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**THE GLOBAL CONDITION:
LOCAL NAMES FOR UNIVERSALISM**

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Ekaterina BOLTUNOVA

**THE PRESIDENT HAS ENTERED THE BUILDING!
THE BORIS YELTSIN PRESIDENTIAL CENTER AND
MEMORIAL TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA***

In 2015, the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Center (hereafter, the Yeltsin Center) opened its doors in Yekaterinburg. The ceremony was attended by the president of Russia Vladimir Putin and the prime minister Dmitry Medvedev. This highly publicized event reignited the media and Internet debates on the role of Russia's first president Boris Yeltsin and, in a wider sense, of the 1990s in history and public memory.¹

The Yeltsin Center was created in accordance with Federal Law no. 68-FZ "On Centers of Historical Heritage of Presidents of the Russian Federation, Whose Terms in Office Have Expired." The law, adopted in 2008, stipulates

* I am grateful to the editors of *Ab Imperio*, and especially Marina Mogilner and Ilya Gerasimov, two peer reviewers, and Sergey Oushakine for their comments and insightful suggestions, and to Vladimir Makarov for his assistance in translation of the article.

¹ See, for example: V Ekaterinburge obshchestvenniki ustroili piket u "El'tsin-Tsentra" // Regnum. 2015. November 28. <https://regnum.ru/news/accidents/2023022.html>; Est' li vykhod iz istoricheskogo labirinta El'tsintsentra? // Besogon TV. 2016. No. 94. <http://www.besogon.tv/mikhalkov/119-yeltsin-center.html>; K. Dzhultaev. El'tsintsentr zapisyvayut v "inostrannye agenty" // Ura.ru. 2016. April 20. <http://ura.ru/articles/1036267676>; I. Nekrasov. Po zakazu Kremliya El'tsintsentr vyshel iz-pod udara // Ura.ru. 2016. July 5. <http://ura.ru/articles/1036268311>; Petitions to close Yeltsin center at change.org: <http://bit.ly/2CCv4yw>; <http://bit.ly/2jYz0BE>; <http://bit.ly/2CzgjML>.

that such institutions are mandatory and can never be reorganized or declared bankrupt. Their collections comprise a presidential archive, a museum, and a library, and their various activities include researching, publishing, lecturing, and charity work, and they even allow “business activity.”² The burden of financing this and all future presidential centers falls on the federal budget.³



Fig. 1. The Boris Yeltsin Presidential Center in Yekaterinburg. Front Entrance (all photos by Ekaterina Boltunova).

Conceptually, the law has borrowed a lot from the example of U.S. presidential libraries and museums. That the American precedent would become the main inspiration for the first Russian presidential memorial became clear long before it was opened, during public discussion sponsored by the charitable foundation known as the Yeltsin Center (not to be confused with the official Presidential Center). Sharing their views on the desirable outlook for the future Yeltsin memorial, public figures and scholars routinely pointed to the American commemorative tradition, which became the main frame

² Federalnyi zakon ot 13 maia 2008 g. N 68-FZ “O tsestrakh istoricheskogo naslediiia prezidentov Rossiiskoi Federatsii, prekrativshikh ispolnenie svoikh polnomochii” // Rossiiskaia gazeta. 2008. May 16. <https://rg.ru/2008/05/16/presidentsy-centry-dok.html>.

³ Ibid. Part 7.

of reference for elaborating the Russian model.⁴ Today, the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Center's official Web site even refers visitors to the sites of the center's U.S. counterparts.⁵ Such explicit mimicking of American standards in the context of a Russian state presidential memorial and in an environment of rising anti-Americanism in official rhetoric and politics can be explained by the desire to "depart from the standards of the Lenin museums," as the head of protocol under President Yeltsin, Vladimir Shevchenko has succinctly put it in an interview.⁶ Indeed, the most obvious domestic tradition of commemorating heads of state was the Soviet one (Vladimir Lenin or Joseph Stalin memorials), which celebrated idealized personalities rather than the office they held.

At first glance, once opened, the Yeltsin Center indeed resembled a U.S. presidential memorial. Typically, such a memorial is located in the place of a president's birth or the start of his political career. Yeltsin was born in the village of Butka, 150 miles east of Yekaterinburg, to which he moved in 1949 as a college student. In Yekaterinburg he became the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Committee of the Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg) region (1976) and a full member of the party's Central Committee (1981). The Yeltsin Center was thus established in Yekaterinburg. American influence is also seen in the format of the exhibition. Departing from the unemotional and monological style of the old Russian museum tradition, the center is remarkably interactive. As in U.S. peer institutions, the Yeltsin Center promotes the political legacy of the president and his cause, rather than concentrating on a hagiographic presentation of his life.

Modern museum culture is revealed in the attempt to develop a recognizable trademark for the center – a dotted pattern that covers the walls of the building and decorates museum-related production. It is referred to as "perforation" by museum managers and presumably symbolizes both Yeltsin's work in the construction industry and the center's transparency.⁷

⁴ See, for example, G. Revzin. Tsentr osmysleniia. Interview // Yeltsin Center. 2011. October 19. <http://yeltsin.crowdexpert.ru/node/233>; A. Zorin. Mirnoe osvobozhdenie. Interview // Yeltsin Center. 2011. October 5. <http://yeltsin.crowdexpert.ru/node/211>; S. Zuev. Tsentr inobytiia. Interview // Yeltsin Center. 2011. September 24. <http://yeltsin.crowdexpert.ru/node/203>.

⁵ Prezidentskie tsentry i biblioteki SShA // <http://yeltsin.crowdexpert.ru/node/137>.

⁶ V. N. Shevchenko. "A seichas politiki – melkota". Otets kremlevskogo protokola o Putine, El'tsine i Gorbacheve". Interview // Lenta.ru. 2016. October 10. https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/10/10/shevchenko_two/.

⁷ See Olia Tatarnikova. Ia rabotaiu v El'tsin Tsentre // The Village. 2017. April 25. <http://www.the-village.ru/village/business/wherework/261326-ycc>.

The museum as a whole has become a brand of sorts. Its very location in Yekaterinburg’s major business and entertainment center conveys the vision of the Yeltsin Center as an element of people’s everyday lives. Among its many facilities are a bookstore, public lecture and discussion spaces, a combined meeting/concert hall, several cafés, and restaurant called “1991” (the year Yeltsin was first elected president of Russia). As an important element of Yekaterinburg’s social landscape, the Yeltsin Center influences local economic and cultural dynamics and is in turn shaped by the interplay of many local interests. Still, it is important for the purpose of this study to underline the explicit semiotic significance of the center as a political statement and testimony of a certain type of political imaginary. Any project of such proportions backed by federal funding would stir a major controversy in the local society. The question is what additional meaning, if any, was conveyed by the model chosen for Yekaterinburg’s Yeltsin Center?



Fig. 2. A Dotted Pattern (“Perforation”) as the Center’s trademark.

