Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (University of Victoria, 2012)

“Corporeal Canvas: Art, Protest, and Power in Contemporary Russia”

Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies

Thursday, December 14, 2017
10:00 A.M.
Clearihue Building
Room D241

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Megan Swift, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Julia Rochtchina, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Margo Matwychuk, Department of Anthropology, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Timothy Iles, Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract
This thesis examines the recent emergence of corporeal protest art in Russia. Through analyses of cultural, social, and economic shifts in the post-Soviet era, I observe how this corporeal turn reflects a significant cultural transition away from the literary text, which has traditionally held a role of major importance in Russian culture. Detailed analysis of the contemporary performances of Pussy Riot and Petr Pavlensky are conducted in order to elucidate the social and political causes and implications of such a shift. Manifestation of oppositional discourse on the site of the human body is understood theoretically through Giorgio Agamben’s biopolitics, Mikhail Bakhtin’s grotesque body, and Inke Arns’ and Sylvia Sasse’s theory of subversive affirmation. Interestingly, this artistic divergence has coincided with the rise of relative economic and social wellbeing in Russia – conditions that tend to foster the development of a burgeoning public sphere, now standing at odds with an increase in political repression. Oppositionists and protest artists are, therefore, exploring new and unconventional ways of expressing dissent. My study contextualizes these new methods of expression within the larger tradition of the cultural expression of political will, examining the ways in which these works are readable through Russian cultural norms and to whom they speak.