and took the uniform off on Red Square. She was detained by the police. Later she was arrested for another action where she was walking around Moscow with VR glasses (showing visuals of a psychiatric hospital). Most of her actions involved police intervention.

Pavel Krisevich: This young performance artist became popular last year having three performances two of which ended up with police intervention. He was kicked out of the university for a performance during which he was near the FSB headquarters on the cross and 'burning' in the flames of burning court cases.

Manizha: Media attention to this Russian-Tajik singer increased after she was selected to present Russian in Eurovision song contest in 2021 with a song called Russian Woman. The song was tackling stereotypes and social pressure on females. She is actively involved in the struggle against domestic violence and homophobia. Her song was discussed among top officials. Valentina Matviyenko, the Chairwoman of Russia's Federation Council,

called the song nonsense and questioned the voting procedure of Channel One. The First Deputy Chairwoman of the State Duma Committee on Culture, Yelena Drapeko, also commented on Manizha, suggesting to ban her from participating in the contest under the Russian flag.

### *Artists Matching Both Criteria*

**Artyom Loskutov:** Artyom Loskutov is renowned for initiating Monstration in 2004. Monstration is an authentic carnivalesque series of mass aesthetic actions resembling demonstrations but using funny and absurd political posters and slogans. First time it took place in Novosibirsk with participation of 80 people. Ever since the number of participants and the geography of the event expanded to include not only different parts of Russia, but also Beijing, Riga, Chisinau etc. It takes place yearly despite the close attention of the authorities. Loskutov was detained in 2009 with drug possession charges, then again in 2016 and in 2016 for violating the law on assembly. The Monstration still takes place yearly. Last year it was held in an online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The format of Monstration allows to ridicule the political issues and find new ways of expression despite the absence of a specific political agenda.

**Husky:** Dmitry Kuznetsov from Ulan-Ude (known as Husky) is one of the most famous rappers in Russia with his literary lyrics full of references and charged with political content. Although he is mostly supportive of Russian foreign policy in regard to Crimea and Donbas, his political criticism did not go unnoticed. In autumn 2018 he was sentenced to twelve days in jail on charges of hooliganism. He was supposed to have a concert in Krasnodar, but the local prosecutors warned the venue against holding the concert since according to them it contained elements of 'extremist'. The fans gathered outside the venue and Husky performed standing on a car outside the venue, where the police detained him.

**IC3PEAK:** This electronic duo famous for what they call 'audiovisual terror' boomed in popularity after releasing a music video for *Death No More* in 2018, which contained provocative audiovisuals and was interpreted as a criticism of the government. They have faced problems with holding their concerts ever since, especially in the regions. They were

hindered from performing through different methods including pressure of venues by local authorities, questioning by anti-extremism police, search by narcotics officers etc. Although there are no charges against them, they often have to deal with the authorities to an extent that they hide their concert dates and sometimes perform in secret.

Noize MC: Rapper Ivan Alekseyev, known as Noize MC became popular in 2007 when he won the largest Russian Internet hip-hop competition. He is famous for his provocative lyrics which often touch political topics. His song *Mercedes S666* enjoyed special visibility. It was about a car accident in 2010 involving Lukoil's Anatoly Barkov which resulted in the death of two women and Barkov's impunity. In 2011 he was arrested and sentenced to 10 days in prison on charges of hooliganism for insulting the police. His creative career once again peaked in 2019 when he released the music video *All as Usual* where he rapped about the political situation in the country.

### **3.2.Method**

The selected sample of artworks was analysed using the Making Identity Count inductive discourse analysis method. It was introduced by Ted Hopf and Bentley Allan (2016) who combined qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to recover the intersubjective meanings that constitute national identity discourses. Prior to introducing the method one consideration should be noted. While this method was initially introduced for recovering the relatively stable national identity discourses, this research uses it as an efficient tool for revealing the identity patterns that guide the meaning creation process of the selected dissident artists. This research does not aim to recover the discourses of Russian national identity through the selected artworks, but rather attempts to discover the identity categories with the aim of understanding how they interplay with the consensus.

According to this method, national identity is how people understand what their nation is and who they are as members of the nation. Country's core national identities are combinations of identity categories that hang together in discursive formations. As a result, political action takes place within the discursive space formed of identity categories and their relation to each other.

The first step of the method is looking for themes related to national identity which appear in the sample. Then these themes are organized into identity categories, which are classifications attached to the members of the nation. Finally, identity categories comprise discursive formations which are ‘clusters of concepts, values, metaphors, and rules that hang together to order perceptions of the national self.’ (Allan, 2016, p. 26). The focus for this thesis is the first and second layers of the analysis, where identity categories are identified. The reason is that the goal of this research, as mentioned above, is not to look at the comprehensive identity discourse, but at the identity patterns that are present in the selected sample.

The coding takes place in a few rounds. There are no pre-theorized classifications used for the analysis, rather there are guiding questions which serve as guides for the analysis. Following the MIC analysis guide every text included in the sample will be read with the following questions in mind:

1. What does it mean to be Russian?
2. What is Russia, how to describe it?
3. Where is Russia in regards to the West?

The identity categories resulting from answering these questions can be political, moral, historical, geopolitical, religious, ethnic, gendered etc. They are expressed in adjectives and coded considering three dimensions. Firstly, distinction was put between negative, positive, neutral and ambiguous identities (Valence). Secondly, it was distinguished whether the given identity was aspirational or aversive. In other words, is that identity considered something which should be aimed for or something that should be avoided. Finally, significant others should be identified. There are historical periods, countries and ideas that the country compares itself with and they all can differ in valence and can be aspirational or aversive. Once the coding is finished, the categories are counted and organized. Next rounds of coding organize these identities into bigger categories, as a result being able to identify discursive formations based on the combination of the identity categories. As already mentioned, this last stage of the analysis was not the goal of this thesis.

## 4. Results of the Analysis

### 4.1. The Consensus: Political Context and Its Transformation

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, dissensus is the process of declassification from the identities of the *police* order. Thus, prior to speaking about the dissensus in art we should first understand how the *police* order functions or in other words what is the consensus in Russia that sets grounds for what can and cannot be articulated. This section describes Russia's domestic political developments and the official cultural policy from 2012 until now with the aim of understanding the distribution of the sensible. It is organized around key political events that have shaped or reshaped the hegemonic discourse allowing or restricting certain actions and utterances. By no means is this an attempt to reconstruct the entirety of the hegemonic discourse in Russia, rather it is an inquiry into the state-promoted dominant discourses on culture, in order to understand what the consensus for the cultural sphere is.

Putin's return to the presidential position in 2012 was marked by a high level of political tension. The results of 2011 Russian legislative elections and Putin's announced intention of running for president again in 2012 triggered a wave of protests. Thus, returning to power, getting rid of the protest movement became one of the priorities for Putin. Arrests of demonstrators and protest leaders, various types of harassments, introduction of laws limiting oppositional activities, media campaigns presenting the movement as a foreign initiative by some secret services etc. gave their result and the protests slowly lost spark and stopped by summer 2013.

Johnson marks 2012 as the year of shift in Russian political agenda towards authoritarian conservatism (Jonson, 2019). Although the trend was noticeable all through the 2000s, in 2012 it became an official policy implemented on multiple levels. This shift highlighted the importance of traditional and family values, moral restoration, the role of the Orthodox Church and Russian multi-ethnic identity etc. The rhetoric was reflected in policies: patriotism entered the school program as a separate subject, history books were revised

taking out ‘contradictions’, the Orthodox Church was actively involved in the spread of values and introduced a class in the school programs (Grani, 2014; Vesti, 2014; Lenta, 2013). This new political agenda also altered the state national identity discourse, which became increasingly based on being anti-Western while also insisting on Russia’s European identity and its key role played in the preservation of the real European values that the West has lost (Laruelle, 2016). There are constant attempts of reaffirming Russia’s European identity which shows the insecurity of that identity. At the same time, it has a liminal position in Europe, is economically less developed and backward (Morozov, 2015). Therefore, asserting its moral superiority in regard to the West is a way of proving its superiority through other means (Neumann, 2016).

These themes were articulated by Putin in his speech at Valdai Club in 2013. There he mainly focused on Russian national identity and culture, slightly resembling an attempt to formulate a state ideology (the existence of which is prohibited by the Russian Constitution). Among other things Putin mentioned a few pillars that are important for the preservation of the Russian ‘spiritual and cultural code’. One of those was embracing and being proud of the Russian history, stopping excessive self-criticism and exposure of only negative pages of history (which leads to creating a gap between generations, creating and destroying idols, extremism etc.). He mentioned how Euro-Atlantic countries have lost touch with the true Christian values and ended up with distorted value. Thus, for Russia it is important to avoid such a path and return to the religious, national, and cultural roots. The Euro-Atlantic countries as claimed by Putin are in a moral crisis because of excessive political correctness and policies that allow same-sex marriage, ‘belief in Satan’, fear of talking about religious affiliation, ‘talking about registering political parties whose aim is to promote paedophilia’ etc. In this sense he insisted on the need to follow an authentic path and disregard any attempts of civilizing Russia from abroad or borrowing models from other countries. He concluded that respecting the minority’s rights to be different is important, but majority’s rights should not be questioned and should be the priority (Putin, 2013).

As clearly noticeable, conservative paradigm is seen as a way of preservation of the Russian identity. It is what can make Russia immune to the spiritual and cultural distortion and foreign attempts to intervene in internal matters. In 2012, the newly appointed Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinskii took on the responsibility of pushing these ideas into the cultural sphere. He was more proactive compared to his predecessors and attempted to rearrange the cultural life through reorganization of institutions, their financial flows and replacement of respected managers/directors with loyal cadres (Jonson, 2019).