Not only was the general idea of the presidential center borrowed from the United States, the museum concept of the Yeltsin Center was designed by Ralf Appelbaum Associates, a U.S. museum design company. This distinctive American path combined with a commitment to a liberal vision of Russian history (especially that of the 1990s) have made the center an object of mass criticism in today’s Russia. At the same time, the final ver-

sion of the exposition reveals its dependence on a political imaginary deeply rooted in Russian memorial practice that dates back to the imperial period and makes use of sacral (Russian Orthodox) and universalist interpretations of the images of past monarchs. It was linked to “scenarios of power” and practices of legitimation in the Russian Empire, and persisted throughout the Soviet period since the commemoration of party leaders still relied on the sacralized image of the ruler.⁸

This article discusses the cultural and memorial politics of the Yeltsin Center in the context of American and Russian cultures of commemoration,⁹ with special attention not only to similarities but also to differences between the first and the only currently existing presidential center in the Russian Federation and its counterparts in the United States. The interpretation of structures like presidential memorials within the analytical framework of memory studies, along with their contextualization within a broader cultural perspective, enables us to see them as a space of power and a tool of legitimization.¹⁰

Life and Death

In the United States, all ex-presidents, living or dead, are honored with presidential centers of their own.¹¹ Currently four living presidents have

⁸ It is very telling that almost immediately after Lenin’s death a new Soviet quasi-sacral memorialization was established in the form of a mausoleum. It has become a commonplace opinion among historiographers that Lenin’s mausoleum was a symbol of quasi-religious propaganda (A. M. Panchenko. *Osmoe chudo sveta // A. A. Panchenko. Russkaia kultura. Raboty raznykh let*. St. Petersburg, 1999. Pp. 476–497). But it is also notable that this first ever case of a tomb combined with a stand for the leader’s political heirs was written into the Soviet practice of legitimizing power (D. Khmelnskiy. *Zodchii Stalin*. Moscow, 2007. Pp. 14–15).

⁹ After several decades of development of memory studies, marked by the milestone contributions of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Jan Assmann, today, scholars address the role of institutions (including museums, archives, libraries, and memorial spaces) as sites of memory. See: Mary Douglas. *How Institutions Think*. London, 1987. Pp. 69–80; Barry Schwartz. *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth-Century America*. Chicago, 2009. Pp. 3–4; Michael Schudson. *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past*. New York, 1992. Pp. 51–52, 217–218.

¹⁰ U.S. presidential memorials became the objects of research of political scientists and cultural anthropologists some time ago. A special issue of the *Public Historian* (Summer 2006) was dedicated to the topic: *The Public Historian*. 2006. Vol. 28. No. 3: *Presidential Libraries: Programs, Policies, and the Public Interest*.

¹¹ Two institutions commemorate John F. Kennedy – the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum (Boston, MA) and the John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing

dedicated presidential libraries and museums: Jimmy Carter (Atlanta, GA), George H. W. Bush (College Station, TX), William Clinton (Little Rock, AR), and George W. Bush (Dallas, Texas).¹² Work on setting up the Barack Obama center is also under way.

In Russia, the first presidential center appeared after Boris Yeltsin died on April 23, 2007. Legislation authorizing and regulating such centers was passed by the State Duma exactly one year later in 2008. Since Yeltsin's tenure in office had ended back in 1999, it seems that his death became the sole factor prompting the creation of such an institution. The centrality of death in the decision is further underlined by the fact that Dmitry Medvedev's presidential term ended on May 7, 2012, but there is still no talk about opening a presidential center dedicated to him. To this day, the Yeltsin Center remains the only one in the country.

The 2008 law covered the presidents of the Russian Federation, but left out the only president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev. The International Foundation for Socioeconomic and Political Research (the Gorbachev Foundation), established in 1992, technically qualifies as a presidential center based on its objectives and functions, but juridically this foundation is not recognized. Thus, the last general secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, who went on to become president of the USSR, has been assigned in statutory terms to the field of Soviet rather than modern Russian legislation.¹³

The primarily posthumous character of the Russian presidential center sharply contrasts with the dynamism of its exhibitions and the American model it embodies. Moreover, in this respect, the Yeltsin Center reveals a fundamental link to the centuries-old Russian tradition of commemoration,

Arts (Washington, D.C.). The latter does not belong completely to the tradition of U.S. presidential libraries and centers because it focuses primarily on producing performances (theater, dance, ballet, orchestral concerts, etc.) and cultural education. According to the concept of the Kennedy Center, it was intended to become a "living memorial" to Kennedy (<http://www.kennedy-center.org/pages/about/history>).

¹² The Jimmy Carter Presidential Center (<https://www.cartercenter.org/about/contact.html>); George Bush Presidential Library and Museum (<http://bush41.org/directions>); Clinton Presidential Center (<https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-presidential-center>); George W. Bush Presidential Center (<http://www.bushcenter.org>).

¹³ The Gorbachev Foundation is currently working on a digital version of its permanent collection, "Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev: Life and Reforms," once exhibited in their headquarters at Leninsky Prospekt, Moscow. There are no plans to set up a museum or center in honor of the living ex-president. Interview with O. M. Zdravomyslova (September 30, 2016). Author's personal archive.

with its reliance on the sacral and the idea of spiritual resurrection.¹⁴ The contrast of this tradition to American cultural practices was famously discussed in political context by Boris Groys on the example of the Lenin Mausoleum and the animatronic representation of Abraham Lincoln at Disneyland. The mausoleum with its static symbolism appeals to the cultural imagery of the leader's eternal life or ultimate resurrection, whereas the Disneyland statue is animated (it can speak – delivering the Gettysburg Address – and move its limbs), but offers nothing else: “The Lincoln statue in Disneyland can never be brought to life for one simple reason – it is already living and can move and talk. There is nothing in it that we would be lacking.”¹⁵

¹⁴ By the turn of the nineteenth century the church had become the main venue for memorial events mandated by both the official ceremony of a monarch's burial (V. B. Gendrikov. *Traurnye tseremonii v Petropavlovskom sobore // Kraevedcheskie zapiski: Issledovaniia i materialy. Vol. 2 [Gosudarstvennyi muzei istorii Sankt Peterburga].* St. Petersburg, 1994. Pp. 306–315; M. O. Logunova. *Pechal'nye ritually imperatorskoi Rossii.* Moscow, St. Petersburg, 2011) and by posthumous remembrance practices (see, e.g., A. F. Krasheninnikov. *O proekte pamiatnika Petru Velikomu // Gosudarstvennyi muzei istorii Sankt Peterburga. Kraevedcheskie zapiski. Issledovaniia i materialy. Vol. 2 (Petropavlovskii sobor i Velikokniazheskaia usypal'nitsa).* St. Petersburg, 2002. Pp. 174–178). The space connected with a Russian emperor's life or death was marked as sacral by erecting churches. One type of sacral commemoration is presented by the “churches on blood,” such as Sts. Peter and Paul in St. Michael's (Engineers') Castle set up in the emperor's former state bedroom where Paul I was assassinated (L. V. Khaikina. *Novye materialy k istorii sozdaniia khrama-memoriala v Inzhenernom zamke // Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha. Vol. XXXVI (Rossiiskii imperatorskii dvor i Evropa: dialogi kul'tur).* St. Petersburg, 2007. Pp. 193–202); or Church of the Savior on Blood in St. Petersburg, erected on the spot where the final attempt on Alexander II's life succeeded. In a wider sense, one can think of the so-called Original Palace of Peter the Great, better known as the Cabin (Domik). After the emperor's death, it was fashioned into a chapel. With the old icon of the Savior preserved here, the chapel began to attract pilgrims until the practice was stopped by the revolution (Doma i domiki Petra I / Ed. by V. V. Yakovlev. St. Petersburg, 2015. P. 399). In Taganrog, the palace room where Alexander I died was turned into an in-house church by order of Empress Elizaveta Alekseyevna (A. A. Tsymbal. “Vysochaishii dvorets imperatora Aleksandra I” v Taganroge – tsarskaia rezidentsiia i memorial'nyi muzei // *Dvortsy Romanovykh kak pamiatniki istorii i kul'tury.* St. Petersburg, 2015. P. 326).

