

7 Political action

The counterculture developing within the Russian art sphere reflected the evolving mood of frustration in part of society. Similar processes took place to varying degrees in other cultural spheres. This chapter examines how this counterculture was transformed into media activism and then into traditional forms of political action, such as demonstrations. The first section looks at protest tendencies in Moscow's cultural and intellectual circles beyond the art scene. It describes an evolving trend for social concern manifested by individuals who publicly took up civic positions questioning official state policy, not least through their cultural output. The second section investigates whether there were organizations capable of taking this frustration and transforming it into political action. The third section looks at the new media activism that helped to mobilize protest during the campaigns for the parliamentary elections of December 2011 and the presidential election of March 2012, and up to the inauguration of the president in May. Finally, the chapter discusses the role of people from the cultural sphere in this mobilization.

Towards social concern

Taking a civic position in public is a brave step in a society with a history of repression and fear. Therefore, when in 2010 and 2011 well-known cultural figures went public and criticized the authorities from an ethical and moral standpoint, this had an impact on public opinion. The legal case against Mikhail Khodorkovskii and Platon Lebedev was important in this regard.

The Russian tradition of writing 'open letters' to rulers replaces other protest activities that the state does not allow. The first Khodorkovskii-Lebedev trial resulted in several open letters in 2005. A polarization took place within the intelligentsia as some sided with the regime while others criticized official policy. Well-known people, such as the writer of children's books Eduard Uspenskii, the science fiction writer Boris Strugatskii and the actress Lilya Akhedzhakova, were among those demanding that Khodorkovskii be recognized as a political prisoner (*Grani*, 2005). It was not long, however, before another open letter was published in defence of the authorities, the work of the court and the legal system signed by among others Nikita Mikhalkov and Stanislav Govorukhin (*Izvestiya*, 2005).¹

The second trial was no different in this regard. A letter in support of Khodorkovskii and Lebedev was published as the trial started in March 2009.² About a month before the verdict was announced, an open letter called for the two to be released (*HRO*, 2010). A few months later, a letter called for them to be granted the status of prisoners of conscience.³ The fate of Khodorkovskii had by then become a concern of the cultural elite. One contributory factor was his book *Dialogues*, based on his correspondence with the writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya, which was awarded the *Znamya* literary prize in January 2010, a clear sign that Khodorkovskii had been recognized by the cultural elite (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2010). The other side in this controversy was no less active. A letter was signed in March 2011 in defence of the court and accusing the supporters of Khodorkovskii of slander against the Russian legal system (Vlasenko and Shakirov, 2011). By then, however, this side had been compromised by a scandal in February 2011 over how signatures had been collected for the 2005 letter. More than five years after the first letter was published, a well-known ballerina announced that she had been tricked into signing. She left the United Russia Party in protest (Shakirov, 2011). Four more cultural personalities also retracted their signatures. This scandal had far-reaching consequences for the Putin regime among the intelligentsia.

By early 2011 the political temperature was rising in Moscow and in the country as a whole. The parliamentary and presidential elections were getting closer. They were of the utmost importance for the regime as the ruling power constellation would be defined for the next six years. In order to secure the desired outcome, the Putin regime took some nervous steps. In May 2011 the pro-Putin All-Russian People's Front was created and, in a landslide, public organizations became collective members of the Front. This, not surprisingly, led individuals to react. Among them was Evgenii Ass, the famous architect who publicly protested against being enrolled in the Front through his membership of the Union of Architects but without his personal consent. Instead of remaining quiet, he went public and criticized the practice (Treshchanin, 2011).

The poet Lev Rubinshtein, by now a voice of moral authority and protest, called in May 2011 for the support of people who dared take a stand in public, primarily arts activists (Rubinshtein, 2011a). In September 2011 he wrote about the importance of making a 'personal choice', and the decision that everyone must take in relation to what was going on in Russian society and political life. This choice, he said, was not just a question of responsibility but also one of how to behave, with a nod to Andrei Sinyavskii, who once said he had 'stylistic differences' with the Soviet regime (Rubinshtein, 2011b). Rubinshtein mentioned people not previously known for making public statements who now took a civic position. Besides Evgenii Ass, who objected to being enrolled into Putin's Front, he mentioned the classical composer Aleksander Manotskii who declared his participation in the protest meetings in Triumfalnaya Square on the 31st of each month in defence of political rights guaranteed by the Russian Constitution (Manotskov, 2011). To Rubinshtein, these people were demonstrating civic responsibility when they bravely defended their views in public and acted in opposition to the political mainstream (Rubinshtein, 2011b).

Among these people was also Leonid Parfenov, a television personality at the state-owned Channel One. In a speech in November 2010, made as he accepted the award for television journalism named after Vladislav Listev, the journalist and general director of the ORT television company murdered in 1995, Parfenov publicly criticized state television for censorship, propagandistic tendencies and extreme loyalty to the official line, views and versions of events.⁴ His speech attracted much attention because he was considered part of the official media establishment. The federal television channels and the private-owned NTV found his criticism too severe to broadcast (Kotova, 2010).

By this time, many rock and rap musicians had gone public with their criticism on the Internet, and their declarations spread rapidly. One of the first was the popular rapper NOIZE MC (Ivan Alekseev), who in March 2010 uploaded his song ‘Mercedes 666’ on to the Internet. The lyrics were about an incident in which the Mercedes of a Lukoil deputy director killed two women, but the driver faced no legal sanctions.⁵ It was a song about the arrogance of power and how power and money make a person ‘untouchable’. The song put words in the executive’s mouth: ‘Let me introduce myself . . . I am a person on a different level, a being of a higher rank. I am unfamiliar with problems that cannot be resolved by bribery. I know no people whose lives are more important than my own interests. I don’t care what the press writes about me. If you are in the way of my Mercedes, whatever happens you will be the one guilty of the accident. Mercedes S666, out of my way plebs! Don’t climb under my wheels’.⁶ In October he produced a follow-up song, ‘Mercedes S777’, when the court cleared the Lukoil deputy director of all charges.⁷

When NOIZE MC performed a song about police brutality in Volgograd in July 2010, he was arrested and detained for ten days. He was only released after he produced a written apology to the police. This, however, was full of sarcasm, and after his release he wrote a song that included the refrain, ‘Goodbye city of Stalingrad. Now it is clear to me where the capital of our police state is located’.⁸ The text and accompanying video dealt with police brutality and had more than 700 000 downloads in its first few days on the Internet. The lyrics of NOIZE MC put into words the feelings of hatred and mistrust of the police that many felt at the time. He was invited to the small, independent radio station Ekho Moskvyy and became known to a wider as well as an older audience.⁹

Another musician who went public was the rock veteran Yurii Shevchuk. He was the leader of the band DDT, and known from the 1980s Soviet underground music scene. More than 20 years later his group could still attract 10 000 fans in Moscow without any conventional marketing. In March 2008 he was the first rock musician to participate in a demonstration organized by the political opposition group March of Dissenters (Marsh nesoglasnykh). He was therefore known for both his music and his civic position, and the audience knew well the refrain of one of his songs: ‘Putin is travelling around the country but we are standing in the same place as previously in the . . . shit’.¹⁰ In May 2010, at a live television broadcast of a meeting between Putin and cultural personalities in St Petersburg, his frank questioning of Putin and his criticism of the situation in the media, the

courts and civil society caused a sensation.¹¹ In the summer of 2010, Shevchuk joined the protest movement against the construction of a motorway through the Khimki Park on the outskirts of Moscow. This helped attract attention to the cause and made him a key figure together with the leader of the movement, Evgeniya Chirikova.¹² The Khimki movement, created in 2007, became extremely important during 2010 and 2011 as a catalyst for the growing frustration and protest among intellectuals in Moscow. It provided a venue for protest by organizing actions, demonstrations and concerts.