Film sector was among the firsts to be affected. Censorship was applied in regard to presentation of certain historical paradigms (Kalinin, 2018). Later, Medinskii targeted contemporary art. Biennales and exhibitions were still financed, but the minister continually reduced the importance of contemporary art: ‘Why do we, under the label of contemporary art, have to see something abstract–cubic, clumsy, in the form of a pile of bricks? And, moreover, it is paid for by public money! Not to mention that this is incomprehensible to the absolute majority of the inhabitants of Russia’ (Iablokov, 2013). Soon the funding policy was set to be oriented on art that ‘does not harm the psyche of the citizens’ and ‘positively affects’ them. The deputy minister of culture Vladimir Aristarkhov said contemporary art was pornography and functions as a big business. He added that he had not seen a bigger abomination than the Moscow biennale and that funding should be provided only to talented artists that strive for beauty (Lapina, 2014). Later that month, the contemporary art section of the ministry was merged into the folk art section. This very well illustrates Rancière’s point that consensus in art focuses on the harmony in the society and a nostalgia for the times when everyone was in their place and dealing with the duties that they are capable of and assigned to (Rancière, 2009, p. 42).

In December 2014 Vladimir Putin signed a decree approving ‘Foundations for a New State Cultural Policy’ (Основа государственной культурной политики (Foundations of State Cultural Policy), 2014). The first draft document was circulated in May 2014 prior to the signing and was more radical and explicit containing formulations such as ‘Russia is not Europe’. Lena Jonson’s review and comparison of the two documents concludes with few roles that culture should play in the Russian state and society (2019).

*Firstly*, culture is an essential component of identity construction and preservation. The main identity marker was Russia's difference from the West, moreover, Russia is beyond the West-East categories, rather it is a unique civilization that unites these two. The values that serve as a basis for the Russian identity (in line with Putin's 2013 speech) are characterized as conservative and include Orthodox Christianity, rejection of Western universalist values, national patriotism and to a lesser extent multiethnicity (including their religious beliefs and cultural specificities). It is noteworthy that while the document clearly frames Russia as different from the West, Putin himself as well as Medinskii occasionally highlight Russia as the 'true Europe', where Christian values are still preserved (Jonson, 2019).

*Secondly*, culture is viewed as an instrument of education and formation of national mentality. The ultimate goal is the unification of the nation, which is seen possible through strengthening individuals' Russian value system and morality. Culture is not viewed as a value by itself, but rather as a sphere, an investment into which would contribute to the development of the country (Jonson, 2018).

*Finally*, the state's role in the cultural sphere was reframed from being a patron of cultural activities to an investor and regulator of the cultural institutional system. This means the Ministry of Culture consciously took the role of the decision maker when it comes to funding, organization and reorganization of cultural and art institutions which in earlier drafts of the document explicitly included a censorship function (Jonson, 2019, p. 19). The concern of the ministry was mainly controlling (contemporary) art that was centred around a paradigm unacceptable or alien to the traditional Russian value system. Although the extreme formulations were removed from the final document, the approach did not undergo significant changes (Jonson, 2019).

The Ukraine crisis and the annexation of Crimea served as additional points of intensification for the anti-Western sentiments not only in the government but also among the public. The government showed increased sensitivity to certain artworks. First of all, the artists who somehow showed solidarity with Ukrainians came under criticism. Examples include rock musician Andrei Makarevich (founder of Mashina Vremeni) whose

concerts were cancelled after he performed at a Ukrainian refugee camp (Beard, 2014), performance artist Petr Pavlensky, who was arrested after imitating a protest and burning car tires in St. Petersburg to show his solidarity with anti-government protesters in Ukraine (Omidi, 2014), Mikhail Borzykin (pop group Televizor) who allegedly received threats after performing in Kiev and voicing his approaches concerning the annexation of Crimea (Flintoff, 2014).

It can be tracked that the cultural sphere was censored in accordance with the new cultural policy which turned out to be an authoritarian conservative one attempting to prevent the intervention of the currents alien to the Russian culture (Federal Council, 2013). The implementation of the policy can be said to have started even before its official signing. Artists who have not been functioning with the logic of the new political situation were labelled as internal enemies or the ‘fifth column’ (Jonson, 2019). Many of them were accused of offending the feelings of the religious community or undermining traditional values, like Pussy Riot, Marat Gelman and Boris Mezdrich (director of the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theatre) to name a few. The oppression of these artists was manifested differently: while some were arrested, others were fired from their positions or harassed by different right-wing state-affiliated or supported formations and organizations such as *Cossacks* (formally known as Registered Cossacks of the Russian Federation) (News Ykt, 2014; Shestakova, 2015). This is precisely the logic of a functioning *police* order – rejection of somebody’s complete possession of utterance, therefore discreditation of their speech. By framing a group’s ideas as having an alien/foreign root, the consensus mutes their voices.

Marat Gelman considers that the difference of approaches to cultural activities depends on the actors. He suggests that the Ministry of Culture treats the cultural sphere as an industry, as a collection of units which are under its domain of control. Culture here is viewed as a production process. Thus, the ministry controls who is a part of the process, who is left out, who is financed, what is the expected product etc. According to Gelman the State Duma, is a more powerful entity treating artists as hooligans, who should be repressed and restricted in action through various legislative and administrative mechanisms. In their turn, the

cultural politics of the Orthodox Church have to do with canonization of the past, or in other words, anything that is old is good (even unpleasant periods and figures of history) and all that is new is rejected, discredited. Finally, when it comes to the Presidential Administration, it views art as opposition, thus chooses mechanisms similar to those used to fight the opposition (Gelman, 2018).

The authorities increasingly started to limit opportunities for alternative opinion-making. Organization of protests without government approval or calls for participation in them became illegal in 2012. A law against defamation was introduced (again in 2012) and affected the activities of journalists in criticizing civil servants. A law was introduced in 2013 to protect minors from information that promotes non-traditional family values and sexual relations, which essentially means that no information about LGBT-related topics can be provided to children via any channel (including for educational purposes). Yet another Federal law enacted in 2012 required non-commercial non-governmental organizations receiving financial support from abroad to register as foreign agents. In 2013, triggered by the famous Pussy Riot affair, the Federal council approved a law, making citizens liable for public actions that show disrespect to the feelings of religious believers. The entirety of these policies created a certain vague border of what can be said and done which should be considered by actors of the cultural sphere.

Lev Gudkov convincingly proposes that these limitations are all aimed at controlling the way people interpret the reality, the past, the political situation and the prospective future. The regime attempts to consolidate the most important collective values through transferring people into the 'emergency state' where war, mobilisation and deep crisis are more important than the life as usual (Tsvetkova, 2016). Thus, the *police* order functions through limiting 'the gaze' and the possibility of interpretation, resulting in a more or less uniform society. Those who show any attempt of deconstructing or looking beyond the accepted interpretations are moved downward in the social hierarchy.

Between 2014 and 2018, the official cultural policy largely stayed the same and there have not been major shifts despite the dynamic political developments, tense foreign policy, and further advancement of the regime towards authoritarian conservatism. In 2018 the scene

was activated again with Putin's re-election Putin and the outburst of politically engaged art especially in music. In 2018 alone over 40 concerts were cancelled with the involvement of the authorities including concerts of IC3PEAK, Husky, Noize MC, LJ, Friendzona etc. The reasons were different: in some cases, there were accusations of hooliganism, propaganda of drugs and suicide (Meduza, 2018).

In December 2018 Dmitry Kiselyov, known as one of the key state propagandists spent around 15 minutes in his news program speaking about Russian rap and the arrest of Husky. He then took the viewer to a journey through Russian rap scene showing the contrast between the patriotic rap and the rap about sex and drugs. Through this he differentiates between the American imported rap, which was born in Black America and got to Russia in the 90s and that which is the authentic Russian rap-poetic tradition going back to Vladimir Mayakovsky. Kiselyov then rapped a poem by Mayakovsky. The main point he was making was that rap is by nature an alternative genre and is often based on teenage protest which will be hard to 'organize in a flock' (Meduza, 2018).

For Putin it was a special priority to 'take charge of' rap and other modern forms of art since they are based on sex, drugs and protest (his worry being the drugs). He said that this type of art leads to nation's degradation and if it is impossible to stop it, 'it should be taken over and navigated in a particular way' (BBC, 2018).

In 2019 Kiselyov made yet another rap appearance on Rossiya-1 this time rapping about politics and providing a news brief of 2018 in an unusual form. He then announced that in 2019 he will be organizing a rap festival in Crimea (Vesti News, 2019). Attempts to create patriotic rap still continue. In 2021 Federal Treasury announced that it is planning to hold a rap festival of patriotic music aiming to "strengthen spiritual and moral values and improve the patriotic education of youth". The information available now claims that there will be songs devoted to the Great Patriotic War (Obnosov & Mineeva, 2021).

In the 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a government reshuffle took place and Olga Lyubimova was appointed as a Minister of Culture. Her appointment was met with a huge wave of criticism mainly because of her decade-old LiveJournal blog, where she expresses

her hate towards classical music, museums etc.; and a photograph with a T-shirt featuring a curse word. Despite her history, her working methods seem to include less political and ideological interference (as opposed to her predecessor Medinskii) and are mainly focused on mitigation of the COVID-19 effects on the cultural sector, management and delegation of resources. Lyubimova treats the ministry as a ‘legal entity’ where there is no censorship - only laws, no creative engagement – just correct distribution of funds. In one of her interviews, she mentions that the biggest threat to the Russian cultural heritage would be if people forget that it has to be protected according to the Constitution (Tvardovskaya & Mikhailov, 2020). This brief remark shows that not much has changed from the Medinskii times and that culture is again securitized, causing a certain anxiety about something great that ‘we’ used to have but are losing. Exactly this approach allows for discreditation of contemporary art and strive to work with history, folk art and any content that is ‘controllable’.

The political situation intensified in the first half of 2020 with the vote initiated by the government to amend the Russian constitution giving Vladimir Putin the right to run for another two presidential terms. Despite the COVID-19 restrictions and the law banning unauthorized demonstrations, the amendments led to street protests. Just by the time the public sentiments were about to calm down (although Khabarovsk protests had been held since summer supporting the arrested governor), the scandalous poisoning of opposition figure Aleksei Navalny started a political process, the conclusion of which will probably determine the direction that Russia is going to take. Upon his return from Germany where he had been receiving treatment, Navalny was captured at the airport in Moscow and later sentenced to 2.5 years of imprisonment. Meanwhile, the film ‘Putin’s Palace’ (an investigation documentary by Navalny and his team) was released and in just a few days went viral. These events unleashed a significant protest movement which on the first day was held in 198 locations and was one of the largest demonstrations since 2011-2013 protests. Although large in scale at the beginning, the government managed to contain the protests and used methods of force to deescalate the movement.