¹⁵ B. Groys. *Lenin i Linkoln – obrazy sovremennoi smerti // B. Groys. Utopiia i obmen.* Moscow, 1993. Pp. 353–356. The original Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., is a different matter: immediately after Lincoln's assassination it was built as a temple to him as “Savior of the Union,” where “the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever” (see the memorial's Web page: <https://www.nps.gov/linc/index.htm>). Still, despite the close structural parallels with the Lenin Mausoleum, the bigger-than-life statue of Lincoln in the temple is functionally almost identical to its Disneyland version: “There is nothing in it that we would be lacking.”

Historical Context

American presidential libraries and museums were originally designed to function as archives of presidential documents and repositories of artifacts, thus, their memorial function, which is undoubtedly growing in significance now, is neither the only, nor the dominant one. The first U.S. presidential exhibition aimed to display Franklin Roosevelt's collection of navy ships, stamps, and Hudson Valley paintings rather than to tell the president's biography. Current statistical figures are also quite telling. The collections of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (opened in 2004 and 2005, respectively) hold as many as 47,000 artifacts, photographs, broadsides, prints, books, and letters, as well as 12 million documents, books, and artifacts relating to all areas of Illinois history.¹⁶ The archival segment of the Clinton Presidential Center consists of 78 million pages of official records and personal correspondence, 2 million photographs, 21 million e-mail messages, 75,000 artifacts, and 12,500 videotapes.¹⁷

The Yeltsin Center collection is by no means comparable to that. So far it has only 80,000 documents,¹⁸ many of which are copies of originals that can be accessed elsewhere. It remains to be seen how the Yeltsin Center archive will be replenished, what order of priority will be adopted in selecting new documents and objects, and whether or not these materials will attract numerous scholars. However, it is clear that the Yeltsin Center has been established primarily as a memorial, rather than an archival repository or research center.¹⁹ In other words, its objective is not to produce new knowledge but to spread already existing body of information-cum-interpretation.

The existing version of knowledge relates to the entire long history of the country.²⁰ The whole ground floor of the museum is dedicated to the many centuries of Russian history. The first thing a visitor sees is an introductory

¹⁶ Marty Myron. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum // *The Public Historian*. 2006. Vol. 28. No. 3. P. 186.

¹⁷ Stephen L. Recken. The Clinton Presidential Center // *The Public Historian*. 2006. Vol. 28. No. 3. P. 216.

¹⁸ On the Archive // <https://yeltsin.ru/archive/about/>.

¹⁹ The Boris Yeltsin presidential library that was open in 2009 in St. Petersburg's is administrated by Presidential Executive Office and not affiliated with the Yeltsin Center.

²⁰ This feature is not typical for presidential centers in the USA. Tours begin with orientation films or exhibits that aim to describe a president's life, starting with his elementary school days but not earlier (Recken. *The Clinton Presidential Center*. P. 213; Maeve Devoy. *Nixon Presidential Library and Birthplace* // *The Public Historian*. 2006. Vol. 28. No. 3. Pp. 202–203; Ted McAllister. *The Ronald Reagan Library and Museum* // *Ibid*. P. 210).

video on Russian history. Its creative approach to visualization and good selection of images can provoke genuine interest. Graphical representation of several centuries of Russian culture (e.g., the imperial palace rooms with their mirrors and gilded decor, Kustodiev's portraits of merchant wives, or the *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* monument by Vera Mukhina) are presented in recognizable Hollywood fashion, so even the Stalin terror is communicated in the style of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Video narrative is sustained by literal visualization of popular cultural tropes. Thus, Peter the Great is depicted chopping down pine trees as an illustration of the Russian saying "When you cut down a forest, splinters will fly" (i.e., "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs"); Mikhail Speransky's draft of the constitution ends up locked in a casket; Nicholas I's reign is described as "political stagnation" and symbolized by a blizzard of papers falling over the Senate Square and the mutinous troops led by Decembrists. The Berlin Wall is pulled down by a bulldozer driven by Mikhail Gorbachev, whose first job, as is well-known, was as a combine harvester operator. Visually, the film is built as a sequence of iridescent glass structures, which reflects the idea of the fragility of history and human life.

The very concept of Russian history in the video is presented through two dichotomies – "freedom vs. slavery" and "Russian authorities vs. Russian society." The voice-over starts with the telling phrase: "It is little known that Russian democracy preceded Russian authoritarian rule (*samoderzhavie*)."
The struggle of the mutually opposing concepts is unfurled as happening over the *longue duree* – from the days of the Novgorod Republic to the arrival of the first president of Russia on the stage of history. Almost all crucial figures in Russian history who can be pigeonholed as either reformers or "counterreformers" get a mention in the video: Ivan the Terrible and Alexey Adashev, Peter the Great, Catherine II, Alexander I and Mikhail Speransky, Nicholas I, Alexander II, Nicholas II, Sergey Witte and Pyotr Stolypin. Also featured is the entire progression of Soviet leaders: Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, and Leonid Brezhnev.

It is in this sequence of historical figures from the tsardom of Muscovy, the Russian Empire, and the USSR that Boris Yeltsin ultimately appears in the video: all reformers come as a succession, with Russia's first president at the end of the line. (Since only Khrushchev and Gorbachev are featured as Soviet reformers, the viewer ends up with the impression that Yeltsin is more closely linked to the imperial than the Soviet period in the history of Russia.) But Yeltsin appears as more than just another government reformer. The video showcases Boris Yeltsin, more reminiscent of the Tank Man in

Jeff Widener's iconic photo of a protester in Tiananmen Square standing still in front of a column of tanks. In similar fashion, in the video Yeltsin stops the tanks sent into Moscow by the coup leaders from the State Committee on the State of Emergency (GKChP) in August 1991. He appears as a lone fighter, recognized and followed by the people, an image that apparently represents public support of his reforms.



Fig. 3. Boris Yeltsin (first from the right) among Russian imperial and Soviet historical figures. Final scene of the introductory video.

It is not the task of this article to criticize in detail the oversimplified (and at time erroneous) historical narrative conveyed by the video. For example, the film suggests that the Time of Troubles was a response to the Oprichnina terror, the Crimean war broke out as a consequence of Nicholas I's deliberate authoritarianism, and the assassination of Alexander II by the People's Will was revenge for the emperor's abandonment of the reform program. Of more importance is the underlying idea to present Russia's history as an eternal struggle for freedom and against tyranny, which is a striking reprise of the Soviet secondary school textbook version of history. In an obvious attempt to accommodate the current political trend, the producers of the film have tried to present the Soviet period positively (all the more so because Yeltsin had made a successful political career during that period, and the memorial celebrates his life, rather than just his presidency). While mentioning the times of terror, the video also focuses on achievements, such

as the construction of the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station (DneproGES), the exploration of the Arctic, and the victory in World War II.²¹

The filmmakers succeed in presenting the first president of Russia as both a successor of royal reformers and a leader of popular protest against the coup d'état attempt by the GKChP. Thus, he appears simultaneously as a representative of the authorities and the public.

Having been acquainted with this view of Russian history in general, visitors move along the display area devoted to “The Real Twentieth Century.” A guiding line on the floor zigzags through stages and periods of the century’s history: “World War I,” “Revolution,” “Civil War,” “The Leader,” “Industrialization and collectivization,” “The Great Purges,” “Great Patriotic War,” “The Iron Curtain,” “The Thaw,” “Stagnation,” and “Perestroika.” Throughout the exposition, the same logic for interpreting history persists – the dichotomy between leaders and the masses.

