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978-0-521-19516-4 - Cultures of Power in Post-Communist Russia: An Analysis of Elite Political Discourse

Michael Urban

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Cultures of Power in Post-Communist Russia

In Russian politics reliable information is scarce, formal relations are of relatively little significance, and things are seldom what they seem. Applying an original theory of political language to narratives taken from interviews with thirty-four of Russia's leading political figures, Michael Urban explores the ways in which political actors construct themselves with words. By tracing individual narratives back to the discourses available to speakers, he identifies what can and cannot be intelligibly said within the bounds of the country's political culture, and then documents how elites rely on the personal elements of political discourse at the expense of those addressed to political community. Urban shows that this discursive orientation is congruent with social relations prevailing in Russia and helps to account for the fact that, despite two revolutions proclaiming democracy in the last century, Russia remains an authoritarian state.

MICHAEL URBAN is Professor of Politics at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He is the author of numerous books including *The Rebirth of Politics in Russia* (Cambridge, 1997) and *Russia Gets the Blues: Music, Culture and Community in Unsettled Times* (2004). He has frequently commented on Russian affairs on radio and television in the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia.

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For Veronica, one more time.

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Acknowledgments

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Note on transliteration

I have followed the standard British form for transliterating the Cyrillic alphabet into the Russian one. Hence, names such as “Yeltsin” that are regularly used in the popular press are rendered here as “El’tsin.” The rare exceptions to this rule concern those Russians who have adopted a particular transliteration of their own names: thus, for instance, “Alexei” instead of “Aleksei.”