The new round of ‘tightening the screws’ which was more intense in the past five years resulted in increased government surveillance over individuals and organizations. According to Mark Galeotti, the regime’s anxiety about losing credibility and popularity is demonstrated in form of pressure and spreading fear. If in 2012 it was largely accepted that Russia’s political regime is a form of post-modern hybrid authoritarianism based on control of narrative, now it has moved to a ‘post-post-modern authoritarianism’ which is the same as the old-fashioned authoritarianism relying on fear (Galeotti, 2021). The events in Belarus and the recent events in Moscow triggered the Russian government to slide back into the system which functions on means of force. If prior to 2021 critical media channels like Meduza were more or less effectively functioning without heavy state intervention, this year they have been designated as a “foreign agent” losing most of their advertisements and appearing on the edge of closing down. Added to that, Navalny’s Anti-Corruption Foundation was designated as an extremist organization. For the past decades the limited functioning of civil society, non-governmental organization etc. were possible with carefully controlled doses of repression. However, the past five years and 2020-2021 in particular have been filled with attacks and new laws introduced to shrink the public space for critical expression even further. Even lawyers, who are supposed to protect the rights of the citizens, fell victim to this attack themselves.

The authorities are increasingly involved in the online space banning online cursing, online propaganda of drugs and reporting certain YouTube content, following people’s activities and calling to responsibility for social media posts. It seems that the authorities are trying to figure out ways in which YouTube content can be controlled. YouTubers are already quite self-aware and some of them even have lawyers who review their blogs prior to publishing (Petya Loves to Drink, 2020). However, the new law on limiting enlightenment activities without government approval might affect the scene. It is vaguely termed and allows for interpretations, which means it can be applied selectively if needed. Another new law passed by the State Duma made it felony to ‘insult WWII veterans’.

Many analysts claim that this new wave of harsh control is a preparation for the State Duma elections and is aimed at overseeing the election process and its outcome (Radio Free

Europe/Radio Liberty, 2021). Whether that is the case is yet to be seen but the result stays the same: critical expressions of opinion including those in the cultural sphere are closely scrutinized.

### *State promoted regime or art*

While looking at the cultural hegemonic discourse through the lens of regimes of art, we can say that it is a certain combination of the ethical and representative regimes.

In the ethical regime of art, aesthetic practices are acceptable so long as they preserve integrity of the community and do not introduce ‘harmful’ ideas which contain the risk of becoming habitual for the society. The instrumental approach to culture by the Russian authorities and its role of formulating “harmoniously developed personalities” is very much in line with the ethical regime of art (Serdechnova, 2020). The state views culture as a tool of constructing and preserving the Russian national identity. Additionally, it is an important component for educating the population and cultivating certain moral values and patriotism. On the other hand, the state accepts alternative aesthetic expressions inasmuch as they preserve the given order of things and allow for a catharsis of harmful emotions. For example, when the rapper Husky was arrested, a group of popular Russian artists organized a solidarity concert in Moscow and stood against the censorship of art. The government, although capable of, did not restrict this event. It is consistent with the logic of catharsis: instead of restricting the event and causing even more enragement, people were allowed to gather and ‘let out’ the nonconformist sentiments, which might be helpful in prevention of future outburst of a protest. Similarly, artists, whose works are publicly perceived as political and oppositional are often invited to perform on national TV thus decreasing and co-opting the excitement of the public about the oppositional nature of these artists’ works.

In other words, the rule is to get involved when the debate over some artist is already heated to control the escalation of the events. An alternative technique is the use of ‘proxies’ for oppressing the artists. The most popular case is that of *the Cossacks*, who threaten and sometimes physically harm dissident artists like it happened to Pussy Riot and Marat Gelman. Often the oppression takes place through institutions which have a certain

level authority of firing people, depriving them of certain opportunities or simply being sued. Fear of social exclusion and physical threat serve as strong mechanisms for censorship (Erofeev, 2018).

Additionally, the authorities do not ban certain types of genres and methods of expression, but they impose a hierarchy where the less preferred genres are marginalized and pushed to the very bottom of the hierarchy. The 'battle' against contemporary art is a case on point. While rap, graffiti, installations, performances, punk rock and other forms are also supported by the government, their content defines their position in the hierarchy. The government even supports artists (mainly unknown to the wider public) who borrow the techniques of contemporary protest art such as those of Avdei Ter-Oganyan, Artyom Loskutov and even Pussy Riot. All forms of art are acceptable for the promotion of patriotism. However, once they tackle topics that have potential of disrupting the order (the so-called 'Russophobic art'), they are discredited. This appropriation of avant-garde techniques is probably a strategy coming from Vladislav Surkov who used to show interest in contemporary art and culture. He served as the First Deputy Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration from 1999 to 2011 and was seen as the main ideologist of Kremlin (Erofeev, 2018).

Contemporary art was and is filled with counter discourses; thus, it was marginalized and its official funding was compromised. The same happened to the emerging experimental theatre with the case of Kirill Serebrennikov, who was quite successful at creating critical content while also receiving official funding. He paid the price by being accused of embezzlement and later resigning from his position at Gogol Theatre. Thus, another takeaway: official funding is a leverage over the control of artistic content. This model is quite functional for arts that take place in traditional art institutions, but have limited effectiveness on virtual art and art that takes the streets.

The official culture is becoming more and more homogenous and usually is not very engaging (Andrey, 2017). The underground culture, on the other hand, is still vibrant, but is becoming increasingly unsafe (Erofeev, 2018, p. 136). The cultural sphere now can be described as stably constrained, where artists are extremely fragile, but still managing to

find gaps for expression of their opinions especially with the opportunities that social media and private funds (increasingly less) provide. To sum up, the state promotes the representative regime of art, where all forms and contents are seemingly embraced, however art is not viewed as an end in itself and the content which is created with purposes other than entertainment or propaganda is viewed suspiciously.

#### **4.2. Dissensus in Post-2012 Russian Art**

Through looking at the artworks and interviews of contemporary Russian artists, it is clear that politics have become inseparable from their daily life, feelings and mental condition. There is a high level of internalisation of the political problems. For example, Noize MC, in his song *In the dark* sings about his depression, but the whole storyline is filled with political problems which affect him, thus he sings “I sit in the dark and it's no worse in the room than the darkness outside”. Likewise, Nikolay Komyagin from Shortparis in an interview with BBC mentions that political developments indirectly affect them and they ‘clothe’ their ‘emotions into forms that surround themselves’ (Shortparis, 2019). Political scene is perceived as a caveat for personal development. In a song called *DNA FACE* sings:

I want to become something more than now

The state does not even give us a chance.<sup>1</sup>

And later in his interview mentions that people who do not think that politics concerns them are some madmen (Chumakov, 2018). This perception of the current day Russia by the artists serves as yet another reason for looking more deeply into their audio-visual and verbal texts.

Below I present the identity categories which were derived from approximately 900 themes coded during the first round of the analysis of 64 texts (see Appendix 1). It is important to mention that the analysis did not attempt to look at the sample as a single community,

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<sup>1</sup> “Я хочу стать чем-то больше, чем сейчас // Государство не даёт нам даже шанс.”

neither analyse the identity of that community. The artists in this sample chose different ways of expressions and used the help of lyrical heroes, metaphors and other rhetorical and artistic tricks. Therefore, they positioned themselves differently taking the role of the government, a simple citizen or an artist speaking for the masses. However, as a general trend, artists mapped themselves as separate from the masses and considered themselves a member of a small but powerful, honest and strong group, which is capable of resistance or endurance. In this regard, there was a certain level of self-exclusion and self-marginalization among the art community. On the one hand, this was demonstrated through pathos and entailed a certain type of messianism, where the artist identifies as a member of a group which is visionary, brave and ready to sacrifice himself/herself for the good of the oppressed. On the other hand, this small community was framed as the true Russian: a simple person (in many cases peripheral) who is tired, tortured but sincere and resilient. The categories presented below concern larger identity discourses as imagined and articulated by the artists rather than being limited to the above-mentioned community. Also note, that the categories are not rank-ordered in terms of importance, since the aim of the analysis was not to get a comprehensive discourse as in the MIC project, but rather to look into the ways in which Russia and Russianness are perceived and presented by the dissident artists. A final point to consider is that the analysis below is comprised of the vocabulary and the political imageries proposed by the analysed works, they should not be read as my personal or political opinions.

#### **4.1.1 The Self**

This identity category summarises the most prevalent themes that were used to describe Russianness in the selected sample of artworks. According to the analysis being Russian entails being economically and socially insecure, inured, restrained, indifferent, poorly educated, in an identity crisis while remaining resilient and hopeful. Each one is discussed below.

*Economically and socially insecure:* It is no surprise that the artworks focus excessively on poverty and inequalities. In 2019 a study by Carnegie Moscow and Levada Center revealed that the top three concerns of Russians are rising prices (59%), poverty (42%) and

corruption (41%) (RBC, 2019). Social situations such as taking the fourth credit, robbing stores, being tortured by creditors were combined with lyrics such as “Collecting the crumbs, washing it down with expired Pulpy”<sup>2</sup> (FACE, *Humorist*) or (Small barracks bristle somehow”<sup>3</sup> (Husky, *Poem About the Motherland*). Topics resulting from poverty and social insecurity were tackled with the leading topic being alcohol and drug addiction as well as gambling.

The family problems and especially the so-called fatherlessness was another sharp topic. In *Russian Woman* Manizha sings:

A son without a father  
A daughter without a father  
But Broken Family  
Can't break me.<sup>4</sup>

The issue of having toxic or incomplete families was connected to the general theme of war and imprisonment (usually mentioned together in texts), which leaves children with hero fathers, who passed away or disappeared.

To a lesser extent the topic of poor social institutions was tackled mostly by performance artists with the focus on mental health institutions, prisons and orphanages, which employ harsh punishment and control mechanisms reaching to the level of torture. The artists focused on how these institutions are used as a way of isolating certain members of the society. Katrin Nenasheva’s most performances (Figure 1) and Piotr Pavlensky’s *Separation* were devoted to this issue.