The Yeltsin Center museum uses every possible way to present a period in history – from documents and artifacts to posters, photographs, videos, and films.²² A large body of material crammed into a small space of the exhibition room leaves visitors overwhelmed. A strikingly wide color palette captures the eye with its sharp moves from the gray and black (black-and-white photos and videos and a gray cell door in the “Great Purges” section) to the bright colors of posters and red banners. At the same time, the inscriptions are very hard to read: white letters on glass are almost invisible due to flickering from the video displays. From the standpoint of Russian classical museum presentation, this is visual cacophony – and it is not accidental.

On the one hand, this arrangement of museum space, which heavily relies on multimedia, scenography, and rich interpretative design, is characteristic of Ralf Applebaum Associates, which, as mentioned above, designed the concept of the Yeltsin Center. A similar arrangement can be found, for example, at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. (designed by the same company and opened in 1993). The project made Ralf Appelbaum Associates

²¹ In the introductory video both terms are used.

²² Films used in this part of exhibition – Revolution: *Battleship Potemkin*; Civil War: *Two Comrades Were Serving*, *The Flight*; Collectivization: *Earth*, *Tanya (Bright Path)*; The Leader: *Burnt by the Sun*; Great Purges: *Not Afraid to Die*, *Tomorrow Was the War*; Great Patriotic War: *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, *They Fought for Their Country*; The Iron Curtain: *Flight 222*, *TASS Is Authorized to Declare...*; The Thaw: *I Am Twenty (Zastava Iliycha)*, *Clear Skies*, *My Younger Brother*, *Nine Days in One Year*; Stagnation: *The Blonde around the Corner*, *Vacation in September*, *GAI Inspector*; Perestroika: *Little Vera*, *Taxi Blues*, *Messenger Boy*.

a globally renowned business and simultaneously launched a wide public and scholarly debate on various issues – from the nature of contemporary museums and the purpose of an interactive approach to the role of didactics and value of artifacts.²³ Notably, the U.S. Holocaust Museum’s library collection was a very small part of the museum’s original plan (1985) and objects were acquired mainly for immediate use.²⁴

On the other hand, the chaos of the ground floor in the Yeltsin Center seems to have been carefully constructed. It is intended to produce a contrast to the structured order of the second part of the exposition showcasing seven decisive days (episodes) in the life of Boris Yeltsin. In other words, this is another straightforward interpretation, representing order arising out of chaos.



Fig. 4. Museum section “The Real Twentieth Century” on the ground floor.

²³ Anna Reading. Digital Interactivity in Public Memory Institutions: The Uses of New Technologies in Holocaust Museums // *Media, Culture & Society*. 2003. Vol. 25. Pp. 67–85; Michael Bernard-Donals. *Figures of Memory. The Rhetoric of Displacement at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*. New York, 2016. esp. Pp. 47–87; E. Linenthal. *The Boundaries of Memory: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* // *American Quarterly*. 1994. Vol. 46. No. 3. Pp. 406–433.

²⁴ Bernard-Donals. *Figures of Memory*. P. 56.

The powerful panorama of Russia's twentieth-century history is supplemented by episodes of the Yeltsin family history. In the massive stream of information, the eye stops at exhibition boards titled according to the main periods in Yeltsin's life: "A Peasant's Son," "A Soviet Schooler," "A Party Official," "Head of the Moscow City Committee [of the Communist Party]." Still, this narrative, although quite Soviet in its attempt to inscribe a family story within the wider history of the nation, seems not to attract much visitor interest. Visitors pay little attention to these exhibition boards, hurrying to move on to examine a poster or a clip from a well-known film. The history of the nation totally eclipses the family history, instead of enriching a narrative of personal roots with wider historical context. In the second part of the exposition, devoted to Yeltsin's two terms as president of Russia, the family story is narrowed down to the nuclear – Boris Yeltsin, his wife, and one of his daughters and political aids, Tatyana Yumasheva (Yeltsin's eldest daughter, Elena Okulova, is not mentioned in the exhibition). In this section, the figure of the president grows to such monumental proportions that the mention of his mother's death in the section "Unpopular Steps" (the early 1990s) appears almost inappropriate.

Yeltsin's personality comes to the fore of the exposition only at the very end of "The Real Twentieth Century," as if out of nowhere. The next part of the museum display begins with Yeltsin's conflict with the top brass at the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee in the late 1980s, when he presided over the Party's Moscow City Committee.

Power and Personality

In the United States, attempts to downplay certain aspects of the presidencies commemorated in presidential memorials while highlighting their achievements become targets of public criticism.²⁵ The task of memorial curators to strike a balance is further complicated by the close involvement of the presidents themselves or their family members in outlining the concepts of memorials. Thus, the redesign of the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum in the early 1990s was supervised by Edwin Schlossberg, the husband of Caroline Kennedy, the late president's daughter.²⁶ Bill Clinton is reported to have been involved "in every detail" of the creation of the Clinton Presidential Center.²⁷

²⁵ Recken. *The Clinton Presidential Center*. P. 215; McAllister. *The Ronald Reagan Library and Museum*. P. 210.

²⁶ Carl M. Brauer. *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum // The Public Historian*. 2006. Vol. 28. No. 3. P. 195.

²⁷ Recken. *The Clinton Presidential Center*. P. 212

The Yeltsin Center is no exception in this respect. It is run by the board of trustees chaired by Anton Vaino, head of the Presidential Executive Office. Along with Moscow and Yekaterinburg officials (including Russia's minister of defense and the mayor of Yekaterinburg) and cultural figures, Boris Yeltsin's wife Naina Yeltsina, his daughter Tatyana Yumasheva, and her husband are on the board.²⁸ In her interview with the *Forbes Woman*, Yumasheva presented herself as the main initiator of the museum and the person who defines the scope and ideology of its exhibition.²⁹ Accordingly, in the museum, the narrative of Boris Yeltsin's years as president turns into a heroic story uncomplicated by any alternative or balanced interpretations of the events.



Fig. 5. Museum section on the GKChP coup of August 1991 on the second floor.

The pinnacle of the presidency is found in the abortive GKChP coup of August 1991. The section devoted to the events of August 18–21 begins with the reconstruction of a typical Soviet apartment of the 1980s. It is furnished with a sofa, a bookcase wall (*stenka*), a coffee table, and a TV running a looped fragment from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* ballet – a typical feature broadcast

²⁸ O presidentskom tsentre // <https://yeltsin.ru/about/>.

²⁹ Tat'iana Iumasheva. "Mify prizhilis", i s nimi ochen' trudno borot'sia" // *Forbes Woman*. 2015. October 22. <http://www.forbes.ru/forbes-woman/karera/303663-mify-prizhilis-i-s-nimi-ochen-trudno-borotsya>.

on Soviet TV during the uncertain days of the coup. It does not take long to see that the apartment's owner must belong to the liberal intelligentsia. There is a copy of the progressive literary journal *Novyi mir* on the coffee table, and the radio can be tuned to Western Russian-language stations. Beyond the apartment door, in the next room, the history of the standoff between the protesters and the GKChP is displayed in a way that has become canonical. One can watch the tense press conference of the coup plotters, including a close-up of Gennady Yanayev shaking hands and a question from a journalist, "Do you understand that what you did last night amounts to a coup d'etat?" There is also footage of armored fighting vehicles and tanks rolling along the streets, and the famous scene of Yeltsin on top of a tank.

