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Published on H-SHERA (June, 2022)

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Eliot Borenstein's analysis of Pussy Riot's work is an insightful and valuable contribution to Bloomsbury's series Russian Shorts. While articles on Pussy Riot abound, most date to 2014-15 and offer analyses in the aftermath of the Pussy Riot show trial. There are, however, only two books—a book by Russian American journalist Masha Gessen, *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot* (2014), and the book discussed in this review. In many ways, the latter monograph attempts to conceptualize and continue where Gessen left off. Borenstein's book, however, aims at a different audience than Gessen's publication. It requires relatively extensive grounding and analysis of what was the most decisive event of Pussy Riot's career, their performance of "Punk Prayer" at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. Their subsequent arrest, or the long trial in the style of Soviet dissident trials, resulted in the most extremely harsh punishment of two years in a penal colony.

Borenstein's main objective is to analyze Pussy Riot's work from its inception to about 2019. The dates are important because, as the author notes several times, the anonymous members of Pussy Riot, who later became known as Maria Aliokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, or, as the author calls them, Masha and Nadya, are constantly changing their artistic and philanthropic direction and reinventing themselves. Hoping to reach a wide audience, Borenstein tries to keep the use of Russian words to a minimum and successfully, at least for me, explains the nuances of Russian use of such terms as "actionism" and "punk." The book is written in a surprisingly conversational and nonacademic language. While the discussion is nuanced and sophisticated, philosophical and academic jargon is kept to a minimum. This concise volume could be used for teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses and not only those related to Eastern European culture. It may also serve as an excellent case study for classes on activism or gender.

The book's brevity is both its blessing and its weakness. While analysis of Pussy Riot's infamous performance and subsequent trial, along with other earlier actions, has been published by numerous scholars both in English and in Russian, Borenstein's examination is exceptionally astute and concise. He explores Pussy Riot as a group of young and eclectic Russian feminists who take their lessons from actionism and conceptual avant-garde of the late Soviet period. At the same time, Pussy Riot turned to punk in its nihilistic and
homegrown aesthetic that was mainly understood and revered in the West. Borenstein's interpretation potentially creates a definitive narrative for further understanding the group's work. A more nuanced discussion of the Soviet version of feminism, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, examples of actionist and conceptualist techniques, and, finally, analysis of the difference in punk as a cultural movement between the West and Russia would have made the book helpful for scholars studying any of these issues.

While the author does not divide his narrative into distinct parts, the discussion of Nadya's and Masha's activities after their release from prison constitutes the second part of the book. Here Borenstein is on much less previously explored territory, and his analysis continues to be well informed, based on both Russian and Western primary sources. Critical is his discussion of gender and feminism in Russian media in relation to Masha's and Nadya's interviews and media appearances after their imprisonment. The total misunderstanding of the goals and aspirations of Nadya and Masha by such oppositional journalists as Ksenia Sobchak and feminist writer and politician Maria Arbatova makes clear to what extent activism and feminism advocated by ex-members of Pussy Riot were inspired by Western feminist movements especially the third and fourth waves. Additional explanation of difference in feminist approaches between Arbatova and Pussy Riot members can be read through their different backgrounds, for example, political versus artistic and activist but also generational and cultural backgrounds. Here again, the book's shortness becomes its liability. It is not that the author misses these points (he notes all of them and is thus aware of them), but a more in-depth discussion would have been able to explain why Pussy Riot is so admired abroad and disliked in Russia.

The last chapters discuss Pussy Riot as a brand and explore the activities of Masha and mainly Nadya after the initial interview and publicity circuit in 2014. Here Borenstein's starting point seems to be a complete impossibility of coexistence between commercial success and “branding” and the early do-it-yourself punk aesthetic of the group. The analysis falls into a binary between “selling out,” specifically Nadya's use of her own "brand,” glamor, and notoriety to advance various causes, and Nadya's practice as a member of the punk band and user of the punk aesthetic. The author's attempt to reconcile the earlier punk stage of Pussy Riot (Masha and Nadya's mainly) artistic careers and their later work is recognizing that punk for Pussy Riot (all of the members, not only for Nadya) was part of the their "growing pains." Now in their thirties and thus more mature, they have changed, evolved, and adapted different ways of activism and self-expression. While this is undoubtedly true, Nadya at least appears to be coming back to her punk roots through her work and her "brand" and merchandising. She is one of the artists and creative people who constantly seek new ways of self-expression. For instance, she is involved in activism through Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs). Her constant transformations, use of bricolage aesthetic, and attempts at connecting between grassroots and activist artistic endeavors remain within the punk movement. But perhaps more important, at the time of writing, Pussy Riot's merchandise is still making a difference in even more repressed contemporary Moscow. Three months since the start of Russia's aggression on Ukraine, Ukrainian journalist Ivan Yakovina posted an image on Twitter (@aktroitsky, May 12, 2022) showing the Pussy Riot brand and merchandise. The picture shows a young woman whose appearance and eclectic style fits the punk's general definition. Riding on the Moscow subway, she is wearing one of the Pussy Riot T-shirts featuring the swear word pizda (cunt) next to one of the ideologists of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Igor Strelkov (Girkin). This serendipitous photo testifies that perhaps Nadya and her work are redefining what punk could mean in a totalitarian country.
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