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<sup>2</sup> “Собираем крошки, запивая просроченным Pulpy”

<sup>3</sup> “Бараки-недоростки топорщатся кое-как”

<sup>4</sup> “Сын без отца // Дочь без отца //Но сломанной Family // Не сломать меня.”



Figure 1: Katrin Nenasheva, *Cargo 300*  
Source: Ekaterina Nenasheva's FaceBook Page

*Inured*: The feeling of hopelessness and apathy was overwhelming in most of the artworks of this sample. People are described to be in a helpless condition, a survival mode where even looking for an exit is considered pointless since the situation will last forever. The sampled artworks were flooded with nihilistic expressions both in music and performance art. Russia in this context became a ‘broken ark’ (*Monetochka, Russian Ark*), ‘Bottomless Abyss’<sup>5</sup> (*Monstration, 2012*) full of references to death, burial and void. The feeling that accompanies is not the natural sadness, but some kind of coldness and normality, thus the name of the category: *inured*. “Death is no more”<sup>6</sup> (song bearing the same name) and “It hurt – it will hurt again”<sup>7</sup> (*Fairy Tale*) sings IC3PEAK. Shortparis raises a similar point: “Beaten? Already beaten three times. It will get to a hundred”<sup>8</sup> (*Shame*).

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<sup>5</sup> “Бездна без дна”

<sup>6</sup> “Смерти больше нет”

<sup>7</sup> “Было больно — снова будет”

<sup>8</sup> “Бит? Уже трижды бит [...] Дойдёт до ста”

Many artworks contained a self-destructive component, where the apathy is so strong that only self-destruction can help to end the current situation:

A bullet for the satrap, another for the lackey

A bullet for you, a bullet for me.<sup>9</sup>

(Husky, *Endless Magazine*).

*In an identity crisis:* The above-mentioned feeling of apathy is coupled with an identity crisis and alienation from one's own country, people and culture with no sense of direction.

Our journey has been so long we no longer remember where we are from, where we are going,

Which dock we started from, and what prize awaits us in the end.<sup>10</sup>

Monetochka, *Russian Ark*

The protagonists of the texts are in search of their home and roots, while existing in a system which destroys any possibility of enlightenment and self-reflection (Figure 2). Shortparis describes this feeling as shame and continues:

There's no limit in nudity anymore,

The emptiness pressures over and over in the head.<sup>11</sup>

(*Shame*).

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<sup>9</sup> “Одна пуля для сатрапа, и одна для холоуя // Одна пуля для тебя, и одна пуля для меня.”

<sup>10</sup> “Мы плывем так давно, что забыли откуда мы, куда мы, // Из какой вышли пристани и какой приз в конце.”

<sup>11</sup> “Больше нет предела в наготe // Давит, то и дело, в голове // Пусто так.”



Figure 2: Screenshot from IC3PEAK, *March* where children turned into soldiers shoot at symbols of art, love, belief etc.

The texts tackle the problem of tasteless mass culture and the commodification of culture in general, thus speaking with irony about art functioning according to a business model (such as Stas Mikhailov, mentioned by Monetochka).

Monetochka's *Burn, burn, burn* was the most explicit text tackling the issue:

Funny... In a country of multiculturalism, culture ended<sup>12</sup>

[...]

In the country of Yesenin's poems, art ended.<sup>13</sup>

*Restrained:* This identity category is quite broad however the key topic which was overwhelmingly present in the sample was the question of freedom, or rather its absence. According to the artists, civil rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of protest, freedom of religious belief, freedom of choice or free and fair elections are all violated causing a feeling of being constantly abused and humiliated by the state.

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<sup>12</sup> “Смешно... в стране мультикультур // Закончилась культура.”

<sup>13</sup> “В стране есенинских стихов // Закончилось искусство.”

People feel interrogated by the state. It is overwhelmingly involved in the life of the citizens and controls not only the physical space but also the online platforms. This leads to another key topic which makes Russians feel deprived: censorship and what is even more, self-censorship resulting from the atmosphere of fear. This concerns not only individual members of the society but representatives of media, art community, bloggers, public figures etc.

People feel deprived of their voice since the state demonstrated in practice that too much talking (sometimes even a little) can lead to a ‘fabricated’ criminal case or a new law which will tighten the screws just a bit more. These restrictions often take a physical form of beating and torture.

In such an atmosphere people are traumatized and exposed to negative information on daily basis triggering anxiety.

The dog whines quietly

And its back dreams about the stick.<sup>14</sup>

Shortparis, *Moscow Speaking*

*Indifferent:* The sample of artworks contained many pieces highlighting how indifferent the society is. Its members are concerned with their online life, satisfaction of consumerist needs and pursuing luxury. People are caught in self-deception and often think that problems will not come to their door thus not taking action for anything that does not concern their personal and family life and does not bring any direct benefit. As an illustration, in their song *Sexist Pussy Riot* describe a scene of harassment to show the rooted indifference: “The skin is falling off, right at the passers-by, they pass by”<sup>15</sup>.

*Poorly educated:* A problem that is ironically mentioned and ridiculed is people’s archaic thinking and the naiveness to believe in conspiracies.

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<sup>14</sup> “Тихо скулит собака // И снится палка // Её спине.”

<sup>15</sup> “Сыпется кожа, прям на прохожих, они проходят мимо”

GMO, UFO sent from Satan with greetings.<sup>16</sup>

Monetochka, *Russian Ark*

People have a distorted mentality, where patriotism is reduced to xenophobia, or loving one's country to abstaining from any resistance or demand for opportunities. People take the time to impose their shallow ideas on others, while being reluctant in taking action to make their surroundings better (Figure 3). This mentality leads to confusing stability and stagnation, while any perspective of change is perceived negatively, any unknown phenomenon – discredited. Polarization is a by-product of this and even the political actors carry this mentality, where 'leftists mumble and the right crave blood' (Noize MC ft. Monetochka, *People with guns*) while the real urgent social and political problems are ignored.



Figure 3: Screenshot from *Monetochka, Nymphomaniac*. The shirt reads 'After all OXXXY is ours' referring to the famous 'Crimea is ours' which was often chanted by people who were unaffected by war but wanted to showcase their patriotism.

*Resilient:* Russians are seen as nonconformists, rebels who do not break even under the highest pressure. Art censorship being the main concern of artists, they show resistance to being silenced.

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<sup>16</sup> “ГМО, НЛО присылает от сатаны с приветом.”

I will sing my music,  
The most honest music  
Music of broken eyes.<sup>17</sup>

Husky, Ay

Some people are willing to speak up even if they are under the threat of being killed or being subjected to ‘fabricated’ criminal cases (because of drugs for example). Although enraged and broken, they still decide to fight.

With Russian longing  
Standing as a wall.<sup>18</sup>

Shortparis, *Life for the Tsar*

In this context conformism and moreover collaboration with the state (especially by artists) is evaluated negatively. The “While they feed – eat, while they water - drink”<sup>19</sup> logic is viewed as destructive for Russia’s future (Noize MC, *Everything as Usual*).

Resistance though should not be confused with Russophobia. On the contrary, Russophobes<sup>20</sup> are highly criticized in some songs, while loving the motherland, appreciating and embracing it even in the distant regions are highlighted as nobility.

*Hopeful:* There is an interesting phenomenon which repeats itself though pieces. Despite being very negative and depressing at times, they still contain mentions of hope. People believe that an unknown force will unexpectedly make people act and bring change while

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<sup>17</sup> “Я буду петь свою музыку // Самую честную музыку // Музыка сломанных глаз.”

<sup>18</sup> “Русской тоской // Стоять стеной.”

<sup>19</sup> “Пока кормят — ешь, пока поят — пей”

<sup>20</sup> “Быть против власти — не значит быть против родины // Я люблю Россию за запах чёрной смородины // Не дам русофобам нажиться на моих взглядах // Я в золотистых полях и колосьях, ляг со мной рядом” (FACE, Labyrinth)

somehow managing to remain sceptical. Thus, there is no need to bury Russia ahead of time, or if you try, it will still survive. These controversial sentiments are well expressed in the following two pieces.

In a white shirt

In a single stroke "With an unsteady step

towards the long spring.<sup>21</sup>

Shortparis, *Moscow Speaking*

Your frozen bones are somewhere at the bottom

Flowers will sprout in this mourned land.<sup>22</sup>

IC3PEAK, *Plak-plak*

#### 4.1.2 Internal Others

This section describes the perceived internal others or those in the Russian society which are not a part of the whole and maybe even are against it. The key internal others according to the analysis are the government, the system according to which the country functions and the so-called ‘opposition’.

*The Government:* Although the coding mentions government as an internal other for keeping the logic of coding coherent, the analysed artworks gave the impression that the government is almost considered external, something that has no commonality or interest with the ordinary people. According to many artists, it is a predatory repressive mechanism made to oppress, punish, and feed people with lies. Moreover, it is viewed as the enemy against whom citizens should protect themselves: “I am the enemy of the state, my language is the truth”<sup>23</sup> (FACE, *Our Mentality*). The government is an entity which serves the interests of certain groups and all institutions serve that group. This group works both

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<sup>21</sup> “В белой рубахе // В едином взмахе "Нетвёрдом шаге // К долгой весне.”

<sup>22</sup> “Твои кости ледяные где-то там на дне // Прорастут цветы в этой оплаканной земле.”

<sup>23</sup> “Я враг государства, мой язык — это правда”

with formal and informal mechanisms, abusing their positions, authority and closely cooperates with criminals, businesses and the church. They easily fabricate criminal cases against the citizens, torture them if needed and introduce laws which are meant for close surveillance:

Wherever you spit, wherever you look

It's state all over.<sup>24</sup>

(Monetochka, *Burn, burn, burn*).

The state controls the media, spreading unrealistic perceptions about Russia through federal channels and on the other hand, limits the activities of independent media who dare to publish anything critical. The control spreads to the individuals, who are blamed of extremism and attempts of terrorism thus cleared from the public space: “Mama, they say I'm a terrorist, what? I did nothing wrong, but I got on a blacklist” (IC3PEAK, *TRRST*).

The artworks depict president Putin at top of the hierarchy, who is either mentioned explicitly or referred to as the tsar or the tyrant. He is not only a representation of the problematic unchanging government but also a symbol of the flawed mentality which is based around a cult of personality. Monetochka addresses him: ‘Please age slowly, tsar, and keep the power strong’. The last part of the sentence can also be translated as ‘hold the power tightly’.

