Occupy Youth! State-mobilized contention in the Putin era (or, what was Nashi and what comes next?)

Draft – please do not circulate

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One frigid December morning, I struggled out of bed at 5 am to join several hundred local youth at the Tver' railway station. I was joining a campaign organized by the pro-Kremlin youth movement Nashi (Ours). We were traveling to Moscow to meet with World War II veterans, bearing gifts and best wishes for the New Year. Our train was one of many traveling from the provinces to Moscow that morning. Kirill, my Nashi activist contact (a "komissar" in the movement who had participated in our research project), explained that the campaign, entitled "A Holiday Returned," was timed to coincide with the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Moscow – to give back to surviving veterans the New Year's holiday celebration that had been cruelly snatched from them by the Nazis during the winter of 1941. Kirill had explained that the campaign would bring one hundred thousand young people from across the Russian Federation to the capital in specially commissioned trains. Each group of one hundred was to meet with a group of veterans and present them with a New Year's gift.

At the station, I joined a seething mass of young people; as I shuffled through the crowds to find Kirill, I marveled at the complexity of the organization. Komissar-organizers ushered us into numbered cohort groups, signaled by large placards or signs. As they then began to load big plastic sacks of what looked like food onto the train, after which we were told to move onboard. I spilled into a wagon with the others who had amassed under Kirill's sign.

As the train pulled out of the station, Kirill and his fellow komissars paced up and down the wagon, barking instructions (there was to be no smoking, no drinking; we shouldn't come to the organizers with any complaints) and handing out supplies. They passed out box lunches, return tickets, and costumes for us to wear as we distributed gifts – Grand-father Frost (*Ded Moroz*) suits for the boys, Snow Maiden (*Snegurochka*) suits for the girls.1 "These are gifts for you," Kirill called out. "You may keep them, but don't give them to anyone else."

In Moscow, the excitement mounted. We poured out of the train in the half-light to join crowds of young people – who had arrived on trains from other cities – and lined up in our cohorts. As I took my place in line, I saw Kirill sneaking a cigarette. From the front of our line (other groups from Tver'), a chant began – "Happy New Year!" (*S novym godom*) – and we began to pick it up.

At last, all assembled, we shuffled forth. As we rounded the corner and approached the square where the rally was to take place I saw that the streets were eerily empty. The wide boulevards of central Moscow – usually jam-packed with cars – were blocked off to traffic by scores of police. As we cleared the security checkpoints, the space opened up and the crowd behind me let out a cheer. The scene was startling: thousands of young people dressed in costumes, snapping pictures of each other with their cell phones, as sound systems pumped out Soviet wartime songs mixed to a techno beat. The words appeared karaoke-like on a large screen, against a backdrop of black and white World War Two combat scenes, presumably excerpted from a Soviet era movie I did not recognize. On stage in the foreground, young people in [red T-shirts] breakdanced and sang along.

Nashi (Ours), the independent youth democratic antifascist movement, burst onto the Russian political scene in the spring of 2005. Until 2012, when it was disbanded, Nashi was highly controversial, both because, with its mass actions and youth in uniforms, it resembled prior Soviet forms (the Komsomol), and because it was taken to signal Russia's resurgent authoritarianism. This "independent youth movement" was state run, founded and funded by top Kremlin aides; Nashi's administrative founder was Putin's chief ideologist, Vladislav Surkov. Its public meetings – always pro-state, nationalist-patriotic in hue and often with a pronounced anti-Western or antiliberal orientation – were permitted at a time when oppositional meetings were not. The young people who colorfully, loudly occupied the streets on that frosty day in December wittingly or unwittingly signaled this displacement.

Nashi is most commonly cited as a straightforward case of "astro-turfism." Dominant media and scholarly accounts depict it as a false project that seeks to dupe innocent young people and divert their energies away from "real" and independent forms of civic engagement and activism. [1] However, the categories of state, grassroots and civil society are highly unstable in the post-Soviet context. Moreover, political identification in Russia is complex and does not necessarily align with western social science expectations (Yurchak 2006).

Nashi marks an interesting instance of state mobilized contention. It illustrates how Russian state actors and the political technologists who served them appropriated the technologies and repertoires of both international democracy promotion and countercultural protest between 2005-2012 and deployed them for distinctively pro-state ends. My title, "Occupy Youth" is a provocative borrowing that intends to signal both

this circulation of tactics and the mutually constituting relationship between state-run and oppositional movements. Providing ample evidence of the innovation Robertson identifies as characteristic of "hybrid regimes" (2011), Nashi was a complex political technology project in motion. The product of a distinctively reflexive, highly self-conscious political culture, the Nashi project skillfully mobilized existing discontents to captivate youth and their energies. Self-aware, it was constantly rebranding and recalibrating its message both in line with shifting state priorities and the interests of the youth it sought to engage (Lassila 2012). However, its outcomes were unstable and complex; this appropriation gave rise to results that were unanticipated and sometimes unintended.

In this paper, I first account for Nashi by contextualizing it and examining the historical, geopolitical and political economic factors that prompted it. I trace Nashi's trajectory through two distinctive phases – its early "contentious politics" phase (2005-2008), and its more civil (or formal politics) rendition during the Putin-Medvedev administration (2008-2012) - showing how it changed substantially in the course of its existence in response to different political moments and agendas. Second, drawing on ethnographic data collected in the course of a collaborative research project,[2] I examine some of the distinctive technologies it harnessed as well as the ways they were experienced by Nashi participants. These are (1) "Street technologies" (associated with international democracy promotion and the countercultural and protest repertoires it interacted with)[3] and (2) "Project design" technologies (associated both with global repertoires of corporate capitalism and management consultancy, manifest in the NGO world also). Profiling several Nashi activists, I provide a "thick" description of Nashi to

point to its instabilities and to emphasize the heterogeneity of perspectives, internal tensions and politics within (c.f. Urla and Helepololei 2014), as well as to show *what else* it mobilized. Beyond sheer youthful biomass, Nashi mobilized loyalties, affect and idealism. Finally, I turn to consider the implications of the Nashi case and pose preliminary suggestions about its complex and unstable legacies.

Nashi thumbnail

Nashi (Ours) was founded by Vasily Yakemenko, a hitherto little known political operative, in the spring of 2005. Building on the youth organization he had founded in 2001 Moving Together (Idushchie Vmeste),[4] Nashi started out as a patriotic movement to provide ideological support for the Kremlin at a sensitive time: the roiling political aftermath of Ukraine's "orange revolution" when "non-systemic" oppositional movements burgeoned.[5] Between 2005 and 2008, Nashi grew; at its peak, during the 2007–2008 election cycle, it claimed several tens of thousands of members (and many more supporters) and had approximately fifty regional branches across the Russian Federation. Nashi's hallmark activity was the high-profile mass event – pro-Kremlin campaigns that brought tens of thousands of young people onto Moscow's streets and plazas. Many of these, like the Return the Holiday rally I attended, had a nationalist-patriotic hue and frequently invoked World War Two.[6] Nashi summer educational camps – held at the popular resort Lake Seliger – also attracted tens of thousands of participants, and were attended by high-ranking politicians and Kremlin aides. These rallies, as well as the "contentious" actions Nashi engaged in (harassing political opponents; rumored acts of violent retribution) won it most press (and notoriety).[7] However, at the local level, Nashi activists engaged in a wide range of socially focused activities that received less

media coverage. Some of these bore strong resemblance to prior Komsomol campaigns, for example events for orphans and programs for local veterans, sessions on cultural tolerance and friendship with international students, and campaigns against littering, graffiti, and the sale of cigarettes and alcohol to minors. Like the Komsomol, Nashi had a reward structure and promised forms of social mobility for its participants. Nashi activists took classes and seminars in Moscow as well as at Lake Seliger. Activist-leaders of the movement ("komissars") were rewarded with the opportunity to study at Nashi's own Moscow-based higher-education institute – the Natsionalnyi Institut Vyshaia Shkola Upravleniia.