The response to both NOIZE MC and Shevchuk suggested that there was an important change in mood among the public, primarily the intelligentsia and the middle class. Opinion polls by the Levada Centre in early 2011 indicated falling support for Putin, Medvedev and the United Russia Party (*Vestnik*, 2011). In March 2011, a sociological study by the Centre for Strategic Analysis, based on extensive focus group interviews, showed a remarkably sharp fall in support for Putin first and foremost among the middle class. The authors of the report concluded that a ‘political crisis was rapidly under way although it had not yet reached the surface of political life’ (Belanovskii and Dmitriev, 2011).

Social concern and the theatre

The increasing social concern in the visual arts and contemporary music had its parallel in the theatre. The New Russian Drama that evolved at the end of the 1990s and in the early 2000s developed its own subculture. It traced its roots to the need felt for plays that described the radically different post-Soviet reality. The repertoire of Moscow’s theatres in the 1990s had been dominated by classic plays or translations of foreign plays.

Back in 1991, the Lyubimovka Festival for young scriptwriters had been founded to encourage a new generation of writers to take on the task of portraying contemporary Russian life.¹³ Aleksander Kazantsev and Mikhail Roshchin created the Centre for Playwrights and Directing (*Tsentr dramaturgii i rezhissury*) in December 1998. It opened its doors to young directors and playwrights and became the first theatre to stage New Russian Drama.¹⁴ The centre participated in a joint Russian–British theatre project with London’s Royal Court Theatre, which introduced new British playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Cane to Moscow. The new British drama, with its focus on social themes and the dark side of society, immediately received a strong response in Russian theatre circles and influenced the evolving New Russian Drama.

Although inspired by the Brits, the young Russian playwrights found their inspiration and form of expression in Russian life. In 2002, Mikhail Ugarov, one of the first young directors to stage a play of the new kind at the Centre for Playwrights and Directing, opened the small, independent *Teatr.doc* with Elena Gremina and a small number of young playwrights. The theatre concentrated on *verbatim*, or plays based on documentary material collected through personal interviews.¹⁵ Ugarov was the driving force behind the New Drama Festival from its start in 2002. In 2005, Theatre *Praktika* was created by Eduard Boyakov, who

declared it ‘a theatre of a new generation, a theatre of the texts and heroes of today’. According to the theatre’s website, ‘We talk honestly about the topics of the citizens of the megapolis: love, business, fashion, politics, narcotics, poetry, sex and the conscience’.¹⁶

New Drama was a way to analyse post-Soviet society, its living conditions and the existence of the individual. It represented, in the words of Birgit Beumers and Mark Lipovetsky, ‘a return to social reality and to those social problems that the Eltsin era generated and that the cultural establishment of the Putin era refuses to notice’ (Lipovetsky and Beumers, 2008: 294). A common trait of New Russian Drama was its analysis of the violence that penetrated society and constituted its social fabric. In their analysis, Beumers and Lipovetsky distinguish between different kinds of violence in the Soviet and post-Soviet context, paying special attention to what they call ‘communal/communicative’ or ‘causeless’ violence. It is this type of violence, they argue, that characterizes post-Soviet Russia. It is a ‘non-ideological’ violence in the sense that it has no rationale. Instead, it is everyone’s war against everyone else and characterizes the daily relations of authority and submission. They explain that ‘... the arbitrariness in the definition of the Other – the target of violence – is not characterized by ideological, religious or any other discourse, but transforms violence into a form of social communication, which is destructive and self-destructive at the same time’ (Beumers and Lipovetsky, 2009: 59). Such violence is reflected in the language, which is full of aggression and words with aggressive sexual connotations. New Drama is about the exposure of and vulnerability to violence, and it uses naturalistic, absurd or fantastic forms of expression.

The New Russian Drama formed a whole generation of playwrights, such as Vasilii Sigarev, the Presnyakov brothers, the Durenkov brothers, Ivan Vyrypaev and Yurii Klavdiev. Beumers and Lipovetsky’s words about the Presnyakovs are valid for many of the New Drama writers: ‘The Presnyakovs return social values to the theatre stage, inverting them in effect: they convince the audience/reader that the “community” to which they belong is cemented by pseudo-identities based on spectacles of violence; therefore their plays do not “assert afresh” but, on the contrary, undermine the performed identity, aggravating the existing crisis and taking it to its explosive limits’ (Beumers and Lipovetsky, 2009: 291).

The Kazantsev and Roshchin Centre, Teatr.doc and Praktika constituted a sub-culture within the otherwise conservative life of Moscow theatre. They did not deal directly with political topics, but their plays expressed dissensus in relation to the dominant consensus discourse.¹⁷ Teatr.doc was unique in basing its plays on documentary material, but the theatre stood out, first and foremost, because when staging plays on overtly political and highly sensitive topics Ugarov and Gremina always allowed different voices to be heard. When in 2005 they staged the play *September*, about reactions to the terror attack on the school in Beslan, their actors gave a voice to all sides of the event. The play *00.17*, staged in early 2010, was a documentary on the night when the jailed lawyer Sergei Magnitskii was left to die in his cell by the prison authorities. The name of the play indicates the exact time of his death. Only documentary material was used, but it was

nonetheless the first play to take a clear and directly stated civic position on such a hot political topic.¹⁸ Gremina recalled: ‘Before this play Teatr.doc had been a theatre outside politics and we had been proud of that. We staged “September.doc” about the events in Beslan and everyone was given a voice: Russian fascists, Wahhabists, philistines. This was a mutual recognition of the hatred, and we took no position. We considered that this is hell in the head of the contemporary human being, and we were happy that we were free to talk about it. But “00.17” was the play where we changed this “zero-position”’.¹⁹

Thereafter, Teatr.doc became the most politically outspoken theatre. Among its plays were *Offended Feelings* (*Oskorblennye chuvstva*) (2011) about the trial of the Forbidden Art exhibition, *BerlusPutin* (2012), after a play by Dario Fo about two political leaders who merge their brains, the title being a merger of Berlusconi and Putin, *Pussy Riot* (2012), about the trial of the group, and a play about the people arrested at the demonstration in Bolotnaya Square in May 2012. The choice of repertoire was a sensation in the Moscow theatre world. Teatr.doc avoided the attention of the patriotic-religious groups until August 2012, when Orthodox activists broke into the theatre at the end of a performance of the Pussy Riot play shouting: ‘Repent!’ and ‘Why do you hate the Russian people?’ The audience threw them out. The most surprising thing about this incident was that the activists came with a television camera crew from NTV.²⁰

The radical theatre directors were not taken to court, as was usually the case with the visual arts. There are several possible reasons for this. A major factor was probably that a picture is more easily accessible because it can be spread over the Internet. A theatre like Teatr.doc is more of a closed world, with its limited number of seats. Another factor is that Teatr.doc usually avoided the burning issue of religion.