The next circle of enemies includes the so-called *siloviki* (law enforcement institutions) represented by the police, OMON and security services, (the protagonist being the FSB as the predecessor of the KGB). The perception is connected to the violent crackdowns during the protests, torture in police stations and prisons. The FSB’s reputation is connected not only with its current functioning, but also the baggage of history connected with KGB. Putin being a representative of the ‘KGB community and mentality’, the institution’s negative perceptions are increased even more. In one of his most famous performances

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<sup>24</sup> “Куда ни плюнь, куда ни глянь // Сплошное государство.”

Piotr Pavlensky decided to go and burn the entrance door of the FSB headquarters (Figure 4). He ended up visualising it as the entrance to hell.



Figure 4: Piotr Pavlensky, *Threat*

Source: *The Economist, Body Politics*, <https://www.economist.com/1843/2016/05/03/body-politics>

The judicial system and the deputies are no less disliked by the artists than the representatives of the other institutions. They as well do not serve the interests of the citizens with their incompetence and rent-seeking leaving people absolutely unprotected.

One bullet for the fleshy face of the riot police

One bullet to his twin brother

One bullet for the minister, just above the collar.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Одна пуля для мясистого лица омоновца // Одна пуля в его брата-близнеца // Одна пуля для министра, выше чуть воротника.”

These institutions as a whole work for the redistribution of profits they get through extraction of natural resources (oil and gas which are often mentioned in songs). Corruption and greed thus become the main columns of governance.

*The church:* Songs express rage over the fact that Orthodoxy is pushed on people artificially while even the religious authorities do not act upon the Christian values. The Church serves the system more than it serves the spiritual needs of the population.

Patriarch Gundyaev believes in Putin  
B\*tch, you better believed in God.<sup>26</sup>

Pussy Riot, *Punk Prayer*

In the mind map of the identity church can be placed inside of or intersecting with the government.

*The system (order of things):* Not only people have a problem with the government as such but also the logic through which, the country as a whole, functions, the way it is governed and the way people interact with each other and the world. The system is described in ways which can easily be summed up with the word authoritarian or totalitarian. That is to say, excessive militarism and violence as a regulatory mechanism of social interactions, ‘those who have power define the truth’ logic, propaganda and exaggerated patriotism reaching to the levels of war propaganda and patriarchy.

People feel like their life is overwhelmed with war rhetoric and not only rhetoric. Young man, or the ‘guys, half the price’<sup>27</sup> (Shortparis, *Moscow Speaking*) who just graduate from school go to military service and sometimes perish in conflict zones (Figure 5). Thus, the system replaces education (represented by books) with military weapons and at the same

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<sup>26</sup> “Патриарх Гундяй верит в Путина // Лучше бы в Бога, сука, верил.”

<sup>27</sup> Пацаны В полцены

time uses education to reproduce the logic of violence and patriarchal order (for example through history classes, or classes on the Orthodox church).



Figure 5: Left: *Shortparis, Moscow Speaking*. A scene of dropping a body of a dead soldier and desecrating his memorial wall. Symbol of betrayal and humiliation by the system  
Right: Michelangelo, *Pietà (Pity)*  
Source: Wikipedia

The people who act against the logic of the system are quickly excluded if not by the government, then by the society. The imposed uniformity and consensus results in self-exclusion “It’s as if I’m a stranger in my own family”<sup>28</sup> (IC3PEAK, *March*), oppression of individuality and an urge to stay invisible and unnoticed through remaining silent. Consequently, the problem is that there is no much choice: you either become the victim or the perpetrator.

Your face is exactly the same,  
And this building is in every city.<sup>29</sup>

IC3PEAK, *March*

Another important component of the system as mentioned is patriarchal order where violence against women is justified, social pressure is put on women, LGBT community to behave and look in certain ways and how they are burdened with conventional gender roles.

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<sup>28</sup> “Я будто чужая в своей родной семье”

<sup>29</sup> “Твоё лицо совершенно такое же // А это здание есть в каждом городе.”

The artworks touch upon even the micro levels of the functioning of patriarchy such as cheating husbands, victim blaming, toxic families, child abuse etc.

Ideology and propaganda are another strong component of the current system and ensure its continuity. The logic is clearly illustrated in Shortparis' *So the Steel Was Tempered*:

So they build for centuries

So the table is set

So you look at the enemy

Doctor giving an injection

[...]

(So the hand is smeared

So the mouth is shut

So women get hit in the stomach

So the steel was tempered.<sup>30</sup>

The system is presented as a chain or a circle of violence passing from one generation to another, where children become violent just as their parents (Figure 6). These children increasingly become a threat to the system with their excessive level of aggression. Thus, it is self-destructive ('Structure is dumb, the skin took itself off' (Shortparis, *Structures Don't Take the Streets*)) and doomed to collapse: "Today I'm the third world, today I'm suicide"<sup>31</sup> (Pussy Riot, Rage).

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<sup>30</sup> "Так строят на века // Так накрывают стол // Так смотрит на врага // Врач, делая укол [...] // Так мажется рука // Так закрывают рот // Так строят на века // Так женщин бьют в живот // Так закалялась сталь."

<sup>31</sup> "Я сегодня третий мир, я сегодня суицид"

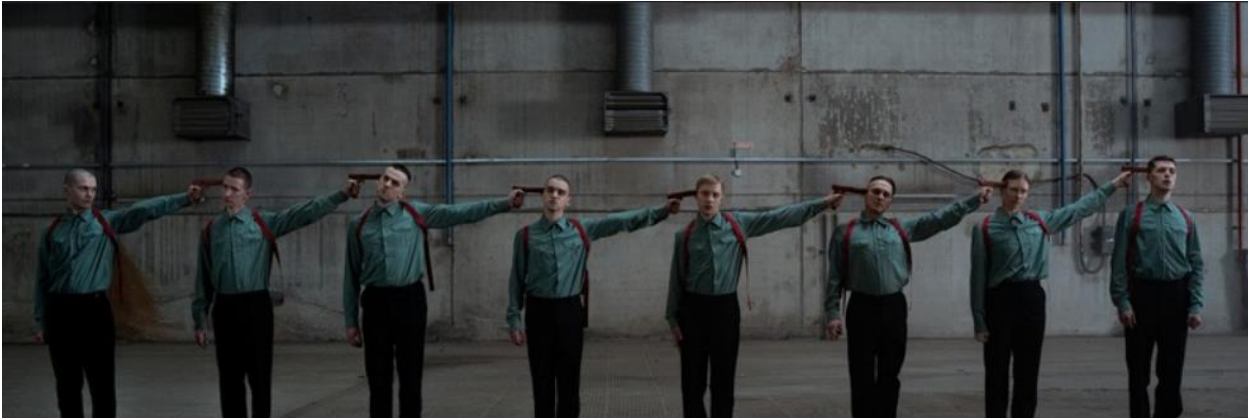


Figure 6: Source: VK page of Shortparis

*The 'opposition'*: The discourse on the flawed nature of opposition or resistance movements in Russia is clearly reflected in the sample. Their mostly verbal interventions and essential inaction end up being harmful resulting in more restrictions and general tensions created in the society. What is more, these rhetorical engagements are deprived of serious content – ‘Counterattack, A drunk fight’ go the lyrics of Shortparis’ *Moscow Speaking*.

Secondly, their blame game or the cockfight with the government ignores the deeply rooted social problems which in many cases have to do with mentality and the social fabric of Russia. And finally, the demands of these oppositional groups are not clearly or efficiently articulated, which again do no help to the transformation of the system, and on the contrary – prove it functional.

The ice<sup>32</sup> under the feet of the major will break easier than the crust of falafel<sup>33</sup>

Noize MC, *Everything as Usual*

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<sup>32</sup> Refers to the famous song by Grazhdanskaya Oborona, where major walks and trips on ice. Ice symbolizes the people

<sup>33</sup> “Лёд под ногами майора ломается легче, чем корка фалафеля.”

Reading between the lines of *Only got worse*<sup>34</sup> Shortparis, we will notice how the song describes the full storyline of the above-mentioned: the silent start to speak inspired by the conventions of ‘the North’<sup>35</sup> without reflecting on what the real problems of their own society are (“Not knowing what the mother was crying about”<sup>36</sup>). As a result, speaking ends up being destructive and drives them into the ‘dog’s mouth’ making the situation worse than it was.

### 4.1.3 Prospective Other

This section describes the potential future of the Russian identity, which in this case is the possible empire, portrayed negatively in the selected artworks.

*An empire?* The analysis showed that Russia’s great power identity is questioned within the society. This was manifested in a very nuanced way, making use of the official vocabulary such as *otchizna* (homeland) and *derzhava* (power). Here, as well, irony served as a key tool to express the discontent with Russia’s arrogant, aggressive and colonizing behaviour, while having a vast number of problems within the country.

We saw all Petersburg streets as from slops and faceless mud

The mud is smoothly drawing in Cyrillic the word great.<sup>37</sup>

Monetochka, *Russian Ark*

You would jump into bed, but the scythe gets in the way

You are power, but you only imagine it.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For lyrics see <https://genius.com/Shortparis-got-even-worse-lyrics>

<sup>35</sup> “Север смотрит на нас, север ставит печать”

<sup>36</sup> “Сам не зная, о чем так плакала мать”

<sup>37</sup> “Видели все Петербургские улицы как из помоев и грязи безликой // Грязью кириллицей плавно рисуется слово великое.”

<sup>38</sup> “Ты бы прыгнула в постель, но коса мешает // Ты держава, но ты это лишь воображаешь.”

The issue was viewed in the context of the Ukraine crisis with criticism toward the government for the annexation of Crimea.

On the other hand, there were views that did not criticize the government's actions regarding Crimea but blamed it in the inability to contain the brotherhood of nations.

The brotherhood grave - now a common wife

One bullet for a khach, and one bullet for a Jew, one bullet for a Ukrainian

The rest I would leave to Russians.<sup>39</sup>

Husky, *Endless Magazine*

The irony was directed not only towards the government but also towards members of the society who are rejecting any other opinion about Russia other than its greatness.