Despite its proximity to the state, Nashi had a rogue energy and uncertain status; some Nashi campaigns irritated its Kremlin backers, leading to periodic reorganization and "rebooting" attempts. The 2007-2008 period was a turbulent one for Nashi; the presidential administration distanced itself from the organization following a number of controversial campaigns, and it was restructured after the December 2007 federal elections, resulting in the closing of the majority of the regional branches. While leading Nashi komissars were kicked upstairs and rewarded with federal positions (Nashi founder Vasily Yakemenko was appointed leader of the newly founded Federal Youth Affairs Agency *Rosmolodezh,* two leading komissars were elected to the State Duma), rank and file participants found themselves cut adrift. Liberal newspapers jubilantly reported Nashi's demise, however, it reemerged later that year as a number of regionally based "directions" (*napravleniia* – themed projects or suborganizations).[8] The scholarly consensus is that this moment marked a distinctive shift. In the post-2008 period (the "Orange" problem resolved and the Medvedev presidency secured), Nashi retooled its

activities and campaigns, largely abandoning street politics to engage in more formal political activities and youth development programs (Atwal and Bacon; Robertson 2011). In line with the Medvedev administration's policy focus on "modernization," many post-2008 projects focused on entrepreneurship and innovation; other projects focused on social issues (Our Houses). However, elements of the earlier "contentious" mode persisted, as manifest in the decentralized directions or offshoot splinter projects such as Stal (Steel), which continued to run aggressive anti-liberal provocations. Until 2012, when it finally disappeared, Nashi engaged in a constant rebranding and respinning, updating and rebooting itself in response to the changing times, and to keep its young constituents interested and lure them from other youth organizations that competed for their attention.

This tendency to fragment and splinter made Nashi a slippery object to track. So too did its uncertain center of gravity. Nashi offshoot projects that took form after 2009 such as Run With Me, Piggies Against (which campaigned against the sale of expired products in food stores) and StopKham! (a campaign against traffic infractions) were "semi-autonomous movements" that denied their Nashi connection (Krivonos and Fedorova 2014).[9] Meanwhile, Nashi founder Yakemenko continued to spin Nashi-like projects under the auspices of Rosmolodezh and mobilized Nashi activists until the organization's final dismantling. The annual youth summer camps held at Lake Seliger between 2005-2012 exemplified this logic; while the first summer camps were indisputably Nashi events, with a pronounced patriotic component, Seliger 2009 was rebranded and its Nashi connection energetically denied. It advertised itself as a competitive forum open to all "talented" youth across the federation, organized by

Rosmolodezh in partnership with the Ministry of Sports, Tourism, and Youth Policy.

But what prompted Nashi? Was the Russian state proactive, or defensive?

"The streets are with us!" Contextualizing Nashi

I first became aware of Nashi during the spring of 2005 when I heard rumors of pro-Kremlin youth summer camp to be held at Lake Seliger, about 200 miles from my field site in Tver' oblast. Browsing the newspapers in a kiosk at Sheremetevo airport, one front-page story caught my eye: "OUR millions (*Nashe Milliony*): both the Kremlin, and the opposition are looking at youth as a political resource." A large photo depicted a thirty-something year old man in a white shirt, with the Nashi logo emblazoned on it, against a backdrop of thousands of youth supporters, similarly clad, holding red flags with a white cross. It was a bold image, its fascist suggestion unmistakable. On the plane ride home, I read the article, gripped. "The 'orange revolution' [in Ukraine] is becoming a brand (*brend*) before our eyes," the article stated, "one that brings together two opposing [nachala] assumptions – hope for some, a threat for others." The article reported that political parties and groups of diverse ideological persuasion were mobilizing youth via summer camps.[10] The man in the photo was Vasily Yakemenko, Surkov confidante and architect of prior state-run youth projects, now founder and leader of Nashi.

Nashi was born of a time of crisis. The mood in the spring of 2005 was polarized and edgy. Nashi's most proximate cause was Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" of late 2004, a largely youth-led pro-democracy movement, prompted by the perception of rigged elections. Like the other "color" revolutions that took place in the former Soviet Union between 2003 and 2005, it was celebrated in the West as a triumph of democracy, an

analogue to the pro-democracy "velvet revolutions" of 1989; the youthful bodies on streets that *New York Times* articles portrayed were framed in heroic, civil terms, as a "civilizing force" that swept away authoritarian incumbents. However, this color revolution was highly controversial in Russia. Critical newspaper commentators drew attention to the large amounts of foreign money, especially from the United States, expended in supporting it, and expressed concern about foreign meddling in postsocialist space. As "orange" imagery and aesthetics spread amongst youth oppositional movements (Horvath 2015:6-7), [11] this consternation and sense of crisis grew. Nashi emerged a few short months later to articulate a firm retort. An important part of Nashi's "work" was to sternly articulate to foreigners – and the domestic actors (especially liberal oppositionists) who would support them - what was no longer permissible. Its materials explicitly invoked the orange revolution, pitching itself as a counterinsurgency operation to prevent similar foreign occupations from taking place and to guarantee Russia's sovereignty. Signaling its objection to another unpopular foreign-sponsored initiative (the nineties era project of democratization), the Nashi Manifesto named a second goal – to create an "active" civil society.

However, there were other, domestic factors at play as well. A series of unpopular social welfare reforms introduced in 2004 led to a wave of protests in January and Februrary 2005. Under reported in the international media, they represented a major political crisis for the Putin administration. Tens of thousands of protesters came out in demonstrations to contest the "monetization" of social benefits. While the majority of protestors were pensioners, the group most seriously disadvantaged by the reforms, youth were also involved. Young people, mostly students, joined retirees bearing Communist

banners and placards. Radical student groups (including antiglobalist leftist ones) emerged on campuses, and some young people formed online communities of protest, such as Skazhi-Net (Say No); Liudi v Kurse (People in the Know); Idushchiye Bez Putina (Walking Without Putin). Disconcertingly, these loosely coordinated protests began to spread, from St. Petersburg and Moscow to cities all across the Russian Federation, joining forces with existing oppositional groups – groups which, squeezed out of formal electoral politics had begun to proliferate and form coalitions after 2004. These groups used social media to issue powerful slogans, denouncing the reform and the administration that enacted it (Hemment 2012).[12]

I was in Tver' in March 2005, two months after law 122 took effect. People spoke about nothing but the reforms and their antisocial, or antipeople (*antinarodnyi*), character. This term suggested continuities with the unpopular liberalizing reforms of the 1990s, upsetting a major component of Putin's legitimacy – his distinctiveness from the "anti-narodyne" Eltsin administration and reformers. Youth politicization was already a touchy subject; youth groups – including ultranationalist formations – had begun to proliferate between 2003-2005, some engaging in forms of street protest (Robertson 2009:535/Horvath 2011). The National Bolshevik Party in particular, with its proclivity to direct action and unsanctioned assemblies in public spaces, caused alarm.[13] These new mobilizations – foreign sponsored, domestically fomented, with the potential to join forces with existing oppositional groups and coalitions - represented a crisis for the Putin administration. [14]

Zakhar Prilepin's novel *Sankya* (2006) gives a rich account of some of the kinds of youth mobilizations Russian state actors most feared. His novel, published to great

acclaim one year after the anti-monetization protests, was a shocking – and loosely biographical -account of youth involvement in a radical anti-establishment oppositional movement, *the Founders*, a fictional group based on the National Bolshevik Party. Prilepin's "new realist" novel captured the energy of a generation's discontents. Members of the *Founders* were young provincial men, on fire with fury about the dispossessions of the 1990s. Some of the most moving and evocative sections discuss the ire of the provincial subject confronting new Russia's obscene inequalities – the luxury stores and unaffordable goods. They powerfully invoke the sense of outrage young Russians (especially young Russian men) experience at generational wrongs: depopulated villages where isolated elders (members of Russia's Last Great generation) lie on their deathbeds, alcoholic, prematurely deceased fathers. Founder members are highly disciplined and fiercely motivated to right these wrongs – and smash the state as they do so. Their ire is directed equally at the West, the domestic liberals who support it and the new (Putin era) Russian political elites, between which they appear to draw little distinction.