Organizations of protest

Political opposition was weak during Putin’s first and second terms as president.²¹ The Duma elections of 2007 extinguished the liberal opposition in parliament. The Communist Party became the only opposition party in the Duma, but it did not assume the function of a proper opposition. In this new situation, with the democratic opposition excluded from parliament, some liberal leaders became part of the non-systemic opposition. Liberal politicians, however, met with popular suspicion. They were discredited by their past records, and their internal quarrels and splits contributed to a general feeling that the liberals had no future. Were there any political organizations that could articulate the new critical mood among groups in society and transform it into political action?

In the summer of 2006 the movement *Drugaya Rossiya* (The Other Russia) was created. This was a coalition of non-governmental human rights organizations and political organizations from the non-systemic opposition, with leaders as diverse as the liberal chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov and the National Bolshevik Party leader Eduard Limonov. In December 2006 it launched a first public manifestation, the March of Dissenters. Demonstrations were held in Moscow,

St Petersburg, Nizhni Novgorod and other cities, until *Drugaya Rossiya* in 2010 was taken over by the followers of Limonov.²² In the meantime, the liberals split, reorganized and reappeared in new constellations.

The Strategy 31 movement was formed in the summer of 2009, with the intention to hold regular demonstrations. By 2010 it had held meetings in 40 locations around Russia. Nonetheless, the number of demonstrators was limited and in Moscow they usually attracted only a few hundred people. The situation seemed paradoxical. The dedication of the demonstrators strengthened even though they were divided between themselves and the number of demonstrators did not increase. Instead, the masses seemed not to understand why the demonstrations were taking place. In September 2010 the Russian political analyst Dimitrii Furman compared the situation with dissidents in Soviet times. Those dissidents had also been few. He emphasized that the logic of the situation remained the same. No normal person, he said, will voluntarily get involved in defence of a paragraph of a constitution that he has never read. If people are to stand up against the authorities in an atomized society such as Russia's, there has to be a strong trigger that forces people to wake up: 'There have to be other reasons, and they will come by themselves' (Tsvetkova and Samarina, 2010). His point was that the potential support for political protest was strong in principle but current political slogans would not help the movement to grow.

Thus, in 2010 the non-systemic political opposition remained highly marginalized but with a small core of dedicated activists. The liberals, the left and the nationalists would later assist during protests and demonstrations, but none would be able to initiate or take the lead. Nonetheless, that opinion critical of Putin was in the making was reflected in March 2010 when an Internet campaign started to collect signatures for the proposition 'Putin must go' (*Putin dolzhen uiti*). Among the first signatories were human rights activists and people from the liberal and leftist wings of the non-systemic opposition. A year later the list had 80 000 signatures and by March 2012 it had 130 000 names, which is a large number given that the list was public and thus so were the identities of the signatories.²³

Socio-economic protest grew during Putin's second term. At the end of 2004 and in early 2005 a wave of protests against the monetization and reform of social benefits swept the country.²⁴ It engaged mostly elderly people, but also young people primarily of a leftist and anarchist orientation. The authorities reacted rapidly and made partial concessions, as the government feared the protests. In 2007 a wave of wildcat strikes followed (*Russkii reporter*, 2007: 18–28). In cities around the country, people engaged at grassroots level in defence of their own material interests. Small-scale protests and temporary movements appeared to oppose the demolition of old buildings, new construction works, cases of corruption or higher local taxes. Such protests took the form of spontaneous, often desperate reactions and ad hoc demonstrations. Three themes dominated: the monetization of social benefits, housing and issues related to labour and work (Kleman, Mirzsova and Demidov, 2010). Even if individual protests sometimes attracted a fairly large number of participants and coordinating structures were created, no permanent organizations were set up capable of continuing and developing the protest. These

movements could be regarded as embryonic ‘new social movements’ (Clement, 2008: 68–89), but they still had a long way to go.

Normally, these protests were not reported by the official national media. Nor did they capture the attention of the political opposition or intellectuals in the larger cities. The exceptions were those protests that created a strong resonance among the population and thus broke the information wall. One example was the Shcherbitskii case of February 2006 (Kleman, Mirzsova and Demidov, 2010: 107–108; Robertson, 2011: 186), named after a car driver. As Shcherbitskii was turning left on a highway in the Altai region, the governor’s car suddenly appeared travelling at 200 km an hour. It clipped Shcherbitskii’s car, flipped over and ended up in a field. The governor was killed, and Shcherbitskii was convicted by a local court. The decision led to popular uproar and people publicly expressed their support for Shcherbitskii in 20 locations across Russia. This was a spontaneous grassroots revolt against an arbitrary decision of the bureaucracy. Another incident took place in the summer of 2006 in the southern Butovo district of Moscow. The Mayor of Moscow, Yurii Luzhkov, wanted to tear down small, wooden, single-family dwellings to make room for the construction of new commercial buildings. The local authorities tried to force the families to leave their homes but, in spite of the presence of bulldozers and policemen outside their doors, they refused. Instead, they acted together to defend their rights. Although they did not manage to prevent the construction work, they did manage to negotiate somewhat better terms when offered new homes. The spirit of resistance in Butovo became widely known (Kleman, Mirzsova and Demidov, 2010: 186–187; Robertson, 2011).

A protest movement of car owners in the Russian Far East, which began at the end of 2008 in opposition to increased taxes on imported cars, soon spread across the country. Within a year, actions had taken place in several cities (Bashkirova, 2012: 300–313). The international financial crisis hit Russia in 2008–2009 and drastically increased the number of unofficial and unregistered strikes. An estimate in early 2010 claimed that there had been 100 times more strikes than official figures admitted (Kulikov and Sergeev, 2010).

