

RE Constructing

RUSSIA

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Media and politics in the nineties (summary)

- ▶ New political system
- ▶ Transformation of the media system
- ▶ Social reality construction
- ▶ **New Russian identity**

Timeline

- **1985** Perestroika and glasnost introduced
- **1990** First media law, elections. *Mass media are privatized by the journalists.*
- **1991** Boris Yeltsin elected, end of USSR
- **1993** New Constitution, Duma elections - *New political system introduced.*
- **1995** First Chechen war, Duma elections
- **1996** Boris Yeltsin is reelected. *New media system is constructed. Media wars begin.*

Timeline

- **1998** Debt crisis, Primakov appointed prime minister. *New identity is emerging.*
- **1999** Primakov dismissed. *Explosions in Moscow, Dagestan invaded, Second Chechen war begins. Putin appointed prime-minister.*
- **1999-2000** Parliamentary elections. “*Unity*” wins. New Year - Yeltsin resigns. War hero Putin gets the best spot - *wins elections easily.*
- **2000** Attempted takeover of television - Gusinsky jailed, Berezovsky fights. *What next?*



Soviet propaganda system

- Highly centralized
- Newspaper-based (political language)
- Strong radio
- Propagandist television
- Control through social institutions
- Easily avoided, yet ritualized
- Non-seductive

Glasnost-oriented self-liberating propaganda machine

Economic and democratic reforms are introduced. Gorbachov strives to be popular. To overcome the resistance of the CPSU bureaucracy he has to become the **president of the USSR.**



Censorship is abolished.
Archives are opened up.
Political events are transmitted live.
Unprecedented circulation and rise of the print media.

Journalists gain influence.
Agents of order become agents of change.
End of Afghan war after heated coverage
increases journalists's self-esteem

Seeking more power and independence,
journalists embrace the "**Forth Power**" concept
that sees media essentially as an independent
social institution.

Gorbachov is interested in keeping Glasnost going. At some point the party **loses the ability to apply pressure** to journalists without provoking public outrage, inspired by the professional solidarity.

Soviet media effectively become free. What they want now is a **guarantee** that they will never be pushed around by the Communist party anymore. Yeltsin promises absolute freedom to the media.

Independent media in Russia: the golden years

- *First privatization was media privatization.* In 1990-1991 most of the printed press was re-registered by the Russian government
- *An alliance with Boris Yeltsin was established.* He'd keep communists away and promote reforms - the media would support him.
- As the Soviet social system collapsed, this support became vital. Media were simply the *most important institution in the society.*



Russian identity - ?

Independent media in Russia - the end

- With the liberalization of prices paper and delivery costs increased while salaries decreased. Circulation crumbled. *Television assumed the role of the most important medium.*
- Committed to market reforms and supporting Yeltsin policies in spite of crisis, the printed press lost popularity and influence. *They could no longer swing opinion through editorials.*
- Boris Yeltsin decided to disregard the opinion of the liberal journalist establishment and started the Chechen war. *Media counter-attacked, but had to yield out of fear of Communist victory in the elections.*
- War provoked crisis and purge on state TV channel. Although the war was stopped, the media were subjugated and used as an *instrument in the presidential elections of 1996.*

Presidential Elections, 1996



- The effects of media attacks were devastating - Yeltsin's rating stood at 6% in the fall of 1995. No easy solutions: economy is in crisis.
- What is impossible in reality is possible in TV-virtually. TV is viewed like a stage where drama can be presented. American experts help.
- Control over TV, fear of Communists, sabotage and carefully staged appearances before the public secured success in the elections.

The election results:

The businessmen who supported the Boris Yeltsin campaign and invested heavily in the media were reimbursed before and after:

Vladimir Gusinsky: NTV channel + investment for satellite TV

Boris Berezovsky: Sibneft oil Corp + control over first channel ORT

Vladimir Potanin was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and engineered the loans-for-bonds privatization scheme.

Media-political system was established:

< Huge media holdings were assembled by politicized capital. Specialists in political technologies became part of the team.