Greeted with acclaim in Moscow literary circles, *Sankya* must have caused consteration in the political establishment.[15] Indeed, the Putin administration took swift steps to contain the National Bolshevik Party it drew inspiration from – and which was playing a key role in the new creative non-systemic opposition that was taking shape - outlawing the party in 2007 and, coopting some of its ideologists.[16] It quickly moved to demobilize the protests, via "a combination of coercion, channeling and concessions" (Robertson 2011:183), which discredited the opposition (drawing a distinction between

legitimate economic concerns of pensioners and the illegitimate "extremists," manipulating them in pursuit of their political agenda).

Nashi then was born at the crucible of this "revolutionary" energy and at this moment of experimentation and improvisation as the administration desperately sought to deal with the new and urgent problem of 'the streets.' Its formation marked a new phase of Russian politics and state/opposition interactions, one of frequent skirmishes and "dueling protests" (Robertson 2011:12).[17] But beyond this, as should be clear from the account above, Nashi was not only a counter insurgency project directed at foreign meddlers, or even at the noisy domestic oppositionists it faced off against, but a domestic project of prevention also, one that addressed deeply rooted social issues and targeted a specific youth constituency. Although never made explicit, there was clearly a politics of class afoot here.[18] The Nashi project directed itself towards provincial youth, potential NBP recruits - the students of colleges and institutes who did not have the same connections and opportunities as their urban peers. Answering long-term policy concerns – addressing domestic audiences long concerned about the state's neglect of youth since the Soviet Union's dissolution – Nashi sought to occupy these youth, direct their energies and provide them with the chance of upward mobility (or "social lift," as policy documents called it). It did so in ways that conformed to the period's most prominent youth policy goals – "patriotic education" and "modernization."[19]

Mobilization challenges and strategies

Nashi's challenge was to appeal to apolitical youth, to young people who were sick of "politics" and who would be repelled by anything official or conformist (Lassila 2012). In Russia and other postsocialist states, young people are disillusioned and cynical

about formal politics and politicians. Indeed, youth "apoliticism" has long been a Russian governmental policy concern.[20] In this, Russia is on trend with global tendencies, however, this apoliticism and disenchantment bears specific postsocialist inflection. It is both a legacy of state socialism and has more proximate cause, infused with specific disgust at the processes of the 1990s.[21] Nashi was cleverly crafted to hook youth who were deeply skeptical about formal politics, and deeply skeptical of politicians also. It catered to the "apolitical" orientation the Russian government identified as problematic - and dangerous, insofar as it renders youth vulnerable to "political manipulation"- yet it pandered to it as well.

To make its pitch, Nashi architects undertook a curious blend and set of fusions. Nashi proclaimed itself to be a movement of and by youth (an "Independent youth movement"), yet it was state-initiated. It was pro-Kremlin (above all, pro-Putin), yet not affiliated with any formal political party; indeed I found that many of the komissars I spoke with were highly skeptical even of the "party of power" Edinaiia Rossiia. Nashi skillfully mobilized the discontents of the 1990s and appealed to the sense of dispossession and outrage many provincial young people feel (Oushakine 2005) about politics, the tight relationship between political and economic elites, and enduring systems of bureaucratic privilege. In sum, despite its proximity to the Kremlin, Nashi had a pronounced populist kind of "anti-establishment" energy as well.

A prominent tactic was memory work. Linked to the Russian government's Patriotic Education goals, many Nashi campaigns involved honoring Soviet history, specifically the Great Patriotic War. Mass campaigns like "Our Victory" and "Return the Holiday" invited young people to identify with Russia's "last Great Generation" which

saved Europe from fascism. This memory work indexed more recent history also, invoking the decade of the nineties as a period of shame and national humiliation. Campaigns drew a heroic link between Nashi youth and World War Two veterans, whilst disparaging the Gorbachev generation – the "defeatists" who allowed the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia's geopolitical decline to occur, and who were thus responsible for the dislocations of the nineties. As the Nashi Manifesto puts it, "Our generation must take the wheel [*smenit' u rulia*] from the defeatist generation who rule this country. Those people who believe neither in Russia's future, nor in themselves." In this way, it both pointed to the agents of this dispossession, the liberals it deemed responsible for the nineties-era affronts and de-legitimized the contemporary protests these liberals were engaged in, characterizing the "nesystemni" oppositional coalition as an "unnatural union . . . between pseudoliberals and fascists, Westernizers and ultranationalists" (Manifesto).

Nashi's status

Russia's state-run youth projects and its youth policies more broadly have been highly controversial. In 2010, the centrist oppositional party Yabloko issued a press release to announce the following statement: "the Russian state has engaged in a discriminatory policy towards young people, and has given up on its social obligation to them. At the same time, the government is not interested in the civil development of young people, as it sees them as a threat to the existing authoritarian-bureaucratic regime." The document denounces "Oil and Gas glamor"! (*neftegazovy glamur*) as a Kremlin project, one that specifically seeks to produce docile subjects, to anethetize or "debilitate" youth and ensure their political loyalty.

This view was widely shared. Of all the state-run youth projects, people expressed particular hostility towards Nashi; despite Putin's consistently high ratings between 2000 and 2011, the Nashi movement was widely derided and despised (Lassila 2012). I found that even local state actors – people I would have assumed would speak respectfully about the movement – expressed disapproval or impatience towards it. Discussion of Nashi often elicited scornful and classed forms of disparagement among my liberal intellectual interlocutors, directed both towards the grownups who founded it and the young people who participated in it as well. They saw Nashi as other state-run youth projects as the cynical product of unscrupulous people intent on the pursuit of their own interests; ostensibly designed for less advantaged youth, these projects were just PR and their architects made promises they could not keep.

Mobilizing mechanisms and specific technologies

And yet, my research showed that between 2006 and 2010 Nashi succeeded in captivating some of its target constituents: provincially located college-bound high schoolers and lower-grade college students looking to invest their civic energies. It articulated an appealing can-do energy, and offered young people a dignified subject position as leaders, active agents (as opposed to "defeatists" and stultified bureaucrats), and worthy heirs to their World War II predecessors. I turn here to discuss some of the distinctive technologies it adopted: (1) "Street technologies" and (2) "Project design" technologies. Although these technologies overlapped to some extent, they correspond roughly to different chronological periods, where the street technologies and mass mobilizational strategies were a hallmark of the early "contentious politics" phase of Nashi (2005-2008), and project design was associated prominently with the "civil turn"

the organization took during the latter phase of its existence, in line with the "modernization" goals of the Medvedev administration (2008-2012).[22]

1) Street technologies

Nashi's hallmark mobilizing strategy was the mass rally as we've seen. Its first phase task was to undertake this new "politics of the street" I have described. Critical observers, noting the way these visibly recalled Soviet-era agitation, have viewed Nashi as a Bolshevik throwback. In their use of uniforms (T-shirts, baseball caps, and bandannas) and mass actions, Nashi rallies visually recalled Soviet era youth organization (the form itself bears Soviet ideological hallmark). But this was not your mother's Komsomol.