Despite the context of Ukraine, the nature of interethnic interactions within Russia is brought forth. Cultural synthesis is pushed to the foreground as something aspirational. Migrants from Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and the ethnic minorities including the Muslim population are viewed as an integral part of the Russian society and important participants in shaping of the Russian multiculturalism. Thus, xenophobia is condemned, and stereotypical thinking is rejected. A case on point is Shortparis' piece *Scary* where various visual triggers are used to reveal the traumas (school, migrants, Beslan, Kerch, Arabic letters, shaved heads etc.) and the fear of 'symbols' present in the Russian society. The bottom line is that the future of Russia is carried on the shoulders of all citizens and is not limited to one or the other group.

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<sup>39</sup> “Братская могила — теперь общая жена // Одна пуля для хача, и одна пуля для жида, одна пуля для хохла // Остальное я б оставил на русню.”



Figure 7: Screenshot from *Shortparis, Scary*

#### 4.1.4 Historical Others

Historical others are the key moments of the country's past with which it identifies with. The selected sample of artworks depict the Soviet Union and the 1990s as the key historical others of the Russian identity.

*USSR*: The Soviet past, the memory politics and heritage around it were a major part of the analysed texts. These memories were mainly negative and included fragments such as the Russian revolution, Lenin and the Mausoleum, Stalin and the GULAGs, the totalitarian system.

Positive mentions were also present with a slight note of nostalgia for the good relations among the nations and the functional industry.



Figure 8: Screenshot from *Shortparis, Moscow Speaking*

We look like peers in the dining car  
Unintentional companions at adjacent tables  
Remember you died and we ate your meat  
That smelled like a mummy forgotten in the Mausoleum.<sup>40</sup>

Husky, *Poem About the Motherland*

*The 90s:* These years as articulated by the artists are the root of criminal activities and basis for today's system. Nevertheless, there are a lot of misconceptions about these years which are passed down to the new generation, who has not lived in the nineties. The young generation is always warned against sliding back to similar conditions presented as absolute dark and chaotic years. The artists are ridiculing this 'propaganda'. In her ironic song *Monetochka* sings about how in the '90s' people were killed, everyone was running naked, only the smartest survived, there was no electricity anywhere and people were fighting over

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<sup>40</sup> “Мы выглядим, как ровесники, в вагоне-ресторане // За соседними столами нечаянные сотрапезники // Помнишь, ты умерла, и мы твоё мясо ели // Что пахло как мумия, забытая в Мавзолее.”

Coca-Cola and jeans. She then happily sings: ‘How great that in our times nothing’s like that!’

Another comic interpretation is a poster in Monstration which reads “I remember the touch of Yeltsin’s coat”<sup>41</sup>.

#### 4.1.5 External Other

This section describes the external others as depicted in the selected sample of artworks. The external others are countries, regions and other external actors with or against which Russianness is identified. In this situation there are two key other the first being unidentified and the second being the West.

Referring to the second research question of this study, I now proceed to results of the analysis conducted to reveal where Russian identity is mapped in regards to the West. The analysis of the selected sample of artworks are combined with the analysis of interviews and publications of the artists to allow for a more reliable discourse analysis.

*Undefined enemy*: Maybe due to the reasons of artistic expression the artists sarcastically articulated the existence of some external evil enemy, which is watching Russia from the side and waiting for its failure. This enemy is a threat to Russian sovereignty and needs to be contained. As Noize MC reads in *All as Usual* “And so that strangers are afraid, beat yours harder”<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, having decorative tanks at the gates is a needed for demonstrating power (IC3PEAK, *March*). The protective mode brings isolation which is naturally served to the population in form of propaganda claiming that there is nothing behind the ‘barbed wire’, no horizon.

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<sup>41</sup> “помню на ошупь пальто Ельцина”

<sup>42</sup> А чтобы чужие боялись, своих посильнее бей



Figure 9: Shortparis, *So Steel Was Tempered*. Writing translates as: “Everything is permissible in relation to the enemy”

This category is presented with irony; hence, we should look at it as a reflection on another discourse thread – that of the consensus. In her poem about Putin, Monetochka writes sarcastically, that if someone will look down upon Russia, the bear will instantly straighten its back to endure those dark forces. After looking closer, the hints point to the USA and NATO in the role of that abstract enemy (mentions of Ukraine crisis, locating on ‘the other shore’ etc.). The USA and the allies in the context of Ukraine are the evil aggressors who wanted war but were confronted by the kind Russian army. The detailed analysis of the West as an external other of the Russian identity is presented in the next subchapter.

#### **4.3. The Most Significant External Other: The West**

The key Other for the selected dissident artists is the West, which most often is defined as the US. Monetochka’s 2020 album *Arts and Crafts* ends with a song called America. It is a lullaby, which raises a provocative question: ‘Maybe there is no America?’. The song echoes the famous *Goodbye America* by Nautilus Pompilius, which is a nostalgic song at the same time filled with disappointment. If during Soviet years America was perceived as a home of freedom and the American dream due to being deprived economically and individually, now it is seen as a place for prosperous life with respect for human rights and social/economic security since they are lacking in current day Russia). Firstly, Monetochka

seems to question the idealized image of the US, since it is a country with many problems and complexities. America is distant and invisible from this side of the ocean: people have not interacted with the American culture enough to have an understanding about it, but nevertheless, they claim to know exactly how the life in America is.

Secondly, this song seems to be a call for stopping the comparison and competition between Russia and America, because it is not a productive exercise. Democracy and lifestyle in America cannot be copied and pasted into the Russian reality, nor can Russian problems be solved through constructing dreams and images about America (be it negative or positive).

Thus, she tries to put to sleep the perceived American idea in the heads of Russians whose identity has been attached to it for many years: “Sleep well, my America, if you exist after all”. In parallel, we see her ironic representations of how Russians perceive America as prosperous and democratic but also filled with ‘perverted’ values such as atheism and feminism (which in Russia are largely perceived negatively). Summarising the song in a sentence, it is a story about the connection of the Russian identity to the (imaginary) America which leads to a constant state of anxiety and insecurity. As Nadezhda Tolokonnikova of Pussy Riot mentions in her letter to Slavoj Žižek “[...] comparing Russia with a hypothetical “West” will always yield more questions than answers [...]” (Tolokonnikova, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova of Pussy Riot's prison letters to Slavoj Žižek., 2012).

IC3PEAK describe their first concert in the US and mention that growing up in Russia is a defective feeling because of the realization that this is Russia and not the West or Hollywood. After travelling to America everything seems very familiar but at the same time ‘you understand that in reality everything is very complicated in that country - not as it seems from afar. And you realize that in fact everyone there, on the contrary, is moved by their identity and are very interested in their roots.’ (Tayozhnaya, 2019). This was a key moment of paradigm change for the band since they switched to composing in Russian.

In today’s Russia looking down to the West is an attitude promoted by the state and a common discourse among the people, who often confuse humiliation of the significant other as an expression of their patriotism. Moreover, the comparison is not based on hard figures or competitive advantages but rather on superficial arguments. The artists included in the sample of this research are mainly countering this discourse. To illustrate it, lines from the ‘rap news brief’ by Dmitriy Kiselyov (2019) and the song *Russian Ark* by Monetochka (2018) are presented (Table 1).

Table 1

Kiselyov	Monetochka <sup>43</sup>
<p>Europe with its lectures, [Russia] denounced by foreigners, But we calmly don't fall for provocations We put our gas pipelines on your sanctions.<sup>44</sup> [...] Oil rises in price, the Ruble finally gets stronger Teresa May is more often seen frowning Merkel smiles at the camera less and less Coincidence? I don't think so. <sup>45</sup></p>	<p>The chains are dragging us to the bottom, Right into the nets with octopuses, Right into the poachers' lair, but There's a lot of us, and not so many of them. Where is their Apple Feast Day? Where is their oil, where is their gas? They've got unisex, and we've got kvas, Iconostasis, Mikhailov Stas... [...] They say there's no final destination, we're doomed, and, somewhere On the shore, someone evil can't stop staring at us angrily,</p>

<sup>43</sup> For full lyrics see <https://genius.com/Monetochka-russian-ark-lyrics>

<sup>44</sup> “Европа с нотациями Осуждают иностранцы лишают импорта сгибая пальцы // Но мы Спокойно не поддавайтесь провокации // Кладём наш газопровод на Их санкции”

<sup>45</sup> “Нефть дорожает рубль наконец крепнет // Терезу Мей чаще видят хмурую // Всё реже на камеру улыбается Меркель // Совпадение не думаю”

	GMOs and UFOs are sent to us by Satan with cheers.
<p>Что все мы сделали для нас большая загадка</p> <p><b>С России борется хотят положить на лопатки</b></p> <p><b>(What is our fault we don't know. They fight with Russia They want to take it down)</b></p>	<p>Долой атеизма мутные мысли, Протестантов грязные пятки!</p> <p><b>Непотопляемую отчизну дьяволу не уложить на лопатки</b></p> <p>(Down with the troubled atheistic thoughts, With the protestants' dirty feet! The devil won't take down the unsinkable homeland!)</p>
<p>Everyone breaks off relations with Russia But this is just show-off No matter how much they burn, we will build bridges <sup>46</sup></p>	<p>All the people on the Petersburg's streets have seen how the word great In cursive Cyrillic is neatly formed out of shapeless garbage and dirt.</p>

The storyline and even the vocabulary coincide: ‘They are trying to drag us down, but we are powerful’. The only difference is that Monetochka’s text is ironic and questions exactly the narrative that is brought forth by Kiselyov. Noize MC also condemns the excessive anti-Western propaganda singing that the Russian media is full of content claiming that MI6, CIA and Mossad agents are everywhere and scare people with conspiracies of their evil plans <sup>47</sup> (*All as Usual*).