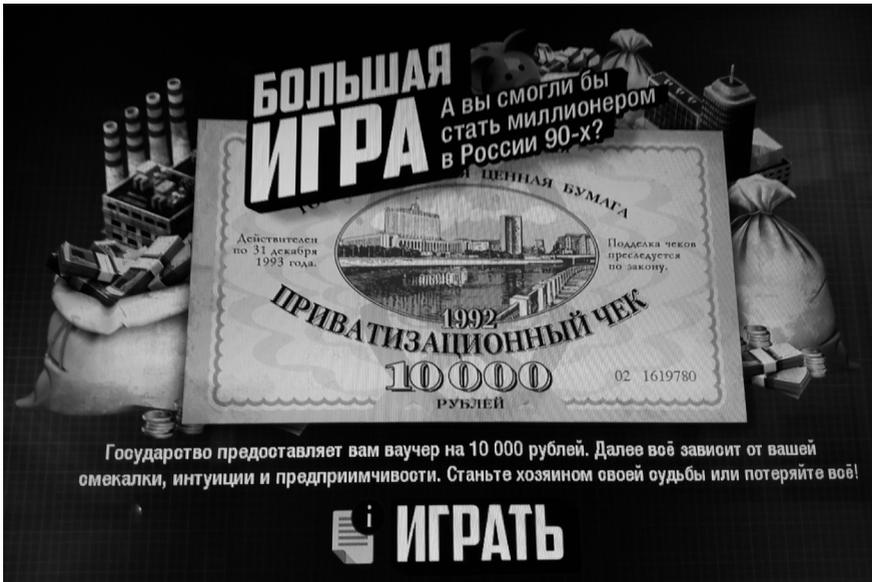


Fig. 6. Interactive game "Could You Have Become a Millionaire in the 1990s?".

The failure of the coup on August 23 and opening up opportunities for subsequent historical development in various directions, make it harder and harder to sustain the single-value narrative. The museum creators try to keep their monological narrative from falling apart using the strategy of recoding. For instance, an interactive game, "Could You Have Become a Millionaire in the 1990s?" presents privatization vouchers received by all Russian citizens in 1992 as a high-risk asset intended for market speculation – rather than individual shares in the national economy undergoing privatization (as it was explained in the early 1990s). A failure to partake

efficiently in privatization thus becomes the result of one's own mistakes, while the implementation of the reform is exempted from any criticism. Within this logic of the exposition, every conflict is presented through a juxtaposition of personal circumstances and the imminent public good. Unpopular economic measures pay off with a cornucopia of goods on store shelves, the shelling of the parliament in 1993 is seen as a redemptive sacrifice that led to adopting a new constitution, and the war in Chechnya is only briefly featured in the room adjacent to the one showcasing Yeltsin's second victorious presidential campaign.

This narrative of the 1990s and glorification of Yeltsin as president makes the entire survey of twentieth-century history that occupies so much space in the museum largely redundant. It does not serve the intended task of providing a comprehensive context for Yeltsin's biography, insofar as his life before he became Russia's first president in 1991 is treated in a cursory manner: born into a Urals peasant family that suffered from dekulakization; was a good student in school, although a troublemaker; served in the army; graduated as a construction engineer; loved playing volleyball. A couple of photos, a replica of a hand grenade (Yeltsin lost two fingers as a boy trying to disassemble one), Yeltsin's Komsomol member card, his certificate of secondary education, manuscript pages from his book *Confession on an Assigned Theme* (Ispoved' na zadannuiu temu). A symbolic earthenware pot and a home-sewn towel are the only reminders of Yeltsin's village childhood. The issue of how his personal development progressed is not addressed at all in the exhibition,³⁰ except for a terse description of Yeltsin as a man "formed in the atmosphere of the Thaw," valuing "renewal higher than the unwritten rules of the political games in the Party and the Apparatus." Within this very graphic exhibition, overloaded with factual details, this characteristic seems utterly sociological if not meaningless. How and why did a man who climbed to the very top of the Communist hierarchy and remained faithful to the system end up a determined fighter against the Communist regime? Even more strikingly, the museum reveals nothing about Yeltsin's final years, as if no life exists after relinquishing power. The story of Boris Yeltsin ends on December 31, 1999, the day he declared his resignation, without a word on the seven years after his departure from his office in the Kremlin.

³⁰ Similar criticism is leveled toward some American presidential centers, for example, the Clinton Presidential Center. According to Stephen L. Recken, though the memorial tells viewers about "the events that shaped his life, it does not give a strong sense of Clinton the man" (Recken. *The Clinton Presidential Center*. P. 214).



Fig. 7. Museum section “Day 1. We Need Change” on the second floor.

The spatial dimension of Yeltsin’s biographic narrative clearly associates him only with the spaces of authority. The museum showcases three locations that most characterize Yeltsin as president: the Moscow “White House” (the Russian parliament until 1994), the Marble Hall, and the presidential office in the Kremlin. The White House symbolizes the 1991 victory of Yeltsin over the GKChP and his 1993 victory over the rebellious parliament itself. The Marble Hall, originally the assembly room in Kremlin Building 14, erected in the Soviet period, has been partially reconstructed for the museum section “Day 1. We Need Change.” This museum room is intended to illustrate Yeltsin’s conflict with the Communist Party establishment in 1987 and the story of his first electoral victory in 1989 (when he became deputy of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union). The Kremlin office is emblematic of Yeltsin’s presidency. Whereas the White House symbolizes Yeltsin the liberal, the Kremlin office at the end of the exposition stands for Yeltsin the statist and symbolizes authority as a whole. Chronologically, Boris Yeltsin’s career progresses from the White House to the Kremlin – that is, from the perspective of the public to that of the authorities.

By completely ignoring locations such as the village family home in Butka, Yeltsin’s apartment in Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg), or even the president’s official countryside residence in Barvikha near

Moscow,³¹ the museum forsakes any attempt to re-create the private everyday space of Russia's first president. This is again reminiscent of the Russian imperial and Soviet tradition to commemorate the ruler as an embodiment of the sacral authority almost completely stripped of any trappings of everyday life. The same traditionalism is revealed in the museum's gender regime, which is overwhelmingly patriarchal.³² The space of power is marked as an exclusively male domain. Yeltsin's wife Naina and daughter Tatyana Yumasheva are mentioned in the museum only as members of the president's family, even though in reality both have played key roles in shaping the concept of the Yeltsin Center. Naina Yeltsina is visible mostly because the menu of the 1991 restaurant contains some presidential specials from her recipe book. Tatyana Yumasheva, herself a key player on the political stage in the last years of her father's presidency, is given voice only as a commentator on private matters such as the Yeltsins' move to Moscow in 1986 and the president's rehabilitation after heart surgery in 1996.

The Predecessor and the Successor

The exposition reflects Yeltsin's complicated relationship with his predecessor, Mikhail Gorbachev, who is presented here as Yeltsin's opponent and an embodiment of the conservative Soviet political system. Accordingly, rather than showing Boris Yeltsin as one of the "perestroika men," museum's creators depict him as a lone rebel unaffected by his predecessor's reformist turn. Remarkably, "The Real Twentieth Century" part of the exposition locates both the "Stagnation" and "Perestroika" sections within one spatial zone. This placement implies that although Gorbachev initiated perestroika, he still remained an old-type leader, part and parcel of the Soviet system, which was unreformable.

³¹ In Butka, Sverdlovsk Oblast, a village where Boris Yeltsin was born one of the streets carries his name. Here in 2008 a memorial plaque in tribute to Yeltsin was unveiled (V rodnom sele Borisa Eltsina otkryli memorialnuiu dosku // RIA Novosti. 2008. April 24. <https://ria.ru/video/20080424/105852771.html>).