Nashi offered young people distinctive technologies (themselves borrowed from oppositional movements both domestic and foreign: the radical oppositional National Bolshevik Party, the "Orange" technologies deployed in the Ukraine) to occupy or take control of the streets. These frequently brought a playful repertoire; borrowing on global subcultural repertoires, its campaigns frequently contained an element of the carnivalesque. Borrowing from the NBP playbook, Nashi campaigns and flashmobs included theatrical, surrealist elements – as the opening vignette indicated, these involved curious juxtapositions and bewildering fusions (Soviet war time iconography, combined with techno music). Here, as in alter-globalization movements, we see the privileging of the ludic and the performative. At the same time as it was playful and fun, this campaign was eleborately choreographed and scripted – as I realized from my participation in the event. The brochure komissars distributed to us on the train read like a precise script for the event that was to unfold ("Ten thousand young people will present veterans with

gifts," it proclaimed). The stage where we assembled was adorned with enormous cartoonlike drawings depicting the exchange that was to take place (a beaming, crinkly-eyed elder, surrounded by young people in Grandfather Frost costumes). It was highly mass-mediated as well. TVcameras zoomed down, intruding on the view, capturing signs and snatches of youth enthusiasm, which were beamed back to us on the giant screens before us.

My ethnographic research and participation in some of these mass events revealed that these carefully staged events allowed space for agency as well. Indeed, I learned that there was frequently a curious disconnect between the campaigns' espoused goals and participants' experience of them. Many participants casually disregarded the overbearing images of state power (the Putin posters) and were often oblivious about campaigns' stated purpose and intent. I came to realize that many of the Return the Holiday participants were oblivious of the rally's stated goals. Few in my wagon bore gifts; the Indian dentistry students I traveled up with (recruited in a 'friendship' outreach initiative) had no idea we were to meet with veterans at all. Even komissar organizers were sometimes unable to enlighten me about the purpose of specific events or campaigns. But this did not mean they were empty or not meaningful. Differently positioned youth participants experienced them in different ways.

Kirill: mobilizing sovereign democracy

Kirill was a komissar who had joined Nashi at the very beginning in 2005. He became interested in our project after learning about it from his teachers and peers and offered to join our research team as a "consultant." Absorbed as he was by Nashi's focus

on "soft power" technologies, he made for an interesting interlocutor and I learned a great deal from him. Notably, he drew my attention to the peculiar transparency with which Nashi signaled its technologies and ambition to govern. One of his first Nashi events was a conference in Moscow. He submitted an abstract on "technologies of the Orange Revolution," which I learned was one of the main themes (Nashi activists explicitly studied this, along with techniques of "political communication"). At the 2006 summer camp at Lake Seliger he had attended lectures by Nashi's leading ideologues, including Nashi founder Vassily Yakemenko's session on mass campaigns – "how to create them, how to disperse them . . . how to properly plan a mass campaign." The ability to do this, he told me neutrally, "is nowadays one of the leading, one might say, stages of human development. Because if a person can bring people onto the street, it means he must be pretty strong. And these are the people who declare [*provozglasiat*] public opinion."

I interviewed Kirill in December 2006. Reflecting on the early phase of Nashi's work he explained that the priority was to work with the masses, on the streets (*s massami, na ulitsakh*). Insufficiently attuned to Nashi terminologies, I thought at first that he was referring to the social discontents that brought people (the masses) out onto the street – the dissatisfaction and concern around social benefits reform, for example, roiling forms of political contestation. "No," he corrected me, "I meant something different– control of street technology. Campaigns on the streets, a street format [*aktsii na ulitsakh, format ulichnyi*]." This was the time of the color revolutions and the Orange technologies, he reminded me. He had led a bunch of these kinds of actions, he said; one time he brought a train full of young people to Moscow from North Ossetia. Since 2008, priorities had changed, he explained, "but we don't forget about the street. The streets are

with us [*ulitsy s namy*]."

I was struck by this formulation. Here, "the street" was a kind of political resource, a site to be managed and an opportunity to demonstrate strength in numbers and the ability to amass crowds. It was curiously disassociated from any social or political issues, and from ideology as well. Kirill confirmed this. When I quizzed him about the meaning of the Holiday Returned campaign, he told me that it didn't have any ideological significance and that the veterans were beside the point. If they'd wanted to do nice things for veterans, they could have stayed in Tver'. Growing impatient with my obtuseness he shouted, "The point was that we could pull people together! One hundred thousand people–there's been nothing like it since [the Russian Revolution of] 1905! The point was – the very fact that *we could do it*!"

As I have argued elsewhere (2012a; 2015), Russia's political technologists drew on the toolkit of the democracy promotion project they disparaged as they mobilized youth. They rebranded "revolution" as something dangerous, dire and bloody (rather than the civilizing, democratizing force it was presented at in Western newspapers), and oppositional activists as "extremists," emphasizing the undesirability of the political use of the streets or politicized youth on streets (c.f. Greenberg 2014; Manning 2007). This rebranding had historical reach as Kirill's remark about 1905 reveals. Nashi materials invoked the revolutionary turbulence of the early 1900s as a dangerous historical precedent (Horvath 2011:11). They repackaged "civil society" (the cornerstone concept of 90s-era democratizing interventions) as something that presented a "solution" to the "problem" of the crowd, invoking it as something that would deflect and contain this energy.

Striking in Kirill's account is the explicit emphasis on technologies of control that was part of his training, here, presented here as unfortunate necessity, a response to the nefarious methods of social control that were part and parcel of the liberal governing project which had contributed to undermining Russia during the 1990s (the "velvet strategy" of fomenting revolution undertaken by George Soros, for example). Street technologies, as other things ("political communication" and "political PR") were hybrid technologies that drew on these resources, deployed to protect young people and equip them to withstand the political manipulation they would inevitably encounter, both from malign foreigners (Soros, agents associated with the US State Department) and from domestic "enemies within" (oligarchs who had offshore accounts, servants of capital).

Kirill's narrative reveals another aspect of this rebranding – its curiously apolitical formulation. Critics of Nashi often drew attention to the fact that many participants were casual and that they "only" showed up to receive gifts (branded items) or to get a free trip to Moscow; certainly, I observed that many of the participants in the Return the Holiday campaign skipped off early to go shopping. But perhaps this was the intent? Nashi's deployment of this "street technology" blurred and obfuscated "politics" itself. I often struggled to distinguish between costumed "activists" and costumed marketers – young people donning suits for hire on behalf of mobile phone companies or local stores. It reclaimed the form of oppositional activity, but emptied it of political and ideological content, in so doing, it contributed to the discreditation of the form itself as well.

During our last interview in June 2007 Kirill told me that Nashi had outlived its purpose. Nashi was over, he said, "because it has outlived its usefulness from within. Not

because it is successful or not successful. It is successful as long as everything is done well. And when it has played itself out, even if it is successful in principle, behold, it falls like a skeleton." He was confident that there would be a successor project. "They'll change the name and there'll be a new movement like the old one," he told me neutrally. "It's PR, it's marketing, it's all technologies. It's all just smart technologies." This insight didn't repel him, however. Despite his critique, he was poised to join another Kremlin project, "League of Equality" (*Liga Spravedlivosti*).

Masha: mobilizing affect

Masha, a twenty-year old student and former Nashi activist had a rather different vantage point on the early phase of mobilization. While Kirill spoke predominantly about the technologies, in a knowing, managerial register (the 'soft power smarts' that the movement offered him), Masha chose to speak about specific local events and the face-to-face encounters they had entailed. Her narrative brought another kind of mobilization into view for me - – the mobilization of affect and the intra-movement effect of affective solidarity that was an outcome of her participation (see also Perry date; Juris 2008).[23] Speaking to me in 2009 she told me that when she joined the movement, "mass actions" was one of the largest campaigns. The focus of this early campaign was to teach activists how to organize patriotic social events. One of the earliest local campaigns she'd engaged in was "Day after day." Young people invited veterans to a social event in the city park, she explained: "there was a dance floor, boat rides, food. And every young person was paired with a veteran; he had to spend the whole evening with them, to talk with him..etc. And because they were all together {/] sometimes they even got a little drunk [laughs] – well, our veterans are… soulful," she added, with a wry smile. "They

played on the harmonica, they sang. It was a concert for them. So, it was pleasant to do such interesting things. "

Masha spoke frequently of the relationships that propelled her – with the elders, veterans, and especially with the disadvantaged children she had encountered via her socially oriented Nashi work. Like Kirill, she had been involved in the December 2006 "Return A Holiday" campaign. However, for her, the veterans were definitely not beside the point. Indeed, she told me regretfully that she felt bad that some of them had gone home disappointed; there had not been enough gifts.