While most of these protests related to people’s material and social situation, they nonetheless had political overtones and sometimes rapidly transformed into political demands. The slogan ‘Putin resign!’ was first heard in a serious public context at the car owners’ demonstration in Vladivostok in 2008. In Russia, ‘economic demands often rapidly transform into political ones’, according to journalists at the daily newspaper *Kommersant*.²⁵ When 10 000 people gathered in Kaliningrad in January 2010 to protest against increased taxes and fees, including on imported cars, the protest soon turned against the local political leadership as well as the federal government, with demands that the governor and Prime Minister Putin leave their posts (Ryabushev, 2010). The car owners’ protest set an example for other groups. They were joined by people protesting against unemployment and the increasing cost of living. Socio-economic and political protests developed in parallel. They were cautiously monitored by the authorities, which regularly cracked down on them.

Because the socio-economic protests in the provinces did not draw the attention of the middle class and intelligentsia in the larger cities, the traditional gap between Russia's intellectuals and the rest of the population seemed as wide as it had ever been. Two issues would partly bridge this gap in Moscow. The first was the protest against the blue flashing light (*migalka*) used by VIP cars, which provided them with the right to make way in the crowded streets of Moscow but exacerbated the city's traffic jams. Traffic-related problems were a constant source of popular frustration to the population. In March 2010, a protest meeting against the *migalki*, organized by the Russian Federation of Automobile Owners, gathered more than 1000 people in central Moscow (Bashkirova, 2012: 297). The new 'Blue Bucket Movement' became a symbol of civic protest against the bureaucracy. In April 2010, Leonid Nikolaev of the *Voina* art group gave his public performance with a blue bucket on his head (see Chapter 5).

The second issue was the protests against the construction of a motorway through the Khimki forest on the outskirts of Moscow, as part of the new motorway to St Petersburg. The protests were started in 2007 by environmentalists and people living in the area, but became famous in the summer of 2010 when tensions between the environmentalists and the construction company took a violent turn after the authorities ignored requests from the demonstrators for a dialogue. The movement, under its leader Elena Chirikova, became widely known on the Internet.

The defence of the Khimki forest was an important experience in the mobilization of civil society. It played a big role in merging different kinds of protest and bringing together people of various political orientations. This movement received the support of people from the cultural sphere, such as musicians, artists, actors and writers (Kashin, 2009). The movement grew, and its demands developed from the ecological to the political.

The Khimki movement 'took on a truly epic resonance', according to *Kommersant* journalists, as it mobilized broad support from within Russian cultural and intellectual circles (Bashkirova, 2012: 321). In August 2011 the Anti-Seliger festival was organized in the Khimki forest as an alternative to the Putin-loyal Seliger youth camp. Two months later a follow-up festival was organized, *The Last Autumn*, this time to discuss political and cultural issues under a single heading in preparation for the anti-government campaign before the parliamentary elections. Among the speakers was Evgeniya Chirikova. The purpose of these arrangements was to get people, young people in particular, interested in supporting the opposition in the upcoming elections. By now, the Moscow faction of the *Voina* group was among the organizers.²⁶

In sum, the mobilization of protest in Moscow, which took off in the autumn of 2011 in time for the parliamentary elections, was not initiated by any existing political organization, as such organizations were weak and not trusted. Instead, individuals who had gained fame and prominence thanks to the Internet took the lead. Among them was Aleksei Navalnyi, who had gained a reputation from his struggle against corruption. By now, various websites and blogs were filling the void left by the non-existent public political debate.

By 2010 Facebook had definitely entered the scene. In the Russian arts community ‘Facebook has really turned the narrow art world into a proper village, where everyone knows what, where and when [something is going on]’ (Fedotova, 2010: 70). The Internet made communication easier. Political mobilization was an illustration of the new phenomenon of so-called new media activism, already well known in other parts of the world (Lievrouw, 2011).

New media activism and political action

When in September 2011 Putin announced that he would run for president in 2012, that Medvedev would step back and that the two of them had agreed this some years previously, many voters felt humiliated. His words clearly demonstrated that they were completely without influence on such an important issue. The reaction to his announcement was strongly negative, as reflected in opinion polls, and the Internet erupted in various forms of protest. It gave a flying start to the opposition’s campaign against the pro-Putin United Russia Party in the upcoming parliamentary election.

The protests that followed had many similarities with the techniques of the new media activism on the Internet that were used in several other countries (Lievrouw, 2011). A central role in this new activism is ‘culture jamming’, a phenomenon defined in 1990 in an article in *The New York Times* as ‘artistic “terrorism” directed against the information society in which we live’.²⁷ The US media scholar Leah Lievrouw wrote in 2011 that ‘[c]ulture jamming captures and subverts the images and ideas of mainstream media culture to make a critical point . . .’ The Internet, she said, seems ‘ideally suited to the cut-and-paste, collage-style, hit-and-run tactics favored by media designers and artists making art with a point’ (Lievrouw, 2011: 73, 78). The methods and techniques that were introduced by the evolving protest movement were clearly influenced by this new kind of activism.

One technique is the *meme* – an idea, expression, image, practice or other piece of cultural ‘code’ that is picked up and spread. It has been characterized as ‘a sort of cultural counterpart to the gene, with analogous abilities to diffuse, replicate, mutate, and hybridize its way into the “organism of culture”’.²⁸ The blogger Aleksei Navalnyi coined a nickname for the United Russia Party, the ‘Party of Scoundrels and Thieves’, in February 2011 with reference to words used by Putin. In 2010 Putin had quoted from a well-known 1979 film that ‘a thief has to sit in jail’,²⁹ and these words were merged with his words about Chechen terrorists from September 1999: ‘. . . we will find them in the toilet and whack them in the john/shithouse’ (Chapter 2). Together, these phrases formed the slogan of the opposition: ‘To whack scoundrels and thieves in the shithouse’ (Lure, 2012: 56). The term ‘Party of Scoundrels and Thieves’ spread rapidly and by the autumn of 2012 had become so popular that it was used not only by the opposition but also by people who did not side with the opposition.³⁰

Another example of a meme was the slogan ‘Freedom for the slave in the galley’, which was used at demonstrations. It arose from Putin’s words in February 2008, speaking of his tireless work from early in the morning to late at night

during his eight years as president. He compared himself to a slave in the galley, but in the interview he appeared to be comparing himself to a crab in the galley – instead of *kak rab na galerakh*, he seemed to have said *kak krab na galerakh*. The crab therefore became a symbol of Putin, and numerous pictures of and jokes about Putin-the-Crab circulated on the Internet.³¹ The art group ZIP created its Crab-Propagandist in the shape of a battle tank with crab arms. It was exhibited at various exhibitions, including the Moscow Biennale in 2011.³² The crab symbol could appear anywhere, as for example in a parody of Medvedev giving a speech while Putin crawled out of his pocket (Azbuka protesta, 2012: 66).

