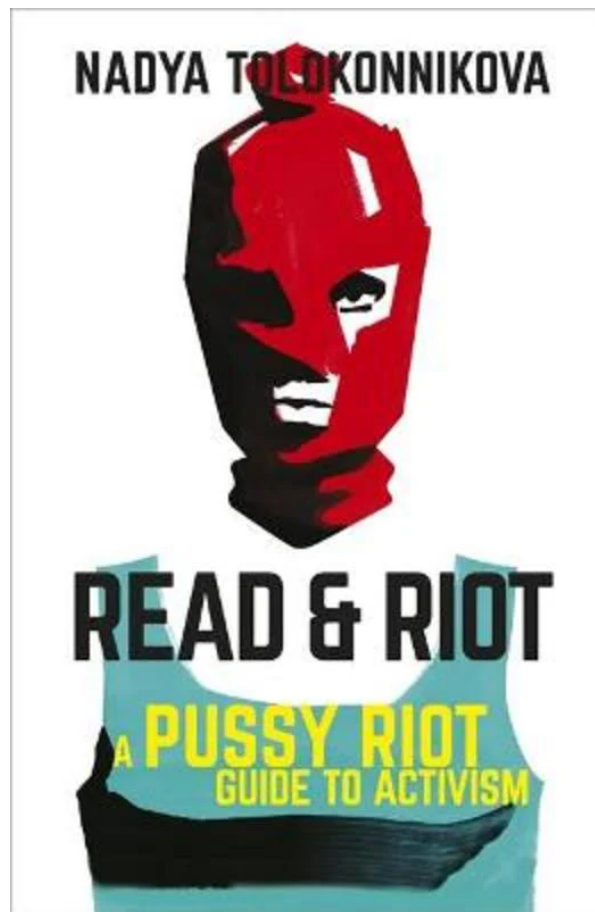


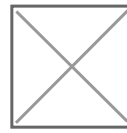
REVIEW

**“Seduce and let yourself
be seduced into radical
questioning” — A Review
of “READ&RIOT” by
Nadya Tolokonnikova**

by Anna Major



Nadya Tolokonnikova is a Russian artist and political activist. In 2011, she founded the feminist protest and performance art group Pussy Riot, which won the Woody Guthrie Prize in 2023. *Read and Riot: A Pussy Riot Guide to Activism*



"Read & Riot" by Nadya Tolokonnikova

(HarperOne, 2018), also published as *Rules for Rulebreakers: A Pussy Riot Guide to Protest* is a guerilla guide calling for revolution. This is a love letter to this work on radical protest and political resistance.

Nadya! I'm in love with you!

(Book review/ love letter / call for introspection + activation)

Dear Recipient Name,

I found Nadya on the internet, although I was always an art enthusiast and had heard of *Pussy Riot* in my teenage years but I didn't care much for politics back then. They seemed cool but distant and too weird. She appeared on my horizon again through her collaboration with Judy Chicago, burning Putin's head, which I thought was a great idea, so I typed her name into Google, definitely incorrectly. Seeing the title of her book I thought, wow, cool, I want to be more politically active, and I've got a little Putin of my own to fight, so I've got to check this out, but oh boy, I had no idea what a ride I was in for... I'm not exaggerating when I use the word *Love* — reading this book is an experience, newly found excitement, attachment, understanding, and a pink cloud descending upon one's horizon when dreaming about what one might make the future into being.

Like the chilly, fresh air filling up my lungs on a late October morning, reading this book starts the circulation of fresh oxygen through my veins. I am reading but I feel like you are here on my couch, Nadya. We are sharing my favorite orange-scented tea with a beautiful deep reddish colour, and you are talking to me. The tone of this book is refreshingly personal and direct, none of that "this is a book so in the effort of being precise it shall be describing the *Thing* through the intellectual lens of making it so complicated that it becomes absolute nonsense." After the first 18 pages I wish I had grown up with your father, I wish we had shared your mother's womb, my heart is beating fast with the excitement of the possibility of a new perspective. One in which my sensitivity breeds courage and my hesitant, ever changing desires plant seeds of good deeds. The radically empowering thought of being a political pirate — opening the chapter with quotes from Villon, Foucault and Thomas Paine

— is one which we are in desperate need of re-inhabiting. A beautifully woven political, philosophical, and most of all, again, personal chapter, connecting the need for the discovery of the unknown in and outwards from one's skin, staying suspicious of all limitations and in the midst of rebellion, having the support of a committed, trusting community.

All my life I disliked being told what to do. Not because I'm stubborn or smug but because trying to force a method on someone takes away what makes life fun and meaningful: the discovery. Through some magic I never quite understood myself, my instinct, the contractions of my stomach, which signal how to do and be my way, has been strong enough to survive the post soviet Hungarian *educational* system, the mentioning of which is usually accompanied by an awkward laugh amongst ourselves as Hungarians. There is so much in that chuckle: the bitterness and the pain of knowing full well that we all have been put in chains and had our wings shaved off generations ago, knowing that we knew all the way through what was happening but set through it like well-behaved dogs. The generational trauma and dogma of having to hold up the status quo runs too deep for us to start standing up now, or so we think. I felt otherwise, since the day I was born. The abuse of alcohol and untreated mental illness, low wages, racial divides and lack of infrastructure and healthcare has broken a nation into thinking they were powerless, abused children, now as adults still having no other option but to feel sorry for themselves, live out a life of victimhood and die an ugly death.

As we talk further, and I get to ask my questions, in my growing excitement I curl my feet under myself and put my mug down, so I can gesture, and gasping for air I ask: Could the stone of self-imposed suppression my bloodline has been carrying through generations, which is heavily weighing down my heart, be lifted so easily? Do I really have the option to not continue the painful and fruitless attempts to force myself through unfitting molds? To constantly re-invent myself, say no to working long hours in exchange for my well-being, and not only that I don't have to be ashamed of it but I get to be proud?

Yes, yes, yes and yes! — you scream, with the absolute joy of connection between the minds, knowing your efforts that have gone into staying yourself, staying alive, writing your book, are like the spores of mushrooms carried by the wind, finding their fertile ground to spread and grow.

“Tears brought my courage back” — you say, and I feel the truth of your words in my bones. My compassionate, open heart fosters the steps of courage, full acceptance of my sometimes silly, sometimes ridiculous, therefore rarely respected but always wholehearted nature is my fertile soil of my strength.

This book is exactly what it promises to be, from a veteran Russian-American artist-activist to you, your guide on how to do something/your thing/your part. It is sensitive and cohesive; if you are in need of inspiration, fresh air, and some encouragement to fully inhabit the thought that you can and should do all that you can, pick it up! Now is a better time than ever. Death is just around the corner, let that thought be something that shakes your cells out of their 100-year-long sleep. We have to stir up the shit, that is up to our plum and rosy bottom lips, *and may even swallow some*, in order to free our limbs and rise above. Fuck, shit, fuck, I am so angry I'm sweating. You all know better, but you've got to go through the tears of courage. Start inwards, stay soft in the face of hardship, and for fuck's sake, don't let go of your own hands.

“Major people’s movements don’t work according to simple linear logic (I give you one dollar, you give me one piece of justice). The nonlinear logic of these social movements requires activists to be attentive, sensitive, grateful and open-minded creatures. They are pirates and witches. They believe in magic.” (p.11. Tolokonnikova, 2018)

Being a pirate, believing in magic, Nadya you are giving me back my wings. I spread them with a cheeky smile, and I repeat to myself, “I am a pirate, I have agency, and I shall use it.”

With suspicious regards,

majoranna