Masha spoke movingly about the emotional experience of participation in Nashi's mass campaigns. For her, participation in this state-run movement had clearly had a transformative effect. "Well," she explained, "each campaign was such a boost, a shot of adrenaline for the young people who found themselves in [it] – and if [the campaign] was extreme, well, you were left with such intense emotions! It was . . . so positive, it left you feeling so warm because you'd gone through it, not alone, but with your comrades. It was great," she told me. "There was nothing like it. Well," she added, in a wry aside that brought new valence to the rehabbed revolutionary rhetoric and technologies Kirill had earlier drawn on: "probably *revolutionaries* experience something similar when they unite and do something like this together. Even if it's absolute nonsense [*chepukha*], just a regular flash mob, where people just stand in lines and clap their hands . . . but they like it . . . [because there are so many of them]." Recalling her younger self a little ironically, her face still glowed as she recalled the experience. Indeed, although she drifted away from Nashi (she didn't quit, she explained, rather, she just stopped attending as she felt

she'd grown out of it), she maintained her commitment to the issues and spoke with appreciation of the tools Nashi had bequeathed her.

Masha was exceptional in many respects and a leader within the organization moreover, however my research suggested that rank and file members found similar meaning in it as well. I found that many were drawn by Nashi's projects to "do good" - to work with orphans, veterans or on interethnic tolerance campaign. Beyond that, the organization, or "*dvizhuka*," offered young people an attractive combination of work, fun and activism that was particularly appealing to those who came from impoverished and socially desolate rural and provincial regions (see also Arutunyan 2014; Krivonos and Fedorova 2014). [24]

Nashi campaigns deployed other "street technologies" also- technologies of "direct action" and flash mob events. These varied in ideological hue and content.

Kirill participated in some of Nashi's early "antifascist" forms of direct action (here, signaling action against ethnic intolerance). He was the leader (*rukovoditel'*) of the Tver' branch's antifascist direction and led "lessons of friendship" in schools and colleges. When I spoke with him in 2006, he had recently returned from the Russian republic of Karelia where he had been on a kind of fact-finding mission to investigate a well-publicized incident of ethnic violence. A fight had broken out in a bar in a small town, he told me, and it had resulted in sustained conflict between Chechens and ethnic Russians. Nashi bused in young people to see the consequences firsthand.

Kirill had returned to the university on fire with the "truth" he'd discovered. All was not what it seemed, he told me. The TV reports (which had referred to the violence that followed as a "pogrom" against ethnic Chechens) had shown footage of sunny

weather; however, it was raining when they arrived. “It was all a lie!” he told me. He had concluded that the resulting ethnic conflict had been stage-managed; it was a plot, the work of malign outsiders. “Someone’s gaining from it,” he said knowingly. While he didn’t know who was responsible, there was a European magnate, he told me, whose interests would be served by the expulsion of the Chechen community.

His accounts helped me better understand the place of Nashi in the “functioning civil society” Nashi’s Manifesto pledged to create. Nashi activists are furious cells, tracing leads, following threads, and trusting nobody. Beyond the opportunity to travel for advancement and study, the movement offered a distinctive kind of mobility: travel for a kind of investigative purpose. In a pro- state appropriation of flash mob technologies, Nashi bused its activists around the country to take direct action – in this case to serve as citizen- investigators.

Other forms of direct action involved opposition baiting, focused on the much-derided National Bolshevik Party (Nashi’s “Other”) or liberal groups. Employing NBP-like tactics, Nashi activists went head to head with liberal youth groups, engaging in provocative campaigns that mocked and subverted liberal positions, identities and commitments, including gender and sexual politics (Hemment 2015:193).[25]Also prominent among these provocations were the bawdy and sometimes scatological run-ins with the liberal newspaper *Kommersant,* with which it had a long-running feud. In a protest action in 2008, Nashi activists posing as *Kommersant* employees distributed toilet paper featuring the newspaper’s logo, including to parliamentarians; billboards around the city announced the paper’s new toilet paper format. An even more grotesque act was captured on film by the 2012 documentary *Putin’s Kiss:* a Nashi activist defecating on

liberal oppositionist Ilya Yashin's car.

Contemplating these forms of direct action, I am drawn to consider another dimension of these "street" technologies: their distinctively "gang" or criminal underworld flavor. As Stephenson notes, criminal slang became routinized in the 2000s; to the chagrin of liberal intellectuals, this language of the "streets" (as small gang units were known in popular parlence) was prevalent in public discourse and politicians' speech, used widely in commentaries about the regular workings of state and political life. This "lad's logic" had a rough, tough, nativist energy that we might see as a form of what Douglas Holmes (2000) has called "integralism" – home-grown, determinedly illiberal, or counter to the effete, Western emanating mode of discourse and politics that was associated with the liberal opposition.

This same nativist or integralist street energy was manifest in forms of direct action undertaken by later Nashi and Nashi splinter campaigns, such as Piggies Against and StopKham ("Stop the Boorishness!"), launched in 2009-2010. Here, a second generation of less "politically" inclined young people took to the streets to campaign against other kinds of "street" infractions (MYPLACE film 2014).[26] Moving in small groups, participants of these campaigns sought out and challenged individual violators - private vendors who sold spoiled goods, or sold alcohol and cigarettes to minors, motorists who violated traffic rules by parking or driving on sidewalks- digitally documenting their infractions to later post on social media sites. Their campaigns had some social resonance–both Piggies and StopKham tapped widespread anger about unscrupulous vendors, roadhogs, or rule breakers. They coexisted with oppositional initiatives to contest corruption and citizen direct action, such as anti-corruption blogger

Alexei Navalny came to represent. But they intersected with and mobilized forms of xenophobic populism also.[27] Recent research suggests that StopKham and Piggies often played out in racialized ways – the MYPLACE documentary captures uncomfortable standoffs between righteous ethnic Russian youth and linguistically or ethnically "marked" others – taxi drivers, shop store assistants and managers. Once again, there was a specific dynamic of appropriation here; StopKham undercut and took the edge off more oppositional protests that contested state actors' traffic violations, appropriating the protest technology formulated by the Blue Bucket Brigade.[28]

2) Project design

A second set of technologies derive more clearly from the NGO and business worlds and reveal how the Russia state harnessed tools of management consultancy and entrepreneurship. Most prominent amongst these was project design. This new technology of governance became prominent during the Medvedev-era (2008-2011) and partially displaced the "patriotic education" focus of earlier work. The streets secured, the administration turned its attention to tackling youth issues/problems by other means. Linked to "modernization" objectives of the Medvedev administration (2008-2011), the move to embrace these technologies may have been stimulated by concerns about the global economic crisis also - as all over Europe, concerns about social instability in its aftermath were intense;[29]however, project design technology percolated in Nashi as early as 2006.

Masha, the Nashi activist mentioned earlier, told me she'd attended a Nashi-run training workshop in Voronezh in 2006 on the topic of social project design (*sotsial'noe proektirovanie*), that is, projects with a social orientation. Masha explained that the

emphasis shifted after the first Seliger camp (2005), from mass campaigns, to projects. The project design training was great, she told me and it was intensive too, "three days without sleep, without rest…we studied, studied, studied… and as a result, I brought back a lot of useful information for myself." Oriented towards social issues, she found this very helpful and drew on these tools to devise local campaigns as Tver's social section leader. In our 2009 interview, she told me, "I'll tell you honestly: all that they gave me during those three days I still use to this day."