Putin's phrasing about a galley slave also resulted in the 'galley' meme. The word galley was linked with 'boat', and Putin's words in the Duma of November 2011, when he told the opposition 'not to rock the boat', stimulated new variations of the meme. The galley became a metaphor for a Russia at risk due to the behaviour of the slave. A ship taken over by a slave is usually in danger of being wrecked. The word 'slave' also raised the question of who the master was. As the answer of the opposition could only be the people, it called on the people to liberate the slave by voting him out. The slave reference also had associations with Anton Chekhov, 'to squeeze the slave out of oneself, drop by drop', in the sense of teaching oneself inner dignity and freedom from conformism.³³ A new formulation of Chekhov's words was invented for a meeting in March 2012: 'Drop by drop we squeeze the slave out from the galley' (Lure, 2012: 34). In this way, memes were endlessly transformed and this creativity was visible on banners at demonstrations as well as on the Internet (Moroz, 2011: 85).

The current wave of protest folklore, wrote Andrei Moroz, 'is based to a very large extent on mechanisms of intertextuality and presents itself as an endless combination of different kinds of hints, references and projections, understandable as a rule not to everybody but to significant groups of people who share social, generational and cultural characteristics' (Moroz, 2011: 85). This may be the case, but the humour, irony and laughter used as political weapons were understood by broad groups of people. Putin's words were publicly twisted and made fun of to an extent that had never happened before. He was used to having a monopoly on the public stage and to nobody talking back to him. Now he was faced with an audience that turned his words against him. In a live television interview on 15 December he said that in the future he would try to establish contacts with opposition parties. However, he said, 'This is often useless and impossible. What can one say in such a case? You know, maybe one could say after all "Come to me, Bandar-log"'.³⁴ Bandar-log are the rough apes in Kipling's *Jungle Book*, so in a sense Putin was comparing his opponents to rough and uneducated people. Endless variations of responses to his words followed. In December 2011, in one of his satirical poems, the 'Citizen Poet' (*Grazhdanin poet*), Dmitrii Bykov wrote about a Boa constrictor named Puu (Putin) that keeps all animals in fear apart from the Bandar-log, who turns into a human being because he does not fear Puu. At the 24 December demonstration, the theme of Bandar-log and Puu was very popular. Thus, the yellow python Kaa in Kipling's book became the symbol of the 'snake monster' Putin (Azbuka protesta, 2012: 130).

Putin also said that the white ribbons worn by demonstrators as a symbol of protest reminded him of condoms in a propaganda campaign against AIDS. This was like an open invitation to attack him.³⁵ Variations on this theme recurred at demonstrations. At the 24 December demonstration, the music journalist Artemii Troitskii opened the meeting dressed as a huge condom, and demonstrators carried posters with Putin dressed in a condom. Two demonstrators distributed condoms while their banner read: 'Didn't you like the condom? Choose another one. You have a free choice' (vybor, the same word as election) (Lure, 2012: 88).

The opposition produced propaganda videos less than five minutes long urging people either to 'vote for any party except the Party of Scoundrels and Thieves', or to cross out all parties.³⁶ These videos parodied and mocked the political leadership. Official news material was 'appropriated', 're-appropriated' or 'cross-appropriated'. For example, the heads of Putin and Medvedev were used in manipulated photographs, dancing like maniacs, or in Putin's case faking his victory in a running race with other politicians. In one brief film that circulated on the Internet, a television interview was cut to nothing except Putin's hums, mumbles, stumbles, sighs, nonsense words and empty gestures. The film gave the impression that Putin could not answer the questions posed by the journalist. The footage of the audience was also manipulated to look surprised at the otherwise articulate leader.³⁷

Music videos by rap, rock and punk groups contained lyrics critical of Putin. The rock group Rabfak made a series of music videos against voting for the United Russia Party and Putin under the heading 'Nash Durdom (Our Madhouse) Votes for Putin' (Rabfak, 2011). The name of the group was a play on words as *rabfak* in Soviet times was a preparatory faculty to help workers and peasants attend university, but also a play on the word *fuck*. Another group, consisting of five middle-aged former paratroopers, 'Veterans of the Airborne Troops against Putin', had a big hit with a song urging Putin to resign.³⁸ As former paratroopers, the jewel in the Russian military crown, they had joined the opposition as 'the ordinary man'.

The political satires written by Dmitrii Bykov under the title 'Citizen Poet' and regularly read by the popular actor and comedian Mikhail Efremov became extremely popular.³⁹ They were intelligent, witty, well written and excellently performed. The humour made each satire as sharp as a knife. They were produced and read for more than a year, from February 2011 until the day after the presidential election on 4 March 2012. Like everything else in this new media activism, they spread over the Internet at the push of a button.

This lack of respect for Putin had been unthinkable only two years earlier. The flood of jokes about Putin helped to desacralize his power. The political leadership was mocked, directly and in public, to an extent never seen before. During the pre-presidential election period in 2012, anti-Putin activities on the Internet intensified but were complemented by serious political analyses.⁴⁰

In several manifestations the white colour was used as a symbol of the opposition in the form of ribbons, flowers, clothes, toys, fantasy costumes or plain blank papers. The colour white was introduced as a symbol of the opposition during the autumn of 2011 and was represented by the white ribbons in the 10 December demonstration. Actions like 'White Streets' and 'White Ring' in Moscow in

January and February 2012 were a kind of flash mob that used anything white as their symbol.⁴¹ This included ‘auto runs’, which consisted of cars driving around displaying something visible in white. In the ‘White Square’ action people with white ribbons suddenly appeared on Red Square,⁴² while in White Ring in late February people wearing something white stood hand in hand in double rows along the Garden Ring Road around the centre of Moscow. To avoid being regarded as a meeting or demonstration, for which permission was needed from the local authorities, they refrained from banners and slogans and did not disturb the traffic (Azbuka protesta, 2012: 16). Blank paper had a meaning of its own, referring to a political anecdote from Soviet times when a man was arrested in Red Square for distributing leaflets. When asked why they were blank, he replied: ‘Also that way everything is evident’ (Moroz, 2011).

The large meetings of 10 and 24 December 2011 in protest against the falsifying of the election results became the first manifestation of an atmosphere of carnival, euphoria and liberated energy. The mass meeting in February continued this atmosphere of exuberance. It was like a carnival in the tradition of the European and Russian Middle Ages, when established concepts were turned upside down. Although the medieval carnivals were allowed for only a limited time before life went back to normal, the contemporary mass meetings gave hope and raised expectations of real change in society. Nobody could avoid the fear, however, that again these carnivals would be nothing but a temporary phenomenon (Trudolyubov, 2012).

Fear aside, they were organized as happy manifestations. Dressed as clowns, a voters’ bulletin, a stuffed dragon or in a Guy Fawkes mask from the film, *V for Vendetta*, the creativity of the crowd and the character of the demonstration was evidence of a new atmosphere in society (Oleinik, 2012). Similar to the style of ‘grotesque realism’ described by Mikhail Bakhtin, the high and the low as well as the sacred and the profane changed places and a linguistic turn took place towards what he called the niz, ‘the domain of the nether’ (Sandomirskaja, 2012: Bakhtin, 2007). This was part of a larger political context in which words, humour and laughter were weapons. Therein lay the key that helped to unlock protest for young people in the creative intelligentsia and the middle class.