< Political system was structured along the lines of media holdings, where parties became more like brands, repackaged for every campaign from the assortment of political actors.

Media-political system

Politicized media holdings co-exist with commercial media. The structure of the media system consists of four layers:

1. Central TV and radio networks are controlled by the state and politicized capital.
2. Commercial media are independent, although sometimes involved in partnerships.
3. Most of the regional press and TV stations are controlled by the regional administrations, although some are commercial and independent.
4. The Internet is controlled by no one, but also goes through the concentration of ownership.

Central TV and regional media exert decisive influence on the outcome of elections. Commercial media strive for attention, so they are predictable and usually can be used in media campaigns. They *provide the stage and shape the formats of the political spectacle*. If mishandled, they get to write their own versions of events - and the effect of this might be devastating.

McLuhan Galaxy

The prevalence of the TV over print media and the book leads to dramatic rupture with the Gutenberg Galaxy.

“ Because of the low definition of TV, McLuhan argued, viewers have to fill in the gaps in the image, thus becoming more emotionally involved in the viewing <...>. Such involvement does not contradict the hypothesis of least effort, because TV appeals to the associative/lyrical mind, not involving the psychological effort of information retrieving and analyzing... ” -

Manuel Castells, *The Rise of The Network Society*, 1996

From ‘public sphere’ to public scene

Instead of a coherent idea system that books and printed media could produce, television introduced the new mindset .

“Typography has the strongest possible bias towards exposition: a sophisticated ability to think conceptually, deductively and sequentially; a high valuation of reason and order; an abhorrence of contradiction; a large capacity for detachment and objectivity; and a tolerance for a delayed response. <...> entertainment is supra-ideology of all discourse on television. No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure.” -

Neil Postman,

Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business, 1985

Evolution of the media-political system

1997 The “Young reformers team” government

1998 Media wars, *Svyazinvest* case: Soros and Potanin against Berezovsky and Gusinsky

1999 Restructuring of the media-political system along the new lines - Kremlin Vs. Luzhkov-Primakov.

Heavy political investment in the media on the eve of elections.



2000

- **Primakov dismissed**
- **Brief tenure of Stepashin**
- **Putin appointed Prime Minister**
- **Explosions in Moscow**
- **Dagestan attacked by rebels**
- **The Second Chechen war begins.**

Unity Vs. Fatherland All Russia Putin Vs. Primakov



- Central TV networks (ORT, RTR, TV6)
- Berezovsky newspapers

- NTV of Gusinsky, TV-Center of Luzhkov
- Moscow-based newspapers



New Russian identity:
strong state, law enforcement,
patriotism, nationalism
mono-culturalism



Contributions:

Luzhkov invests city funds into the restoration of Christ the Savior Church

War in the Balkans (NATO action) - Primakov turns the plane back

Chechen war (rebels attack) - Putin decides to face the challenge and stop terrorism

Fight over TV

- Gusinsky jailed NTV, NTV+ (satellite)
- Berezovsky O R T
- Commercial printed press almost free



Cannot control the Internet

Gutenberg galaxy (print media) - **public sphere.**

McLuhan Galaxy (broadcasting) - **public scene.**

*Interactive computer-mediated communication can be introduced as **the playing field.***

Global Village (can see, can feel) is replaced by the global city, a **Cosmopolis** in the making - a place where the territory is organized in distinctly urban fashion - with places to meet and ways to interact. At some point the organizing role of the net even surpasses the traditional ways, time and space. It is suddenly **a space on its own right.**

Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*
 "A bleak, dystopian, rain-soaked future."

*WHAT
SHOULD THE
RUSSIAN
IDENTITY
BE LIKE?*



A photograph of a large crowd gathered in a city square, likely during a festival or celebration. The background features historic European-style buildings with gabled roofs and windows. The text is overlaid on the image in three distinct colors and fonts.

→ EMBRACE
PLURALITY

→ DISCOVER NEW
ROOTS

→ CELEBRATE THE
DIFFERENCES

= THE END =