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Blending first-hand accounts of grassroots politics with an original theory of social relations under communism, this book seeks to explain one of the seminal events of this century: the rebirth of politics in Russia amid the collapse of the USSR. The authors trace the process from the pre-political period of dissident activity, through perestroika and the appearance of political groups and publications, elections, the formation of political parties and mass movements, counter-revolution and *coup d'état*, the victory of democratic forces and the organization of a Russian state; to the struggle of power in the post-communist epoch, the violent end of the first republic and the contentious relations engulfing its successor. By focusing on the popular forces which accomplished Russia's political rebirth, rather than the reforms of the Soviet establishment, this book offers an original perspective on this critical period.

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# The rebirth of politics in Russia

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For Mili and Brownie

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## Preface

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This book got its start in Moscow during the ebullient spring of 1991. Still as fresh, hopeful and innocent as spring itself, political life had sprouted forth again in Russia, bringing to a close that seventy-year political ice-age, communism. In the face of that, it dawned on me and my colleagues – Vyacheslav Igrunov and Sergei Mitrokhin – that someone needed to write this story and that we might as well be the ones to attempt it. Ironically, however, the subject of our concern soon became the undoing of our collaboration as politics demanded more and more of the working lives of my Russian partners until autumn 1993 when, following their successful campaign for seats in the State Duma, it claimed them completely. Although the writing thus fell to me, they continued to participate in the project throughout: first, by composing segments for chapters 2, 4–6 and 8 that I have translated, reworked and blended into the text; and, second, by commenting on the draft chapters that I had produced, pointing out my errors, suggesting alternative perspectives on one or another question, sharing their knowledge and acumen with me. As such, the first-person plural pronoun has been used in this book to record that degree of collaboration that we managed to sustain.

Our study proceeds along two parallel lines. Along the first of these, we sketch Russia's political rebirth in broad strokes, offering an interpretation of that process that draws on structural, organizational and communicative perspectives to frame it in interactive terms. In our view, this topic can be neither exhausted nor explained by consulting the preferences, projects, calculations, actions and reactions of the individuals participating in it. However important these might be, we repeatedly detect another 'layer' of politics into which they would all dissolve or, alternatively, out of which they have all been constituted. This 'layer' is nothing more nor less than the interaction among the participants themselves that – perhaps counter-intuitively – begets those preferences, projects and so forth in the first instance, as well as in subsequent ones.

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Along the other line, we provide relatively thick descriptions of a number of key episodes that reinforce our broad interpretative strokes with fine details. These situate the concept of interaction in the concrete, often disclosing quite unexpected moments in which the content of actions seems to have little, if anything, in common with actors' (original) intentions, but appears as something supplied by others in the web of their mutual relations. In this respect, we have occasion to explore a number of phenomena often regarded as 'givens' in the study of politics – among them, actors' identities and interests – and believe that these explorations shed critical light both on those phenomena themselves and on our accustomed ways of apprehending them. While conscious of the fact that we remain a long way from providing adequate answers to the questions attendant on the origins, formation and adaptation of identities and interests, excursions into the problem of politics *ex nihilo* chart unusual terrain, rich in implications for the ways in which we think about politics generally.

Unlike a great many studies of Soviet, and now Russian, politics that have focused on governing elites and, more recently, on mass opinions and attitudes, our attention is directed primarily toward a political society whose boundaries can loosely be drawn according to those alternative foci. Political society represents that interactive 'space' in which the affairs of state and the concerns of citizens are publicly mediated. Its ceaseless squabbles and solemn acts of solidarity infuse the political world with distinctions, purpose, intelligibility and meaning. The book's organization divides our topic into four parts, each prefaced by a brief introduction to the chapters included in it. The first and fourth parts serve as 'bookends' – one devoted to the pre-political period, the other to a consideration of the political order that has begun to take shape in Russia – while the two parts thus enclosed constitute the heart of our study, the rebirth of politics itself. Consequently, those readers whose interests pertain only to our central topic can read the book accordingly, skimming or skipping the theoretic elaborations set out particularly in chapters 1 and 12. With respect to terminology, readers will note that we have generally used the names assumed by the actors themselves. Hence, we employ terms such as 'democrats' or 'patriots' to refer to those respective political forces, leaving the issue of authenticity – Are these people *really* democratic or patriotic? – to the judgement of others.

Speaking for my partners, I would like to acknowledge some of the people and institutions whose assistance has made those book possible. In that regard we owe a special debt of gratitude to Andrei Berezkin and Aleksei Kuz'min who provided moral support, critical skills, helpful



suggestions and – in Andrei's case – the data appearing in Table 6.2. Our thanks go, too, to another groups of scholars who actively participated in one or more of the three seminars conducted in Moscow and Berkeley at which our work in progress was presented and discussed. That list includes: George Breslauer, Marc Garcelon, Vladimir Gel'man, Gavin Helf, Il'ya Kudryavtsev, Galina Luchterhandt, Andrei Melville, Nikolai Petrov, Vera Pisareva, Marina Razorenova, Leonid Smirnyagin and Lucan Way. We are likewise grateful to colleagues who read and commented on portions of various drafts of this study: Victoria Bonnell, Valerie Bunce, Georgii Derluguian, Peter Euben, M. Steven Fish, Richard Gordon, Isebill Gruhn, Oleg Khar-khordin, Richard Sakwa, Rachel Walker, Stephen White and David Willer. Throughout its duration, my wife, Veronica, has contributed to this project with word-processing, editing, critical advice and, perhaps above all, by cheerfully enduring the monologues of someone preoccupied with Russian politics that she somehow would turn into conversations. I acknowledge my debt to her in the knowledge that it cannot be repaid.

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