The slogans, costumes and various mobile installations used during the mass demonstrations were recycled as cultural artefacts and shown at exhibitions. A large exhibition at the Design Centre ArtPlay in February 2012 included artefacts from the demonstrations after the parliamentary election in December 2011 (*The New Times*, 2012). They were proof of the spontaneous creativity of the participants. The slogans ran like a play on words: ‘Vy nas dazhe ne predstavlyaete’, which can mean either ‘You don’t even represent us’ or ‘You don’t even understand us’; and ‘Vernite narodu golos!’, which means both ‘Give the people a voice’ and ‘Give people the right to vote’, as well as more simple slogans such as ‘There is no need for a strong leader in a strong society’, ‘No Putin, no cry’, ‘I didn’t vote for these assholes, I voted for other assholes’, and so on.

These large, peaceful and joyful demonstrations in the winter and spring of 2012 were watched over by huge numbers of police, with special police forces (OMON) on alert in the immediate vicinity.⁴³ The police were instructed to keep a low profile, as were the demonstrators. On 6 May, the day before Putin was

inaugurated president, the peaceful character of the demonstrations changed when the police aggressively tried to stop the demonstrations and provoked a response that threatened to set off a spiral of violence. Obviously, the police had new orders. Violence was averted thanks to people like the poet Lev Rubinshtein. Early the following morning he turned the course back to peaceful protest by spontaneously inviting people to walk along the Boulevard Ring Road in central Moscow, which developed into ‘popular festivities’. People responded to calls on the Internet, joining the walks, which took place from 7 May to 17 May (*Lenta*, 2012). The walks became a way to peacefully reclaim the streets of the city centre – the streets that OMON forces had emptied on 6 May.

Inspired by the Occupy Wall Street movement, an informal camp, ‘Occupy Abai’, was set up at the statue of the Kazak poet Abai Kununbaev at Chistye prudy on the Boulevard Ring Road. Here, discussions, lectures, music and mobile art exhibitions took place until the camp was forced to close on 21 May. ‘Occupy Abai’ followed the international practice of the occupy movements of earlier years and became a symbol of popular participation, self-organization and decentralization. It was an experiment in direct democracy in which the participants’ assembly (*assambleya*) jointly resolved problems. This had great symbolic significance in a Russia that had never lived through anti-hierarchical revolts such as those that had taken place in Paris and large parts of Europe and the USA in 1968.⁴⁴ An important role in the ‘Occupy Abai’ action was played by ‘contemporary politicized artists and all those usually associated with the “creative class”– and its



Figure 7.1 Reading Camus in front of OMON, 2012

(Photographer: A. Sorin)

Source: Courtesy of A. Sorin.

capacity for nonstandard solutions and improvisations’, according to observers in *Arkhronika*, who enthusiastically concluded: ‘What the artistic circle managed, and what the rest were unable to, was to organize a common space that included everyone in the collective experiment of creating new forms of life. For the first time art and politics joined in one place’ (Pesnin and Chekhonadskikh, 2012).

The core group of protest: The creative class

Protests against the falsification of the elections and the authorities’ use of so-called administrative resources began on the evening of election day.⁴⁵ It was the liberal *Solidarnost*, however, that was able to mobilize about 5000 people on the following evening, more than in any previous demonstration by the opposition. The demonstration had been permitted by the local authorities well in advance. Many participants came after reading the reports by observers monitoring the elections, which told of procedures that did not work and presented examples of fraud. Independent media publications such as *Novaya gazeta* and *Kommersant* published these reports on their websites (Volkov, 2012: 9–10).

News of the next planned demonstration, in Bolotnaya Square on 10 December, spread among broader circles on the Internet. It gathered 80 000 people, according to estimates by the organizers, although the police estimates were much lower. A Committee for Fair Elections (*Za chestnye vybory*) was set up to organize a new demonstration on 24 December. The organizing committee was not related to any political body – it scrupulously avoided all political connections and therefore had the support of most political organizations. Crucial issues were discussed and decided on the Internet, such as the ranking of candidates when selecting speakers for the 24 December meeting. The number of participants at the 24 December meeting on Sakharov Avenue was reported to be more than 100 000, although the police estimated the number at no more than 30 000. Four key demands were made at the meeting: free and fair elections, holding the falsifiers to account, an end to political repression, and guarantees of political rights and political reform. On 4 February, about 120 000 people participated in a march from Kaluzhskaya Square to Bolotnaya Square, although again police estimates were substantially lower.

A solid majority of the demonstrators were highly educated and many belonged to the middle class. A survey by the Levada Centre during the 24 December meeting showed that more than 70 per cent had higher education, 25 per cent held a leading position with up to ten employees or were private sector businesspeople and 12 per cent were currently students.⁴⁶ Later surveys by the Levada Centre confirmed the high percentage of well-educated people. At the demonstrations of 24 December and 4 February, graduates and undergraduates accounted for about 80 per cent of the demonstrators. It is worth noting that less than one-third of Russia’s citizens have attended higher education colleges (Volkov, 2012: 50).

Looking more closely at the list of speakers and organizers of the mass meetings during the winter of 2011 and the spring of 2012, the crucial role of people from the cultural and intellectual spheres becomes obvious.⁴⁷ Among the ten

highest ranked people selected to become speakers at the 24 December meeting were three actors, two writers, one journalist and one musician. There were also a blogger, a jailed businessman and a veteran liberal opposition politician.⁴⁸ The committee organizing the 24 December demonstration included, among others, several writers. Many of the speakers and organizers of the December meeting reappeared as members of the 'League of Voters', created in January 2012 to organize civic monitoring of the upcoming presidential elections. Among them were the writers Boris Akunin, Dmitrii Bykov and Lyudmila Ulitskaya, the musician Yurii Shevchuk, the journalists Leonid Parfenov, Sergei Parkhomenko and Olga Romanova, and a representative of the 'Blue Baskets', Petr Shkumatov. Denis Volkov of the Levada Centre defined three categories of speakers at the mass meetings during the six months: people from the creative professions (poets, writers and musicians) and journalists, opposition politicians⁴⁹ and civic activists.⁵⁰

The prominent role played by people from the creative intelligentsia and the small number of politicians among the organizers and speakers reflected the general mistrust of politicians (*Interfax*, 2011). This was also true of the liberal politicians, since people linked them to the failed reforms of the 1990s. Confidence was instead shown in people who had demonstrated civic courage in their relations with the authorities and were therefore expected not to compromise their beliefs. Another factor was the visibility of cultural personalities. These people were already known through the media. By the autumn of 2012, however, the situation had changed and 'the position of poets, writers, musicians and journalists had weakened', according to the Levada Centre. Now a new kind of politician came to the fore – those who were working on a daily basis with the issues of organizing and managing the protest movement (Volkov, 2012: 50).