Project design technology (*upravleniia proektami*) was most prominent at Seliger 2009, the non-Nashi all-federal youth education forum for "talented" youth that I attended with several of my Russian colleagues. Echoing the logic of the international agencies that channeled funding to NGOs during the 1990s, projects were central both to the application process and to activities at Seliger. Participants needed to have one to register on the Federal Youth Affairs Agency site, and they were supposed to develop it while there. As one organizer explained to me, project design had a "special place in the program" as the key technology; it was the core of the educational program offered to participants in each eight-day thematic session. It was usually taught during the morning of each day. After that, participants could select among different "master classes" and lectures. They then had the option to compete; events culminated in a project fair, where they presented their projects to potential sponsors.

"Project Design: Create Your Tomorrow," the booklet distributed to all participants at Seliger who were coming without their own projects, offered practical steps and skills. It walked the reader through four main stages, from project development to formal presentation–four stages derived from the US management consultancy models

it drew on. But "project" represented more; the "project approach" (*proektnyi podkhod*) Seliger promotional materials promised was an enticingly new approach to life and work. It emphasized new qualities and skills for which it offered new terms – a strategic way of thinking (*proektnoe myshlenie*) – and a life stance of appealing agility and flexibility. "The person who develops his ability to effectively manage projects will lay a solid foundation for success in life!" promised Evgenii Sokolov in the lecture on project design he delivered at Seliger 2009.

These materials delivered a message of choice and mobility and made a specific empowerment pledge. As one Seliger 2009 promotional video put it, "Your approach to life will completely change. . . . You'll forget the concept of work, work as a boring necessity that begins in school and ends in the grave, along with the fear of losing work or not being able to find it. The grandiose and precise word 'project' will now define the rhythm of your life. Your social mobility will increase. You'll easily be able to move from project to project, from town to town, from country to country." At this point, the video switched to an image of a young man with his laptop on the beach. "Your connections will cause envy. Your diplomas and workbook [*trudovaia kniga*] will recede into the past . . . and you'll ask yourself–*do I really like what I am doing*?" Neither wage slave nor *sovok* (the disparaging slang term for passive, dependent Homo Sovieticus), the new subject invoked here was self-directing and dynamic, and experienced work as an aesthetic experience, as creative play. Indeed, in the image of the beach bum with his laptop, work and play blended in an intoxicating fusion.

Contra the expectations of "patriotic education," project design technology contained an individualizing logic. It placed emphasis squarely on the individual self and

on individual performance. Indeed, I learned that at Seliger 2009 winning projects were selected by teams of psychologists, who were dispatched by the organizers to observe some of the most promising volunteers in action, and to examine their skills, behavior, and conduct. Providing evidence of the wide influence of discourses and practices of individual self-improvement in Russia (Lerner 2015; Salmenniemi 2012), their evaluation focused as much on the person and their comportment as it did on the substance of the projects themselves.

Igor was a komissar active in Nashi since 2005. He was hired as an organizer (*organizator*) at Seliger 2009. When I spoke with him in 2009 he told me he had encountered this project-based way of thinking via Nashi and spoke with appreciation of the tools it had provided. "You need a system, or logistics. The movement taught me how to think about this systematically and to be able to analyze situations," he said. Igor explained to me how this training was enacted at Camp Seliger:"You need to understand that people are given an opportunity," he told me, "to sit for half an hour in front of the campfire and think: what don't I like about my environment? What can I do to change it? That's easy. And it becomes your project on which you can work. It may be, I don't know, the lack of sandboxes. . . . For example, you see children in your neighborhood climbing in construction sites, or poking around in the trash or something. And you are concerned that there's no sandbox in the yard. This is also a project! This is something you can ask for money for." Here, Igor launched into a distinctive empowerment narrative (one I recognized as a script originating in Nashi campaigns) – in which, if only young people are bold enough to approach them, the representatives of the state are enlightened enough to listen, and open to persuasion: "Lots of governors come to Seliger,"

he told me. "You can go up to them and say, 'You know, look . . .' Then you can go on the internet and see how much a playground for kids would cost, how much it would cost to build . . . and go to that person and say, 'You know, this really bothers me. . . . It's necessary.' That is a project. It is an idea you want to realize."

I was captivated by Igor's narrative and his version of project design. It was a participatory rendition that acknowledged and addressed some of Russia's serious social problems in a practical way and suggested local, community-based solutions. For the problem of isolated *babushki* who can't get to the shops, for instance, he proposed a project designed to put them in touch with their neighbors, and for the problem of derelict buildings and poor infrastructure for children, a project of building sandboxes or playgrounds in courtyards. For young people like him, project design promised a captivating path to the future. However, what of the dangers of disappointment?

Young people were urged to be impactful and innovate. More precisely, they were trained to embrace a self-directed and aesthetic form of self-making and to *perform* innovation. Yet they were dissuaded from actually doing anything very direct or that would actually involve (certainly mobilize) people. Moreover, they had little chance of ever seeing their projects enacted; I found that very few Seliger participants received sponsorship or were able to enact their projects and that the vast majority returned home empty handed. Indeed, I discovered that at Seliger 2009 prizes were awarded less frequently to projects than to *products* that could be marketed or sold.[30]

Conclusions

I have shown how the Nashi project emerged at a specific juncture; borne of a

moment of crisis, it look form as it encountered both domestic political currents and global shifts. At the same time as it drew energy, tactics and tools from domestic oppositional movements (the "non-systemic" coalitions and groups that it dueled with), it coincided and interacted with the novel and creative forms of protest and political activism that circulated globally between 2005-2012, including the horitontal networks associated with the alterglobalization movement and Occupy. In so doing, it responded to some of the same energies that propelled these alter movements, deftly spinning these currents and discontents. Russia made for a particularly innovative laboratory in terms of these mobilizational technologies, but the Russian state's preoccupations are hardly unique. Both its anxieties about youth and the tactics it has adopted are widely shared. In crafting the Nashi project, the Russian state was not merely seeking to control the domestic political field, but grappling with broader currents and issues also, responding to twenty-first-century disenchantments: cycles of economic crisis, disillusion about political liberalism, and the ever-widening gap between the affluent and the precarious under globalizing neoliberalism (Hemment 2015). It's important to situate these Putin-era political developments within this broader context and to see Russia within the context of comparative authoritarianisms or managed democracies (Penzin 2014:165; see also Robertson and Greene this volume).

But can we view Nashi as a success? Certainly, it successfully mobilized youth for the duration of its existence, rehabbing "activism" and "politics" and getting young people on the streets. However, its outcomes were ambiguous as we've seen.

I found that Putin-era youth projects such as Nashi represented a more diffuse and uncertain project of governing than critical accounts suggested. First, they did not

emanate exclusively from a unified state. Although in sync with state policy discussions, Nashi (and Yakemenko-era youth projects more broadly) were a site of chaotic productions and improvisations. There was not one unitary design center for these state-run projects, and authorship was opaque. At Seliger 2009 participants were deliberatedly trained to "innovate," which gave rise to a proliferation of projects, some only loosely associated with state goals. Indeed, the "project design" technology I have described partially accounts for the logic manifest in Nashi over time – the dynamic of moving from big bold mass rallies, to splinter projects or "autonomous movements" that deny or obfuscate their origins in Nashi.

Indeed, the "project approach" spawned not only multiple projects, but new agents with multiple and complex motivations as well (c.f Rogers 2015). Nashi's greatest legacy (one of the unintended consequences of this form of state-mobilized contention) may have been the mode of agency it instilled in the individuals who participated in it – an individualized agency that exceeded Nashi the movement. Take Igor, for example, the Nashi komissar introduced earlier. During our interview, and although we had ostensibly gotten together to talk about Nashi, Igor barely made mention of the movement. Rather, his emphasis was on the confidence and sense of agency it had fostered in him and the process of self-actualization that it had permitted. When I noted this and asked him about the role of Nashi and his relationship to it, he said, "You understand, the movement is a tool [*instrument*] that helps me; it's like a car that takes me somewhere." Like Kirill, he subordinated Nashi to his own needs.[31] In the course of my research I found that many activists were ambivalent about the organization; indeed, some youth left Nashi more critical of the state than they were docile – calling the

state/non-state dichotomy into question. (While I did not trace Kirill, Masha or my other Nashi activist interlocutors beyond 2011 and don't have data on their views or participation in the 2011-2013 protests, my sense is that their paths vary. I know some of them – including the most ambitious - experienced bitter disillusion in the aftermath of Seliger 2009 and my sense is that their Nashi past would not have not prevented them from participating in the protest waves).