³² Imperial memorial practices tend to neglect the Romanov empresses, whether spouses, mothers, or even rulers. For example, the empress Maria Feodorovna's throne room in the Winter Palace (designed in 1828) was never restored after the fire of 1837 (T. A. Petrova. *Tronnyi zal imperatritsy Marii Fedorovny v Zimmem dvortse i kartina E. F. Krendovskogo // Trudy Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha. Vol. XI Russkaia kultura i iskusstvo. Leningrad, 1970. P. 190*). Nor were the chambers of Catherine the Great in the same palace (N. Iu. Guseva. *K voprosu o zhilykh pokoiakh Ekateriny Velikoy // "Zolotoi os'mnadsatyi..." Russkoe iskusstvo v sovremennom otechestvennom iskusstvoznanii. St. Petersburg, 2006. Pp. 22–36*).

The issue of Yeltsin's successor is treated quite differently. The "Hard Choice" section thus interprets the internal struggle of Russia's first president:

Whither will Russia move after the year 2000 – to democracy, market reforms, open society, or back to the Soviet past? This is what President Yeltsin is thinking about in the run-up to the presidential election. Constitutional rights and liberties, market economy, the new statehood of Russia – all of these are quite fragile, and worrying about their future is all too natural. President Yeltsin selects a group of potential successors and holds confidential meetings with some of them in 1996–1999. Other presidential candidates rise to political prominence on the crest of the wave of crises in the complicated economic position in which the country had found itself. These candidates are championed by Boris Yeltsin's political opponents. After a long search and tormenting doubts, the choice is finally made in favor of Vladimir Putin. In his televised address on August 9, 1999, Yeltsin announces that he has nominated Vladimir Putin as his candidate for premiership, to be approved by the State Duma. Yeltsin also mentions that he sees Putin as Russia's future president.

This text is highly characteristic of the general concept of the Yeltsin Center museum. Open discussion of nominating a successor to the office is impossible to imagine at any presidential center in the United States. It is also reminiscent of some stable tropes of Russian culture. One can think of

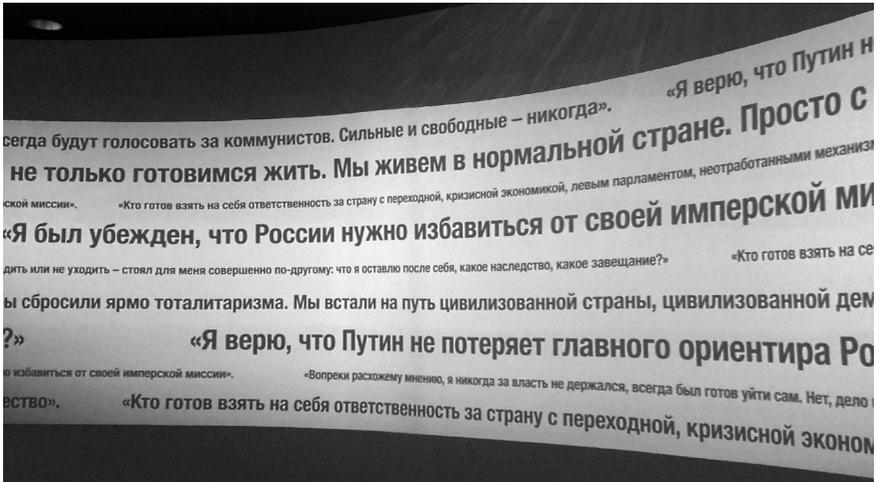


Fig. 8. Boris Yeltsin's sayings concerning Russia's imperial past and the choice of Vladimir Putin as his successor. The "Hard Choice" museum section, second floor.

Peter the Great's reprimand to his son, "Who should I bequeath to what I have planted?" (cf. "Whither will Russia move..."), or the recurrent image of the menacing past ("or back to the Soviet past?"). Most important, the text depicts the model of authority transfer introduced by the first Decree of Succession (1722). The terse formulation in the decree famously declared, "He [the emperor] can assign succession to whom He wills."³³ The story of selecting a successor finalizes the image of Russia's first president. By the end of the exposition, it becomes obvious that his was the role of a liberal tsar of sorts.

The Tsar and the President

Among the most frequently criticized political decisions made by Yeltsin, such as his economic reform doctrine, the handling of the October 1993 crisis, and the Chechen War, Yeltsin's order to raze the so-called Ipatiev House in Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg) during his tenure as the region's party boss is often mentioned. In that house, which had previously belonged to engineer Nikolay Ipatiev, the last emperor of Russia Nicholas II, together with his family and servants, was executed late at night on July 17, 1918. Sixty years later, in 1977, the house was demolished, which seemed unusual because by that time the Soviet regime had turned from erasing to preserving monuments of imperial Russia.³⁴ As Yekaterinburg had been chosen as the location of the Yeltsin Center, its creators must have felt particularly obliged to explain this episode in Yeltsin's biography.

It is known that the Politburo made the political decision to demolish the Ipatiev House back in 1975, when Iakov Riabov held the office of first secretary of the Sverdlovsk Oblast Committee of the Communist Party,³⁵ but was implemented two years later, when Boris Yeltsin succeeded him.³⁶ The creators of the Yeltsin Center admit that the Ipatiev House was demol-

³³ Petr I. Ustav. O nasledii prestola // Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii. Vol. 6 (1720–1722). No. 3893. St. Petersburg, 1830. P. 496.

³⁴ Cf. Catriona Kelly. From "Counter-Revolutionary Monuments" to "National Heritage": The Preservation of Leningrad Churches, 1964–1982 // Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique. 2013. Vol. 54. No. 1–2. Pp. 1–34.

³⁵ O snose osobniaka Ipat'eva v gorode Sverdlovskie. Postanovlenie TsK KPSS (July 26, 1975) // Soviet Archives at INFO-RUSS / Collected by Vladimir Bukovsky, prepared for electronic publishing by Julia Zaks and Leonid Chernikhov. <http://bit.ly/2CHPF13>.

³⁶ On discussion surrounding the Ipatiev House demolition, see A. D. Kirillov. Dom Ipat'eva: mify i realnost' // 14-e Romanovskie chteniia. Materialy. Yekaterinburg, 2013. Pp. 35–42.

ished during the first months of Yeltsin's tenure as first secretary. They do not exploit the legitimate excuse by placing all the blame on the Politburo, although the exposition promptly mentions that the Politburo's decision was spearheaded by the KGB chairman, Yuri Andropov. Instead, they attempted to reframe the entire historical narrative on a grand scale.

It must be said that after 1991, when Sverdlovsk was renamed back to Yekaterinburg, the city became an important site of memory, with Nicholas II playing a particularly important role in local commemorative narratives. The memorial on the place of the razed Ipatiev House was authorized as early as 1990 by the Executive Committee of the then Sverdlovsk City Council. In 1993, long before the royal family was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church,³⁷ the archbishop of Yekaterinburg and Kurgan referred to Nicholas as "a locally venerated saint."³⁸ Finally, in 2003 the area once occupied by the Ipatiev House became the construction venue for a cathedral "on the blood." This Byzantine-style cathedral includes two churches – the main upper one dedicated to All Saints Resplendent in the Russian Land and the lower chapel "on the blood," which marks the place of the royal family's execution.³⁹ The large cathedral can be observed from various parts of the city and has become a dominant part of the city's skyline.