Politically, the protest movement was a highly heterogeneous coalition. According to the Levada Centre, about 70 per cent of the participants on 24 December identified themselves as 'democrats' and 'liberals', 10 per cent as 'socialists/social democrats' and 13 per cent as nationalists. Yet, to many, the political label of a person was less important than whether he or she was known to be a person with civic courage.

Fear of an 'orange-style' revolution in Russia, similar to that which occurred in Ukraine, strengthened the conviction of Russia's political leadership that the intellectuals participating in the protests must be stopped. An official campaign was launched to discredit the protest movement and exploit the traditional gap between the intelligentsia and ordinary people, as well as that between the middle class and workers. One sign of this came in early February 2012, when the head of Putin's re-election team, the well-known film director Stanislav Govorukhin, repeated Lenin's words and called the intelligentsia the 'shit of the nation'. He said, 'I am waiting for a time when finally our Rus, Russia, wakes up and says "Listen Vladimir Vladimirovich, cut all these fat cats down to size. Why do they mire themselves in this quagmire (Boloto)? Eighty-four per cent of all money circulation takes place in Moscow, which in essence produces nothing! There this office plankton sit, there are the ladies in mink coats, and the evil spirit which once governed the country. They sit on our back and try to turn our heads. Stop

them!”’ (Minin, 2012). A new page was being turned in Russia’s thorny political development.

Conclusions

The parliamentary elections of December 2011 provided the fuel for the counter-culture to transform into political action. In 2011 there was a readiness for this to happen that had not existed during previous elections, even though electoral fraud had been widespread. Cultural personalities played a crucial role in the political mobilization during the autumn of 2011 and the spring of 2012. First, individuals from the cultural field and intellectuals served as role models by openly declaring their critical views. They broke the wall of silence and conformism in public life. It seemed as if the call by Aleksander Solshenitsyn (1974: A26) had become relevant once again: ‘Don’t participate in the official lie’.

Second, the trend towards expressing social concern in art had its equivalent in other cultural spheres, first and foremost in the theatre. Sometimes, classical plays were interpreted and staged with a critical view of contemporary life. Most important in this regard, however, was the new generation of playwrights. New Russian Drama reflected the turn towards socially oriented theatre. Three small Moscow theatres took the lead – Teatr.doc, the Centre for Playwrights and Directing and Praktika. During 2010 and 2011, Theatre.doc took a distinct civic position on politically delicate issues.

People from the cultural sphere contributed to the media activism that flooded the Internet during the months preceding the December 2011 elections. The choice of media techniques transgressed the borders of media, art and design. In mass demonstrations, poets, writers, journalists and musicians played together as initiators, organizers and speakers. The protest movement evolved spontaneously. None of the existing political organizations from among the opposition was able or trusted to take the lead. Instead – from various political wings of the opposition – they supported and assisted the new movement. This movement was decentralized and heterogeneous, like many similar movements around the world. It was also coloured by ideas of direct democracy, of which ‘Occupy Abai’ was an example.

The evolving protest movement was based on values and norms contrary to those in current use: free elections, democracy, political freedom, the rule of law and a state free from corruption. It included people of various political colours and convictions (liberals, leftists, communists, anarchists and nationalists) who came together around a few common slogans concerning the elections. The general feeling among the demonstrators was expressed as ‘enough is enough!’

As a protest against the falsification of election results in an authoritarian country, it fell into the pattern of protests in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, the countries of the former Soviet Union in the 1990s and the Middle East in the 2000s (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). The Russian regime was much better prepared, however, and had in the beginning of 2012 developed a counter-strategy – as illustrated by the

pro-Putin mass rallies in the run-up to the presidential elections, the result of an effective campaign of bussing people to Moscow from other cities.

The 6 May demonstration in Bolotnaya Square, the day before the 2012 presidential inauguration, resulted in 14 demonstrators being arrested by the police. This figure would soon increase. Putin's return to the presidency announced a new and harsher political climate. There were accusations against and interrogations of opposition leaders. It became obvious that the aim of government policy was to wipe out a potentially threatening protest movement. A new era began.

Notes

- 1 Among the other names were the chairman of the Union of Theatre Workers Aleksander Kalyagin, the singer Aleksander Rozenbaum, rector Irina Khaleeva and the athlete Alina Kabaeva. On the controversy surrounding this letter, see Shenderovich (2005).
- 2 'Zayavlenie v podderzhku Khodorkovskogo i Lebedeva (sbor podpisei)', 4 March 2009, www.platonlebedev.ru/documents/2009/04/03/12334.
- 3 Among them were the film director Eldar Ryazanov; the theatre director Kama Ginkas; the journalists Vladimir Pozner, Leonid Parfenov and Viktor Shenderovich; the writers Boris Akunin and Boris Strugatskii; and scholars such as Evgenii Gontmakher (Pismo 45, 2011: Infox 2011).
- 4 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9nvQhUBA0k&hl=ru. Listev was the first director general of the federal television channel, ORT.
- 5 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRwFD-QjZac.
- 6 See http://mc-noize.ru/tvorchestvo/texts/drugie-treki-nojjza/mercedes_s666/.
- 7 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Q3Q-NW94UQ.
- 8 NOIZE MC, '10 Sutok V Rayu (Stalingrad)', http://mcnoize.ru/load/tabs/noize_mc_10_sutok_v_raju_stalingrad/3-1-0-125.
- 9 Ekho Moskvyy is a liberal independent channel despite the fact that it is owned mainly by Gazprom's media holding company. It is important as the only politically outspoken radio station open to voices from different political wings.
- 10 Yurii Shevchuk 'Edet Putin po strane, a my po-prezhnemu v . . . govne', 31 August 2010, <http://video.yandex.ru/users/iv-kuzneczoff2011/view/1/#>.
- 11 'Yurii Shevchuk i Putin', www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oaxf7txb-l4.
- 12 Yurii Shevchuk zovet na kontsert v zazhitu Khimkinskogo lesa, www.youtube.com/watch?v=0M0jiUu6B1c.
- 13 See www.lubimovka.ru/.
- 14 Among the young directors who had their breakthrough at the Centre were Kirill Serebrennikov, Vladimir Ageev and Olga Subbotina, as well as dramatists such as Vasili Sigarev, Ksenia Dragunskaya and the brothers Presnyakov. Author's interviews with Marina Astafieva of the Kazantsev and Roshchin Centre, Moscow, March 2011, and theatre critic Kristina Matvienko, Moscow, April 2011.
- 15 See www.teatrdoc.ru/stat.php?page=about.
- 16 'O Praktike', www.praktikatheatre.ru/CommonPage/Index/about.
- 17 In the otherwise traditional Moscow theatres, only a few directors, most often of an older generation – the so-called shestidesyatniki such as Yurii Lyubimov at the Taganka Theatre – staged plays with a political subtext.
- 18 Author's interview with Kristina Matvienko, theatre critic, Moscow, April 2011.
- 19 Interview with Elena Gremina in *Bolshoi gorod* (2012).
- 20 Teatr.doc, 'Pravoslavnyye edva ne sorvali spektakl o sude nad Pussy Riot, NTV vela semku', www.teatrdoc.ru/news.php?nid=355; 'Pravoslavnyye i zhurnalisty NTV pytalys