In his song ‘I am dropping the West’ the rapper FACE makes fun of the USA with a round of insults and offensive verbal and visual content. The main imageries included America as not a serious country, mainly due to the behaviour of its leaders. It was contrasted to Russia, which is much tougher. The visuals included the stereotypical images and symbols

<sup>46</sup> Все рвут отношения с Россией Но это просто понты // Сколько бы они не сжигали мы будем строить мосты

<sup>47</sup> “Пугают исчадием ада звёздно-полосато-носато-пейсатым”

of America: the flag, the Capitol, New York city with skyscrapers, which were attacked by planes and are set in fire; pop-culture characters like Captain America, Godzilla, King Kong and rappers. Russia than is presented by FACE himself, already a careless and somewhat mad character, a Russian middle-aged drunk man and a bear, who ends up beating up the symbolic representations of America. First of all, we should pay attention to how the West is focused around the US, and secondly, contemplate about what ‘dropping the West’ would mean in this context. It is attempting to overcome the insecurity through showing that the West is not a competitor or as a scale of comparison anymore, however ends up reproducing the rhetoric of superiority (ending up only intensifying the insecurity since even the negative comparison asserts that the West or the US is the key other for the Russian identity). However, the main character himself is a reproduction of the Western pop, perfectly illustrating how complex the Russian identity’s positioning in regards to the West is.

Russians are a part of the global consumer society, therefore many cultural specificities that originated in the West are also integrated into the Russian culture. The selected sample of artists are critical of this trend and reflect in their works how degrading these elements can be. An example of such elements is the overconsumption of virtual content which numbs the general awareness of people as members of a society and gives them the urge to strive for success and happiness as defined by the capitalist system. In *All as Usual* Noize MC, calls the people who are obsessed with the artificial happiness as cultural surrogates. Husky’s *Baby-Hollywood* music-video is a futuristic encounter into the Russian society overwhelmed with the consumer trash and de-individualization of persons. Moscow in this video is depicted as a Chinese-looking city and the main hero of the video is someone who wants to become popular just like Hollywood stars. By the end of the video this person realizes that this dream is empty and is not going to bring happiness. However, it is too late, since the system requires everyone to become genderless uniform creatures without regard to their wishes. It seems like the author was trying to illustrate that the problem of the Russian society cannot be viewed in isolation and the same processes that are taking place in the east and in the west – globally.

The artists are mostly not concerned with identification of themselves as European or non-European. They are experiencing themselves as Russians who are concerned with the attempts of the authorities and the society to impose these categories on them. They have the urge to be perceived as autonomous entities and be evaluated in terms of their art, not in terms of their belonging or exclusion from one group or another. They do not reject that their art genre for example has Western roots or that their art is inspired by Western philosophy, but as long as their art is not an attempt to copy them, this kind of relation is not seen as a problem. In a video made by Vogue Russia Husky is asked what the difference between Russian and Western rap is. The answer is presented by Kirill Serebrennikov, who is sitting in a Mickey mouse hat in a set up looking like RT News. He says: “Americans copy everything from Russian rappers. Dima’s (Husky) main aim is to make Americans respect and stop being ashamed of themselves” (Vogue Russia, 2019). Reversing this ironic sentence, it is clear that the goal is to start composing on your own behalf rather than think of yourself in relation or in contrast to another entity. In another interview Husky says that he is guided by foreign performers while creating his art and surely is not going to invent rap. At the same time, he does not like when Russian artists copy Western rappers and their lexicon (Tumanov, 2017). Komyagin from Shortparis says that many Russian artists simply remain at the stage of copying without proceeding to research (Agliullina, 2017).

### *Focusing on the self*

There is a trend among the artists in this sample of turning to their Russian roots and context instead of trying to copy or reproduce the Western cultural and artistic features. The importance of Russian language is highlighted and even myself, translating some lyrics for this thesis, I realized that the meaning or the emphasis of the text sometimes gets lost in translations. The artistic texts of the sample are full of intertextuality. While there are references to world art classics and religious texts, most of the content refers to Russian artists from the older generations: Akvarium, Tsoy, Grazhdanskaya Oborona, Sakurov, Malevich, Nautilus Pompilius, Mark Bernes and others. On the other hand, some of the references are entering into a dialogue with the text, challenging the ideas expressed by

these classics or showing their irrelevance to today's Russia. This is illustrative of the new generation of artists who explore, compare and contrast with their own heritage and when they consult Western culture, they do it with genuine interest and appreciation rather than attempt to mimic or enter into a comparison with it. These artists are highly anxious because they think that Russian culture is in crisis. Komyagin from Shortparis talks about the monasterial cemetery of St. Petersburg: 'It is a monument of the grand Russian culture of the 19th and early 20th century. But this is a dead place in literal and figurative sense. This is an ossified culture. For me and my band it is both: enemy and friend. We feel as an opposition to that. [...] We want to enter into a dialogue with this culture, but only as an equal partner' (Shortparis, 2019). Monetochka as well mentions that she is inspired by Russian culture especially Orthodox culture and Russian philosophy: "The Russian view of the world is much more complex than the Western worldview: the films of Alexander Khanzhonkov (producer, director, screenwriter, pioneer of the Russian film industry - Ed.), which were a success in pre-revolutionary Russia, were then re-edited for distribution in the West." (Monetochka, 2018).

According to Shortparis this trend of switching from English, French etc. to Russian and turning to the ancestral roots by a large number of artists (including themselves) is also a little ironic, since they again intuitively and collectively took the same direction of exploring the 'Russian soul' (Romahov, 2017). However, as IC3PEAK mentions, the language is important for the artists not because it is Russian but because it is an important part of how they perceive the world (Tayozhnaya, 2019).

### *Beyond the Russia vs. West dichotomy*

The point that Shortparis was making about the collective 'homecoming' switch of cultural direction is related to their view on the world in the context of post-colonial criticism. In most of their interviews the topic of identity is brought up by the interviewers and their answer is clear: young Russians are self-sufficient and do not need to oppose the system, the West or any other entity in order to identify themselves (3voor12 extra, 2020). They think that sometimes the extended attention of the West to the Eastern European culture is a way of redefining itself, while the narratives of Western journalists about the topic 'boils

down to a kind of geopolitical delimitation that allows the West to admire its reflection in the mirror of the exotic “other” (Guțu, 2021). Another point that is problematic, is the West’s gaze to the contemporary Russian culture with the same lens as to the dissident Russian art of the 1960s and 1970s of the past century, where being the antithesis of the authorities and bearing the underground non-official nature were the basis for their art and identity. This approach is problematized by Shortparis, who also think that it is vital to look beyond these categories and speak about Russia in the first person through the local gaze. In practice it is illustrated on the example of Monetochka, who highly dislikes how Western media evaluates her work concentrating only on the political content (Monetochka, 2018). It is not surprising at all, because the Western media has been writing in similar ways about Pussy Riot, Piotr Pavlensky, IC3PEAK, Husky, FACE only after they were repressed. Of course, it brings popularity to many artists, nevertheless, popularity of an artist without the understanding of their artwork is in a sense counter-intuitive.

Despite this critical engagement (through artworks and through interviews) that some artists demonstrate about the Russian identity in context of the Western factor, many artists in the sample simply do not have this topic in the agenda. The silence is also a discourse and here it tells, that the positioning vis-à-vis the West is not as actual, at least for the art circles, as it used to be.

A final remark about the topic which cannot be skipped is the Eurasian identity that the state is trying to promote. The selected sample did not tackle this idea at all. The only time that it somehow appeared was in Shortparis’ *Scary*, where there were many people of Central Asian descent involved in, appearing together with Russians carrying a child with a Russian flag. Some people rushed to interpret it as Eurasianism, however I interpret it as an act of illustrating Russia’s multiculturalism and the fact that everybody is essentially in the same situation rather than its Eurasian identity. My interpretation is also based on an instance, when the band, seeing discriminatory behaviour towards the Central Asian workers at their concert hall put a speech in google translator voice saying "Go away, we will not play for you, creative class. Gloomy men from the brotherly southern steppes, we play for you".

#### 4.4. The Key Findings

Now that the identity categories are described, we can reflect on how they relate to the consensus. To start with, the consensus (both as the government and as the system) is framed as the key enemy of Russianness in the selected sample of artworks, thus the conflict between the artists and the government is not surprising.

The contemporary dissident art in post-2012 period challenges the conventional acceptable forms for producing artworks. It contains two main elements: irony and horror/darkness. Both are aesthetic techniques that challenge the consensus by introducing visuals and expressions diverging from the conventional aesthetics. The semi psychedelic and *chernukha*-style visuals cultivate the feelings of unease, fear and apathy. Certain visual elements and symbols repeated across the artworks such as desacralized body visualized in unusual forms, death, raw meat, blood, fire and flames, guns and military aesthetics, dirt and mud, ashes and greyness. While functioning with the logic of the consensus artworks are not very different from the Hollywood style representations of the reality. Under consensus beauty and harmony are valued and vulgarity or banality are accepted in cases when they are used to evoke laughter over everyday situations or visualize topics that the consensus is focused around. Irony, mockery and other forms of art that ridicule socio-political matters are taken painfully. The case of Pussy Riot and Husky are illustrative here, since they suffered a harsher punishment than for example Pavlesky who was not less radical in his artworks.

The selected sample challenges of what can be the subject of politics. It breaks the myth about dissident art's affiliation with the so called 'opposition' by criticizes the latter. This is a step towards disassociation from the assigned identity of being a 'fifth column'. By so doing the dissident artists of the sample come close to redefining the subject of politics. The artists who under the consensus function as propagandists or entertainers have no say in politics. The selected dissident artists, however, through singing about politics and being heard by the masses reflect Rancière's claim that aesthetics have a political effect as long as

the loss of destination destructs the way in which bodies fit certain functions and destinations.

Next, the selected artworks challenge what is considered an object of politics. While the consensus sacralises the Russian history and religion, these artworks freely engage with the topic from ambiguous and negative positions. While the consensus takes Russia's greatness as a given, these artworks show exactly the opposite picture of Russianness, which entails being used to powerlessness, insecurity and repressions. Dissensus in art is demonstrated as an act of deconstructing the existing national identity under the consensus opening spaces for new ways of identification.

Finally, the selected dissident artists deconstruct the consensus identity thus opening space for new identifications. Being Russian is no more about the sense of pride and greatness. There is an identity crisis coupled with attempts of reinventing Russianness and re-actualizing their historical and cultural baggage. The conventional identification was based on mostly positive identity components, while these artists highlight negative identities and present them as a part of Russian identity. Additionally, they do not aim at having a consistent identity and controversies do not cause discomfort for them.