The cathedral occupies an important place in the modern narrative commemorating Nicholas II and his family.⁴⁰ Of no less importance is another local site, known as Ganina Yama, an abandoned mine where the bodies of the murdered royal family members and their servants were dumped.⁴¹ This area now belongs to a monastery. In recent years, both the Church on the Blood and Ganina Yama have attracted many pilgrims, especially during the annual procession of the cross on the anniversary night of the royal family's

³⁷ In 1981 the Emperor Nicolas II, Empress Aleksandra Feodorovna, their five children and servants were canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. In 2000 the Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate followed suit by canonizing Nicolas II and the members of the imperial family but not the servants. In 2016 the Bishops' Council in Moscow canonized the Romanovs' physician Eugene Botkin who was killed in the Ipatiev House.

³⁸ Edin ot tsarei. Zhizneopisanie Sviatykh tsarstvennykh strastoterptsev / Ed. by A. Kuz'min. Yekaterinburg, 2015. Pp. 32–39.

³⁹ The actual spot of the execution is outside the cathedral walls.

⁴⁰ On Nicolas II in contemporary Russian historical memory see E. M. Boltunova. Retseptsiiia tsarskogo/imperatorskogo prostranstva vlasti v Rossii v 1990e–2010e gody // *Ab Imperio*. 2016. No. 2. Pp. 261–308.

⁴¹ Another memorial place is the Porosenkov Log (Piglet Ravine), a location where the remains of the executed were eventually found. It has not been recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church and is thus not included in the church commemoration scheme.

execution. The procession, as the climax of the Royal Days organized by the Russian Orthodox Church, includes thousands of participants who walk from the memorial church to Ganina Yama. According to church statistics, media, and police reports, more than 60,000 people joined the procession in 2017.⁴² The Nicholas II memorial space in Yekaterinburg has kept expanding and now includes the Museum of the Royal Family, the St. Nicholas II Derzhavnaia Library, and the Museum of Holiness in the Twentieth Century Urals. The Museum of History and Archaeology of the Urals now includes the Romanov Memorial Room, the Ural State Mining University has Emperor Hall (previously Assembly Hall), and there is a special royal memorial in the university's Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. Overall, this is a highly dynamic process involving various social and professional groups within the



Fig. 9. Church on the Blood, Yekaterinburg.

⁴² Evgenii Stoianov. V Ekaterinburge bolee 60 tysiach chelovek priniali uchastie v Tsarskom krestnom khode // Oblegazeta.ru. 2017. July 17. <https://www.oblgazeta.ru/news/26876/>; Itogi nedeli: "Tsarskie dni" v Ekaterinburge i Alapaevske // Sverdlovskoe oblastnoe televidenie. 2017. July 22. <http://bit.ly/2zhg09L>; Tsarskii Krestnyi khod: 60 tysiach veruushchikh priniali uchastie v molitvennom shestvii // Informatsionnyi portal Ekaterinburga. 2015. July 17. <http://bit.ly/2CJwaZ1>.

city, which renders the image of Nicholas II in various contexts, both political and religious.⁴³

Thus, for the creators of the Yeltsin Center, Nicholas II is more than a Russian emperor who was tragically murdered in Yekaterinburg almost a century ago. He is a key figure in the local commemorative tradition firmly appropriated by Yekaterinburg as a site of memory, and in this capacity, a strong rival to Yeltsin's memory, which the center attempts to inscribe in the collective identity of Yekaterinburg. This explains the special attitude to Nicholas II demonstrated by the exposition, very unorthodox for the democratic and liberal take on history that it espouses.

Emperor Nicholas II is mentioned for the first time quite soon after visitors begin getting familiar with the exposition. As his reign is assessed in the introductory video:

Nicholas II attempted radical reform, relying on the help of Sergei Witte and Pyotr Stolypin. In 1906, Russia adopted a European type of constitution. The country was experiencing an economic boom; for the first time in its history, reforms improved the general standards of living. However, the economic surge was short-lived – it was stopped by World War I.

Nicholas II is presented as a reformer or at least as one who can take credit for the reforms of Witte and Stolypin. The introductory video shows the last Russian emperor as the giver of the constitution that was first outlined by Mikhail Speransky a century earlier. It is Nicholas who in 1906 removes it from the locked casket where it had been placed by Alexander I. This interpretation can also be found in the book popularizing the museum.⁴⁴ However, in the visual, dominant language of the exposition, Nicholas receives no prominent role: he is shown standing on the Red Porch in the Faceted Chamber in the Moscow Kremlin behind his empress and children. At the end of the introductory video, he does not appear in the line of reformers

⁴³ For instance, the Royal Family Museum in Yekaterinburg, although originally set up by the Russian Orthodox Church, presents Nicholas as both a saint and the holder of imperial power. It features an imperial throne on a podium, a canopy with the imperial eagle on top, and a portrait of Nicholas by Ernst Liphart. It is also notable that adjacent to the museum is the Assembly Room for the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, used for events such as the patriarch's visit to the city. Decorated with a number of portraits and preserving the personal belongings of Patriarch Alexis II and the liturgical vestments of Patriarch Kirill, the Assembly Hall is physically located in the same building as the museum – in the Tsarsky (Royal) Center for Spirituality and Enlightenment.

⁴⁴ *Pasport znatoka istorii. Muzei B. N. El'tsina*. Moscow, 2015. P. 2.

leading up to Boris Yeltsin. In “The Real Twentieth Century” exposition Nicholas II is also shown in a positive light, largely due to the reference point selected. The story of the century begins with World War I, thus sidelining the disasters and failures traditionally blamed on the emperor since his coronation (such as the Khodynka Stampede and Bloody Sunday). The Yeltsin Center had to reckon with the flourishing local cult of Nichols II, so the most important task was to present an image of the emperor that did not conflict with the one cultivated in the memorial zone on the opposite bank of the Iset’ River. The Church on the Blood became the main challenge to the future of the Yeltsin Center as Yekaterinburg’s main memorial complex.

This explains why the story of the Ipatiev House, the royal family, and the role of Boris Yeltsin in their commemoration is postponed to the very end of the exposition. One expects, in vain, to find this information on the ground floor, or in the section on Yeltsin’s years in the Sverdlovsk Oblast Party Committee. As a topic of exceptional importance, it is included in the narrative of the final years of Boris Yeltsin’s political career. In the “Day 6. The Presidential Marathon” section, devoted to Yeltsin’s second and final term in office, just before visitors are informed about the selection of a successor and shortly before the final room, “A Farewell to the Kremlin” (metonymically referring to the president’s political death), through a window visitors suddenly see the Church on the Blood on the opposite bank of the river.

It must be noted that this part of the exposition aims to summarize the positive legacy of Boris Yeltsin. It explicitly refers to the strengthening of institutions of democracy, Yeltsin’s strong stance on foreign affairs, and the overcoming of the 1998 economic crisis. It is also suggested here that the economic and political stability of the 2000s did not come about by itself, but is a direct consequence of events that took place in the latter half of the 1990s.

In this context of Russia’s recent history, the Romanov’s tragic fate in the past century and the Ipatiev House razed long ago are suddenly brought up. The demolition of the house appears to be part of a long chain of events, so the physical destruction of the place of the Romanovs’ murder is interpreted as a new beginning of the family’s proper commemoration. The construction of the memorial cathedral, the search for and identification of the remains of the Romanovs and, in the end, their solemn reburial in St. Peter and Paul’s Cathedral in St. Petersburg, in 1998, mark the return of their memory.⁴⁵ The narra-

⁴⁵ The remains of Grand Duchess Maria and Tsarevich Alexei found in 2008 near Yekaterinburg are not yet buried.