- orvat spektakl o Pussy Riot', *Polit.ru*, 28 August 2012, <http://polit.ru/news/2012/08/28/spektakl/>.
- 21 On the Russian opposition before 2007, see Gelman (2007).
 - 22 The National Bolshevik Party was banned by the authorities in 2007.
 - 23 'Putin dolzhen uiti', <http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki>.
 - 24 Social and political street protest during Putin's first two terms as president (2000–2008) is covered in excellent detail by Robertson (2011) and Kleman, Mirzsova and Demidov (2010).
 - 25 Vladislav Dorofeev in *Kommersant*, quoted in Bashkirova (2012: 8).
 - 26 "‘Poslednyaya osen’ v Podmoskove: poidet li molodezh v politiku?", www.voanews.com/russian/news/Russia-Last-Autumn-Forum-2011-10-02-130926778.html.
 - 27 Mark Dery in *The New York Times*, quoted in Lievrouw (2011: 72).
 - 28 Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*, quoted in Lievrouw (2011: 79).
 - 29 The film by Stanislav Govorukhin, *The Place of the Meeting Cannot Be Changed* (Mesto vstrechi izmenit nelzya), where the hero Gleb Zheglov was played by Vladimir Vysotskii.
 - 30 It was even used ironically in a United Russia roller 'Golosui za partiyu zhulikov i vorov!', 1 December 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAv54E-zrC4.
 - 31 See, for example, www.politota.org/popular/putin_krab; and www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aMGHO5uYKk.
 - 32 'Krab-propagandist. Anapa. Gruppirovka ZIP', an action carried out in the summer of 2011, www.youtube.com/watch?v=7L4BoT9Q2Wg.
 - 33 Letter by Anton Chekhov to A.S. Suvorov, 7 January 1889, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/chekhov/anton/c511t/chapter24.html>.
 'What writers belonging to the upper class have received from nature for nothing, plebeians acquire at the cost of their youth. Write a story of how a young man, the son of a serf, who has served in a shop, sung in a choir, been to a high school and a university, who has been brought up to respect everyone of higher rank and position, to kiss priests' hands, to reverence other people's ideas, to be thankful for every morsel of bread, who has been many times whipped, who has trudged from one pupil to another without galoshes, who has been used to fighting, and tormenting animals, who has liked dining with his rich relations, and been hypocritical before God and men from the mere consciousness of his own insignificance – write how this young man squeezes the slave out of himself, drop by drop, and how waking one beautiful morning he feels that he has no longer a slave's blood in his veins but a real man's . . .' (Chekhov, 1889). Compare the reference to this quote in Chapter 6 (note 14).
 - 34 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qVsVLqggsg.
 - 35 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=htvgfA-HRO4.
 - 36 Song against the party of 'Scoundrels and Thieves', www.echo.msk.ru/blog/merculove/829478-echo/.
 - 37 See www.youtube.com/watch?v=nB3zj0L3oiA.
 - 38 'Komitet veteranov raiona "Akademicheskii"', Moskva, www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSc9wiV7JBI, 28 January 2012. Moved to <http://muzofon.com/search>.
 - 39 See <http://ongar.ru/grazhdanin-poet/>.
 - 40 During the pre-presidential election period up to 4 March 2012, Internet propaganda against Putin intensified. Election campaign films such as *Nastoyashchii Putin* (Real Putin) skilfully presented a propagandistic, broad, critical social and political analysis of the state of the nation and the Putin regime. See *Nastoyashchii Putin*. 1 hour, 2012, produced by The Initiative Group of Citizens, www.echo.msk.ru/blog/merculove/829478-echo/.
 - 41 Auto-runs took place in Moscow on 29 January and 19 February 2012. The 'White Ring' action was held on 26 February.
 - 42 See, for example, "‘Belaya lenta” provodit fleshmob na Krasnoi ploschade", BBCRussian.com, 8 April 2012, reported on www.inosmi.ru/russia/20120408/190164858.html;

- 'Protesty v Moskve: belye lentochki na Krasnoj ploschade', 9 April 2012, www.newstube.ru/media/protesty-v-moskve-belye-lentochki-na-krasnoj-ploschadi.
- 43 For a list of the demonstrations that took place on both sides, see 'Protestnoe povedenie', www.kommersant.ru/document/2021447.
- 44 On the 'Occupy Abai' experience see, for example, Grigoryeva (2012: 183–188) and Degot (2012).
- 45 The Left Front activists, the followers of Limonov, and the nationalists immediately mobilized. The Communist Party leader declared that this was the most unfair and dirty election since Soviet times.
- 46 'Opros na Prospekte Sakharova 26 dekabrya', 26 December 2011, www.levada.ru/26-12-2011/opros-na-prospekte-sakharova-24-dekabrya; See also Samarina (2011).
- 47 At the planning meeting of 22 December 2001 the following people participated: Boris Akunin, Dmitrii Bykov, Oleg Kashin, Tatyana Lazareva, Elena Lukyanova, Aleksei Navalnyi, Boris Nemtsov, Sergei Parkhomenko, Olga Romanova, Vladimir Ryzhkov and Anastasiya Udaltsova, www.echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/841907-echo/.
- 48 The television journalist Leonid Parfenov, who had criticized the media situation when he was awarded a journalism prize in 2010; the rock musician Yurii Shevchuk, active in the movement against the construction of the motorway at Khimki; the writer Boris Akunin, who had conducted interviews with the jailed businessman Mikhail Khodorkovskii; and Dmitrii Bykov, writer of novels, poems and chronicles, and the satirical Citizen Poet. Among the ten were also three actors respected for their civic stand: Liya Akhedzhakova, Mikhail Efremov (who read for the Citizen Poet) and Chulpan Khamatova. Other names high in the rankings were the jailed businessman Mikhail Khodorkovskii and two politicians – the upcoming leader, Aleksei Navalnyi, known through the Internet, and the old liberal Eltsin supporter, Boris Nemtsov.
- 49 Among them were two former members of the Eltsin government, Boris Nemtsov and Mikhail Kasyanov; the liberals Vladimir Ryzhkov, Garry Kasparov, Ilya Yashin and Grigorii Yavlinskii; the leader of the Left Front, Sergei Udaltsov; and the Duma delegates Ilya Ponomarov, from the Communist Party, and Gennadii and Dmitrii Gudkov, from the Fair Russia Party (Volkov, 2012: 13).
- 50 Among them were Aleksei Navalnyi, Evgeniya Chirikova and Denis Volkov (Volkov, 2012: 13).

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