Dissensus in art is revealed while looking at the contrast of the consensus and the identity categories that the artists contribute to. The consensus in the Russian public sphere is based on the conservative authoritarian discourse. It entails centralised control over most spheres of life, surveillance and conformism by the public. For the current Russian regime certain topics are considered out of reach for political discussion such as certain parts of history, Orthodoxy, anti-Western Eurasian identity. Despite the promotion of anti-Western sentiments, there is an Americanization and commodification of Russian culture. The consensus is based on ethical and representational regimes of art, which means that art and culture are viewed as instruments rather than a self-sufficient sphere of life. Therefore, creation is financed and promoted only if it contributes to the propaganda or serves as an entertainment.

On the other hand, the nonconformist artists included in this study are functioning in the logic of the aesthetic regime where there are no assigned rules of what and how to create. Partially the confrontation of the artists with the government is a struggle for their right of functioning in the aesthetic regime without being censored or reduced to political propaganda machines.

In terms of broader discourses these artworks are mostly in line with the values of liberal democracy. They give high importance to civil rights and freedoms, especially freedom of speech and expression of individual opinions. Economic and social security as well as education are highlighted as problematic spheres, which need to be improved. They also connect to the leftist discourses that value progressivism and believe that the system inside which the society functions need to be altered. The current patriarchal order based on violence and war propaganda is countered with the anti-militarism discourse. However, anti-militarism is not viewed in terms of a policy, where military infrastructure should be altered but as an attitude towards life. The feminist discourse was also present in these artworks in varied forms. While some were inherently focused on the feminist discourses like Manizha or Pussy Riot, others were touching it in terms of concrete issues (e.g., domestic violence, victim blaming, body image, LGBTQ rights) among other priorities. Finally, the sample artworks were highly critical of the current-day patriotism in Russia, which according to them is devoid of much meaning. Thus, the last discourse circulated in the sample is critical or constructive patriotism, where criticism of one's own country comes from love and care rather than 'Russophobia' as often framed by the authorities.

When it comes to the attachment of the Russian identity to the West, the artists mainly present a critical perspective. We might call it a counterdiscourse of self-sufficiency which challenges the anti-Western hegemonic discourse. There is a high demand for being a part of the world and experiencing the self as an equal partner, rather than being against others and at the same time having anxiety about it. The need for the Western other for defining the Russian self is being questioned by artists. While some artists demonstrate critical engagement, others do not speak about the West at all. This absence can be taken as a sign that the nonconformist artists have already overcome the urge of having an antithesis with

anything or anyone in order to construct their own selves. The Russian identity is increasingly being defined outside the Russia-West dichotomy.

## **5. Conclusion**

This research had two objectives. Firstly, it attempted to observe the logic of identification in the selected sample of post-2012 dissident Russian art and compare/contrast it with the consensus, or the dominant identity paradigm promoted by the state. Secondly, it enquired the portrayal of Russian identity patterns vis-a-vis the West as reflected in the artworks of the selected nonconformist artists.

Literature on post-2012 Russian conservative authoritarian turn illustrates that the consensus is largely based on the beliefs in the idea of the nation and unity of the people who have a ‘unique’ path (Jonson, 2015). The consensus also bases itself on the belief that sovereignty is to be preserved at any price, and that the strong leader and the unified nation are the protectors of it. This image is strengthened through the consolidation of a negative identity based on antagonizing the external enemy, which is embodied by the West. Through framing of the West as an enemy, the consensus rejects the possibility of another social order, since alternative order as perceived from within the consensus would imply liberalism, democracy and other values which are seen as Western. Due to this understanding, there is also a marginalization of the internal others, or those who act in line with these values such as NGOs, independent media, artists etc. They are labelled as foreign agents, fifth column, aliens, enemies of the people etc. (Tsvetkova, 2016). Thus, those in the society who promote the values of the ‘enemy’ are considered as enemies by the rest of the public. Their voices are muted and their opinions discredited without further reflection. The consensus is leaning on the state cultural policy which is used as a tool for the construction of a uniform identity based on anti-Western-ness, state-centric historical narratives and Russian Orthodoxy. Its objective is to control the creation of meaning, interpretation. This entails that the consensus is about guarding the ‘right’ interpretations of history and the national idea. In this mechanism, the art scene plays an important role for contributing to the national idea. However, it is not solely used for propaganda purposes.

Different art forms and languages are acceptable as long as they do not challenge the hegemonic discourse.

On the other hand, there are some dissident artists who challenge the hegemonic discourse, breaking through the boundaries of invisibility. They manage to articulate politically relevant messages which do not necessarily conform to the consensus. The first step of dissensus in art is the process of disidentification, or refusing to be categorised with the already predefined identities. In order to see whether this is the case for the selected sample of artworks, I applied the MIC method, modified to enable concentration on the identification logic and the discourses that the themes of the artworks contribute to.

The analysis revealed that the identification of the artists is based on different categories from that of the consensus. Defining Russianness in this sample was based on firstly the evaluation of the collective Self. It was described mainly through the negative characteristics such as indifference, economic and social insecurity, identity crisis, lack of education, repression and inure to the hardships. However, the positive self-perception was highlighted with the ability to disobey, resist and stay hopeful. The main Internal Others were the government (embodied by the president and the law enforcement institutions) and the patriarchal system based on violence and militarism that are reproduced by the society and the government. The so-called 'opposition' is also viewed as an internal other, mainly due to its unconstructive behaviour and inconsistent agenda. The Historical Others were the USSR and the 1990s, both of which were perceived ambiguously. The Prospective Other was the possible transformation of Russia into an entity functioning with the logic of an empire, where being preoccupied with its greatness leads to actions which cause harm to the society.

The topic of the external other was mostly absent from the discourse, with only a few artists tackling it. The key External Other as depicted by some artworks was the West, most often represented by the US. However, these works were critical of self-identification based on the 'other'. These points together lead us to the conclusion that the West-Russia identity dichotomy, which is the basis of the consensus, is absent from or criticized by the selected

artworks, illustrating that the logic of identification is distinct. Thus, we see a dissensus in art, demonstrating itself through dissociation from the widely accepted identity categories. The hegemonic idea of Russianness, for which greatness and cultural value are taken for granted, is challenged and deconstructed through dissensus in art, which reinvents the Russian identity orienting the identification logic to the characteristics of contemporary Russian society and re-actualisation of the forgotten culture.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

	<b>Artist</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Piece</b>	<b>Type</b>
1	Pussy Riot	2012	Punk Prayer	Performance/Action
2	Piotr Pavlensky	2012	Seam	Performance/Action
3	Artyom Loskutov	2012- 2020	Monstration	Performance/Action
4	Piotr Pavlensky	2013	Carcass	Performance/Action
5	Piotr Pavlensky	2013	Fixation	Performance/Action
6	Pussy Riot	2014	Putin Will Teach You to Love the Motherland	Performance/Action
7	Piotr Pavlensky	2014	Freedom	Performance/Action
8	Piotr Pavlensky	2014	Segregation	Performance/Action
9	Katrin Nenasheva	2015	Don't Be Scared	Performance/Action
10	Piotr Pavlensky	2015	Threat	Performance/Action
11	Katrin Nenasheva	2016	Punishment	Performance/Action
12	Darya Serenko	2016- 2018	Silent Picket	Performance/Action
13	Husky	2017	Baby-Hollywood	Song
14	Katrin Nenasheva	2017	Between Here and There	Performance/Action
15	Shortparis	2018	Scary	Song
16	Shortparis	2018	Scary	Video
17	Shortparis	2018	Shame	Song
18	Husky	2018	Poem on Motherland	Song
19	FACE	2018	Shiv	Song
20	FACE	2018	Our Mentality	Song
21	IC3PEAK	2018	Death No More	Song
22	IC3PEAK	2018	Death No More	Video
23	IC3PEAK	2018	Fairy Tale	Song
24	IC3PEAK	2018	Fairy Tale	Video
25	Monetochka	2018	Russian Ark	Song

*Appendix I (continued)*

26	Monetochka	2018	Nymphomaniac	Video
27	Monetochka	2018	Nymphomaniac	Song
28	Noze MC ft. Monetochka	2018	People with Guns	Song
29	Monetochka	2018	90s	Song
30	FACE	2018	Stolen Air	Song
31	FACE	2017	I'm Dropping the West	Song
32	FACE	2017	I'm Dropping the West	Video
33	Pussy Riot	2018	Policeman Enters the Game	Performance/Action
34	Katrin Nenasheva	2018	Cargo 300	Performance/Action
35	Shortparis	2019	So Steel Was Tempered	Song
36	Shortparis	2019	So Steel Was Tempered	Video
37	Shortparis	2019	Life for The Tsar	Song
38	Shortparis	2019	Got Even Worse	Song
39	Manizha	2019	Mama	Song
40	Husky	2019	Baby-Hollywood	Video
41	Husky	2019	October 7th	Song
42	Husky	2019	October 7th	Video
43	Noize MC	2019	Everything as Usual	Song
44	Monetochka	2019	Burn Burn Burn	Song
45	FACE	2019	Humourist	Song
46	Husky	2020	Endless Magazine	Song
47	IC3PEAK	2020	Plak-Plak	Song
48	IC3PEAK	2020	Plak-Plak	Video
49	IC3PEAK	2020	March	Song
50	IC3PEAK	2020	March	Video
51	IC3PEAK	2020	TRRST	Song
52	Monetochka	2020	America	Song
53	Monetochka	2020	I Will Survive	Song

*Appendix 1 (continued)*

54	Monetochka	2020	Song About Putin	Song lyrics
55	Pavel Krisevich	2020	Freedom to Political Prisoners	Performance/Action
56	Pavel Krisevich	2020	Sacrifices are Performed Here	Performance/Action
57	Pavel Krisevich	2020	Political Prisoner at Calvary	Performance/Action
58	Shortparis	2021	Moscow Speaking	Song
59	Shortparis	2021	Moscow Speaking	Video
60	Shortparis	2021	CoCoCo / Structures Don't Take the Streets)	Song
61	Manizha	2021	Russian Woman	Song
62	Pussy Riot	2021	RAGE	Song
63	Pussy Riot	2021	Sexist	Song
64	Pavel Krisevich	2021	The Realm of the Russian Person's Soul	Performance/Action