The case of Masha reveals another outcome. As we have seen, she emphasized the collective nature of her participation in Nashi and the experience of solidarity through belonging. Her participation was transformative insofar as it generated a form of affective solidarity rather than ideologically based sense of belonging. Her participation in mass campaigns resulted in a form of affective excess, or overspill energy that was not contained by Nashi.

In sum, my research revealed that while the state certainly set the frame, it did not determine what went on within it. Young people claimed these spaces and experienced them as their own. Their participation in Nashi articulated with other, informal and semi-formal forms of sociality, such as student governance structures, networks of acquaintances and friends. Youth participants of Nashi engaged in the organization on a temporary basis, for career-building reasons or to pursue broader projects of self-realization. While some spoke with gratitude about the benefits Nashi had brought them, many others downplayed its significance.

We're often presented with a vision of two diametrically opposed groups in Russia - the lumpen red-brown provincial masses vs liberal and Western-oriented urban intellectuals, or creative classes. My ethnographic research and other recent scholarship

contradict this characterization, offering insight into a more complex terrain.[32] Upon closer inspection, pro-state and oppositional groups and their members resembled each other to a surprising degree. Not only did they embrace similar repertoires, goals and mobilizational tactics (Lyttkainen 2016; Robertson 2011; Sperling 2015), [33] but their participants expressed similar motivations at times also.[34] Research suggests that they were distinguished less by ideology than socio-economic status and geographic location (while Nashi was a project oriented to less well-resourced provincial youth, liberal youth groups like Oborona comprised wealthier urban college educated youth (Lyttkainen 2016). Indeed, during the early "streets" phase of mobilization, boundaries between pro and anti-state groups were quite porous (Lyttkainen 2016:).[35]The mirroring and borrowing of tactics that oppositional and pro-state youth groups undertook between 2005-2011 and these proximities suggests a dynamic and relationship that the formulation "cooptation" does not fully capture. The Nashi case suggests the mutually constituting relationship between the state/authorities and forms of resistance.

Nashi was finally disbanded in the spring of 2012 following the mobilization that led to its final discrediting:[36] Nashi supporters clashed in Moscow with protesters during December 2011, confirming negative opinions of the organization and sealing its fate. In the aftermath of 2011, it appears that mass mobilization or *protest* is out of favor in Russia again again – the result both of state repression and general disenchantment about it as a tactic with potential to bring about change. Since 2012, both the Russian state and those contesting it have abandoned mass mobilizational efforts to pursue different strategies. The Russian state's actions in Crimea and Ukraine had a demobilizing effect on many people and served to "split oppositional scenes" (Gabowitsch 2016; see also

Robertson and Greene 2016) - depressingly, the "Russian Spring" is not a grassroots progressive/anti-authoritarian groundswell, but a militarized conflict based on the assertion of exclusionary solidarity instead. But at the same time, there is evidence of new political forms taking shape: small, local actions, manifestations that often eschew the designation "political" and new, diffuse mass mobilizations with broad geographic reach (Clement 2015; Gabowitsch 2016).

The blurring I have noted between state/non-state, bottom-up and top-down grows ever more pronounced in these new movements and campaigns. Mischa Gabowitsch (2016) takes up this topic in his analysis of the horizontal, leaderless "copycat" movements that have proliferated in Russia since 2011. These movements are ideologically diverse (he examines the liberal-oriented Strategy-31 protests for the freedom of assembly, the ultra-nationalist temperance movement "Russian Runs," and the "Immortal Regiment" commemorative processions), but share similar characteristics. At the same time as they draw on the "network" technologies embraced by protest movements, they are also "parasitical on, or a response to" the repertoires designed by the state, engaging participants who are frequently oblivious to their ideological points of origin.[37] Within some of these, we can see how Nashi's imprint lingers. Grimm and Pilkington argue that Russian Runs shares many characteristics of Nashi projects and strongly resembles the Nashi offshoot project "Run with me' (Begi za mnoy) that emerged in 2009. Despite this strong resemblance, it has a highly ambiguous relationship to the state (Grimm and Pilkington 2015). In an interesting mutation, some of these new post-2011 mobilizations make satirical commentary about the form of political protest and mobilization itself (for example, the so-called "monstrations," which have the energy

of *stiob*, of "nano protests" where people staged protests with small toys holding tiny protest signs during 2012).[38] As the innovation and mutations continue, we need to keep our eyes on this space.

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[1] See for example Lucas 2008; Wilson 2005; Baker and Glasser 2005.

[2] This paper draws on research undertaken between 2006-2011 in Tver', Russia, with the support of the National Science Foundation, IREX and the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research. I am grateful for the support of my research colleagues, faculty and students associated with the Center for Women's History and Gender Studies, Tver' State University, led by Dr. Valentina Uspenskaya.

[3] Anthropological scholarship has revealed international democracy promotion to be a highly dynamic field that picks up resources across the trajectory of its emplotment, with actors moving in and out of NGO work, to alter-oppositional movements. See for example Jessica Greenberg (2014), Maple Razsa (2015) on the disenchantments it has engendered amongst former participants.

[4] This Nashi precursor project (described as a "pilot project" by many of the Nashi activists I spoke with), was founded by Vasily Yakemenko in 2001. For a comparison between IM and Nashi and the relationship between them, see Lassila (2012).

[5] Squeezed out of formal political space after the 2003-2004 election cycle, the opposition proved adaptive and began to form horizontal coalitions. The Other Russia coalition (founded 2006) brought together an ideologically diverse set of opponents; Solidarity was later founded in 2008 by some of the same actors; Oborona, the leaderless horizontal youth movement was founded in 2005.

[6] Nashi's inaugural rally brought 60,000 youth from all over Moscow to march in commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Soviet victory over the Nazis (or "fascists" as they are more commonly recalled).

[7] Some of the most controversial of these were the campaigns against international diplomats - against the British ambassador Tony Brenton (2006) and against the Estonian ambassador (2007) in protest against the Estonian decision to relocate the Bronze Soldier war memorial in Talinn, which depicted Soviet losses in World War II. These "militant" acts led to condemnation by representatives of the EU and NATO (Mijnssen 2014, 117). Nashi was blamed for other more serious actions, most notably the savage beating of liberal journalist Oleg Kashin in 2011 (Kashin himself pointed his finger at Nashi). This suggestion of the organization's involvement in gang-like forms of retribution explains the powerfully negative reactions of the intelligentsia towards it (Stephenson 2015).

[8] Lassila attributes this dynamism in part to the movement's inevitable propensity to "fail" communicatively – that is, it was successful only for as long as it looked to be a movement of and by youth; when it's "state-ness" became manifest, people moved away.

[9] "Run With Me/ Begi za mnoy'" (promoted healthy lifestyles), 'Vse doma', 'All houses' (issues of housing and communal services), 'Piggy's Against'/'Khryushi protiv' (control of the sale of expired products in food stores), "StopHam, "a campaign against illegal car parking (Krivonos and Fedorova 2014).

[10] In part due to the squeeze on formal political space in 2003-2004, youth movements burgeoned. These included nationalist-oriented groups such as the Eurasian Union of Youth (headed by Alexander Dugin), the youth organization of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky), leftist groups such as the Union of Communist Youth, the National Bolshevik Party and the Vanguard of Red Youth, as well as liberal-oriented ones. The National Bolshevik Party was the most prominent oppositional youth movement. Founded in 1994, it had an extensive network that extended to many provincial Russian cities. For discussion of this period see Robertson (2009; 2011).

[11] For example, the oppositional youth coalition Oborona, which was inspired by the Orange revolution and founded by youth activists from Yabloko, SPS and others, adopted the symbolism of the color revolutions that were controversially spreading through postsocialist space (the raised fist symbol used by the Serbian and Ukrainian pro-democracy movements Otpor! and Pora!) See Lyytikainen (2016).

[12] Horvath (2011) characterizes the mood and perception of "imminent revolutionary threat" of this moment. While the opposition issued a vote of no confidence in the administration, erstwhile Kremlin allies (including St. P Valentina Matvienko and Patriarch Aleksei II) joined their critique of law 122. Rodina party leader Rogozin went on hunger strike, and released an open letter to Putin warning of the reform's revolutionary consequences (2011:8).
[13] The NBP has played a crucial role here, as Robertson notes (2011). See also Horvath (2015).
[14] Horvath (2011:16) draws attention to contention about Nashi among Russian political elites, some of whom were deeply skeptical about the risks it presented. For example, Federation Council Chairman Sergei Mironov likened Nashi to the Maoist "Red Guards." Indeed, the Nashi project only gained political currency and support after the Orange revolution; it took this crisis for the project to gain political favor.
[15] Prilepin's "new realism" (*Novyi Realizm*) is a genre that seeks to challenge the predominantly postmodernist aesthetic of the Moscow literary establishment (regarded as complacent and politically ineffectual, complicit with the political administration it disparages).
[16] Notably, NBP co-founder and Eurasian ideologist Aleksandr Dugin drew close to the Putin administration at this time and has played a key role since then as an expert consultant for the political establishment.
[17]Beyond Nashi, youth were mobilized to participate in pro-state rallies by other means. University administrators called upon students to participate in Edinaia Rossiia events in Tver' and other cities, for example.
[18] On the status of class as a category in postsocialist state see Salmenniemi (2012); a Kalb (2009); Ost (2005). Indeed, as Salmenniemi has noted, Putin-era political parties downplay class to emphasize Russian "unity" (see Salmenniemi 2012).

[19]The State Patriotic Education Program, founded in 2001, engaged several ministries in a project to increase patriotic feeling among young people. "Modernization" goals are most clearly expressed in a 2002 order: *Prikaz: O Kontseptsii modernizatsii rossiiskogo obrazovaniia na period do 2010 goda.* As Doug Blum notes, Russia's youth policy of this period manifested a tension between the demand for modernity and normalcy (civil society and democratic legitimacy) and a unique national path ("control, stability and a guaranteed normative order" (2006:96). These two programs are expressive of this tension.

[20] A 2005 policy document (*Strategy of State Youth Policy in the Russian Federation*) names the following issues as most pressing youth problems: ethnic intolerance; unemployment/social marginalization; low marriage rate; housing crisis; demographic situation (low birthrate); and crucially, "the danger of an apolitical orientation (apolitichnost')," "which leaves young people vulnerable to political manipulation."
[21] Yurchak discusses how during late socialism, the figure of the "activist" was regarded as pathological (2005:103), frequently contrasted with "normal" people who kept away from politics. Exploring the topic of political mobilization in the 2005-2011 period from another angle, Karine Clement examines how this sentiment still prevails. Indeed, she classifies "ordinary people" as those who avoid public, collective action and find it distasteful (2015:213).
[22] Not to say that the political challenge was over. The opposition continued to morph during the Medvedev administration, as exemplified in the Strategy 31 initiative (another broad coalition, in which NBP leader Limonov played a leading role in establishing).
[23] This theme is prominent in contemporary social movements scholarship; Elizabeth Perry has earlier written on "emotion work" in the Chinese revolution, "moving the masses" (get reference).
[24] Krivonos and Fedorova (2014) also note the affective dimension of belonging in Nashi. They report that Nashi activists asserted the category "dvizhukha" to describe their activities, defines as "an active and interesting passtime in the company of other young people." The term also often implies civic motivation.
[25] See also Lyytkainen (2016) Sperling (2015) for textured accounts of these stand-offs.
[26] Recent research confirms that participants of Nashi offshoot projects (Piggies Against, StopKham) saw themselves as apolitical actors, engaged in diverse forms of civic activity. The documentary film (associated with the MYPLACE research project, Hilary Pilkington PI and directed by Dmitry Omel'chenko) "*Our Former Ours*" confirms and illustrates this well. (https://myplaceresearch.wordpress.com/documentary-our-former-ours-the-nashi-youth-movement/). See also Krivonos and Fedorova (2014).
[27] See Atwal and March (2012) for discussion of Nashi's ambivalent relationship to nationalism.

[28] Balmforth reported that Stopkham received grants from the Kremlin of 4 million rubles in 2013 and 6 million rubles in 2014 (http://www.rferl.org/content/nashi-stopkham-kremlin-traffic-violators/26857904.html).
[29] Horvath notes that there was great anxiety about the potential fallout and the potential mobilizations that might ensue (2015:585). Indeed, this period saw a renewed round of "dueling protests," as Edinaiia Rossiia (prompted by calls from Surkov) held pro-state rallies to counteract oppositional assemblies (for example, the Communist party announced of a "Day of Protest" on January 31, 2009, in response to the government's anti-crisis measures. Indeed, a new round of oppositional mobilizations did indeed take place at this time – the first Strategy 31 demonstration took place in January 2009.
[30] Winning projects at Seliger 2009 included a dog-waste disposal system, sponsored by a dog food company; a nicotine-free cigarette, and a biodegradable bag.

[31] In this, Nashi was on trend with social movements more broadly. Digital technology has effected profound transformations in social movements and political engagement itself, transforming it into more of an "individualized" than a collective form of activity (see Gabowitsch 2016:3).
[32] Ilya Matveev (2014) argues that this "myth of two Russias" is profoundly disabling. The purported "culture gap" (between middle class urbanites and lumpen provincial or rural people) is an ideology that serves Kremlin insofar as it obfuscates shared socio-economic interests, renders forms of protest illegible and hinders political alliances.
[33] Valerie Sperling (2015) documents the political use of gender, sexuality, sexism, and homophobia by both pro-state and oppositional political youth groups. In juxtaposing the views of Nashi komissars and Youth Yabloko, Oborona and We, she reveals significant similarities in tactics and repertoires.

[34] For example, the desire to "activate" a purportedly passive youth was expressed by Skinhead groups as well, according to Pilkington (2011). Oppositional youth group Oborona held annual summer camps ("shadow camps") Partizan, at the same time as Nashi met at Lake Seliger (Lyttkainen 2014:129).
[35] Lyytkainen reports that it was not until 2007 that Oborona decided to exclude people who were active in pro-Kremin groups from joining it. Prior to this, things were porous and permeable and there were forms of cooperation between these ostensibly irreconcilable camps. I do not mean to suggest that disenchantment about globalization or US hegemony is a uniquely "lumpen" concern. Indeed, the National Bolshevik Party is interesting to contemplate in this connection. Although it is frequently remembered (and represented as) a movement of disaffected socio-economically marginal youth, its original membership comprised middle class urban anarchists and leftists who identified with NBP founder Limonov's writings and punk aesthetic (Fabrizio Fenghi, personal communication).
[36] Its disbanding may have also had to do with the declining fortunes of its founder-leaders. Both Yakemenko and Surkov were reassigned in aftermath of the fallout of the election protests. Surkov was reassigned to dep PM for economic modernization in Dec 2011, his protegee Yakemenko quit as head of Federal Youth affairs ministry in June 2012.
[37] In his assessment, while vulnerable to state cooptation or domestication, these ambiguous movements have "subversive" potential.
[38]In December 2011, a flashmob deploying small plastic toys (from Kinder eggs) took place in the northern city of Apatity when protesters were denied permission to rally by the local authorities (https://www.rt.com/news/toys-rally-fraud-permission-523/). The trend spread through many Russian cities during 2012.

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