Fig. 10. Church on the Blood on the opposite bank of the Iset' River, view from the Yeltsin Center.

address as president (famous for its phrase “I am tired, [so] I am quitting”). In the logic of the museum, Yeltsin dies as president on New Year’s Eve 1999, a second before the year 2000, heralding the new millennium, chimes in. On his symbolic deathbed, he thinks about his heritage. Facing the church, he yearns for sacredness, without which his authority will never be complete. From the vantage point of the museum narrative, the destruction of Ipatiev House means little in the posthumous existence of Nicholas II, while Yeltsin takes credit for the full-fledged return of the Romanovs’ memory in the 1990s. In this way, potentially damaging competition within the Yekaterinburg commemorative field was neutralized in the museum’s narrative, and

tive of eternity and sainthood is set against the background of the graph of oil prices (in the “Overcoming the Crisis” section), which, in turn, is juxtaposed against the heart rate graph (in the “Heart Surgery” section). As mentioned before, this part of the exposition is adjacent to the partial reconstruction of the Presidential Office in the Moscow Kremlin. It features a TV with a looped sequence from Boris Yeltsin’s last televised

the escalating cult of Nicholas II was used to indirectly endorse Yeltsin's own claim for sacralization.

Conflict Narratives

The version of compromise between potentially conflicting (if not mutually contradicting) historical narratives proposed by the Yeltsin Center in Yekaterinburg is based on the premise of sacralization of the ruler. The authoritarian monarch, Nicholas II, and the proponent of democratic reforms, elected president Boris Yeltsin, appear on the same page, both posing as incarnations of the mystical principle of supreme power. Hence, in the center's exposition, the many allusions to Russian memorial traditions, deeply rooted in Russian cultural codes.

The architectural landscape of Yekaterinburg demonstrates that the conflict of different narratives of public memory is far from being resolved. Symbolically, the city is divided now along the Iset' River. On one bank stands the Yeltsin Center, and on the other, the Church on the Blood. Near the Yeltsin Center are the buildings of the regional government (the Cabinet of Ministers of Sverdlovsk Oblast, often referred to as the "White House," and the Legislative Assembly of the oblast). A Hyatt Hotel, the Academic Drama Theater, and a number of high-rise buildings are located nearby. Near the Church on the Blood, a large memorial zone has developed that includes several churches, a library, and a museum. As was mentioned, the Church on the Blood can be seen from the Yeltsin Center, but from the church itself, the Yeltsin Center can barely be seen. Open dialogue between the two systems of political symbolism is hardly possible, and is ultimately more likely to cause conflict. The temporary balance between the two within the cultural landscape of Yekaterinburg might already have been upset with the further expansion of church-related commemoration zones: in 2017, Yekaterinburg History Park "Russia – My History" was opened, and plans for the construction of St. Catherine Church halfway between the Church on the Blood and the Yeltsin Center are under way.⁴⁶

The Yeltsin Center seems to have lost its momentum, judging by its inability to stage a comparable symbolic expansion. The conservative narrative of sacral authority that the center's exposition embraces has an

⁴⁶ Istoricheskii park "Rossiia – moia istoriia" otkryli v Ekaterinburge // TASS. 2017. September 3. <http://tass.ru/obschestvo/4528085>; Khram sviatoi Ekateriny sobiraiutsia postroit' na ostrove v ekaterinburgskom gorodskom prudu // Znak. 2016. March 28. <http://bit.ly/2olbZ0u>.

important spatial subtext. This authority is not evenly distributed across the country but concentrated in Moscow as the seat of power, from which it emanates to the provinces progressively diminishing in intensity and value. In the American political system, power comes from the people, and therefore any location of a presidential memorial as a testimony to one's ability to rise to the highest office is acceptable. From the vantage point of a conservative Russian tradition, Yekaterinburg is much less prestigious a location for a presidential memorial than Moscow, almost an exile for someone who ruled and died in the capital. In the present-day political climate, which is heavily related to the conservative political tradition, this implication becomes obvious. Accordingly, when the Moscow branch of the Yeltsin Center was announced in 2016, it encountered significant opposition.

The premises were found in the recently renovated Dolgorukov-Bo-brinsky mansion on Nikitskaia Street, a city center historical building of the eighteenth–early nineteenth centuries. It was to house the office of the charitable foundation Yeltsin Center, reception spaces, an exhibition hall, a library, and a restaurant. The museum part of the complex was expected to present the Moscow period of Boris Yeltsin's life. The scale of the project was not comparable with the Yekaterinburg Center. The preliminary plan suggests that the capacity of the exhibition hall in Moscow was limited to forty visitors, while the library accommodated no more than eight readers. Combined, these numbers are lower than the number of seats in the Moscow center's restaurant – sixty-five.⁴⁷ By contrast, the Yeltsin Center in Yekaterinburg occupies 22,000 square meters and can accommodate approximately 5,500 people.⁴⁸ The figures show that the primary goal of the Moscow center is not to raise the public visibility of the Yeltsin Center by expanding its presence to Moscow, but just to more comfortably house the existing Moscow office (it is currently located in a much smaller building on Bolshaia Polianka Street). Establishing another grand Boris Yeltsin museum was not originally planned. And yet, even this step has provoked vehement opposition and sparked another surge of debates on the interpretations of the 1990s in Russian modern history and the role of Russia's first president in it.⁴⁹ Still

⁴⁷ Anna Pushkarskaia. El'tsin-tsentr razmestiat v Moskve so vsemi udobstvami // *Kommersant*. 2016. September 28. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3100945>.

⁴⁸ V Ekaterinburge otkrylsia El'tsin-tsentr // *TASS*. 2015. November 25. <http://tass.ru/politika/2468850>.

⁴⁹ Proekt Politikach. Ne dopustit' sozdanie filiala Eltsin-tsentra v Moskve! // *Change.org*. <http://bit.ly/2cVLXa3>; Vladimir Volvach. Preobrazovat' "Eltsin-tsentr" vo Vserossiiskii memorialnyi tsentr pamiati 90-kh godov // <http://bit.ly/2kwnsoU>.

unfolding, the story of the Yeltsin Center's Moscow branch places the case of this institution into a broader all-Russian context of cultural topography of power and memory, which should become the topic of a special study.

SUMMARY

Ekaterina Boltunova's article analyzes historical narrative as presented at the Yeltsin Center in Yekaterinburg, a memorial complex dedicated to the first president of Russia. The idea, which was conceived after Boris Yeltsin's death in 2007, seems to be an example of truly global thinking, modeled on American presidential memorials. The center was founded not in Moscow but in Yekaterinburg, where the future president's political career began. An American company was hired to carry out the project according to the best world standards. Boltunova reveals the story of the development of the exposition's narrative and interprets its semiotics of power. At the same time, she points to a competing local historical scenario represented by a church-sponsored cult of Nicholas II. Boltunova claims that the center, in a conscious effort to overcome the Soviet imperial legacy, drew on an archaic political scenario of the sacralization of supreme power, or rather – the personality of the ruler.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Статья Екатерины Болтуновой рассматривает исторический нарратив Ельцин Центра в Екатеринбурге – мемориального комплекса, посвященного первому президенту России. Возникшая после смерти Ельцина в 2007 году идея центра казалась примером глобального мышления. В качестве модели инициаторы проекта выбрали американские президентские мемориальные библиотеки, что предопределило выбор Екатеринбурга как города, где началась политическая карьера Бориса Ельцина (подобно тому, как американские президентские центры основываются за пределами столицы в США, на родине президента либо там, где начиналась его карьера). Проектирование комплекса было поручено американской компании. В статье раскрывается история создания исторического нарратива экспозиции и анализируется присущая ей семиотика власти. Параллельно речь идет о конкурирующем местном сценарии исторической памяти, воплотившемся в продвигаемом РПЦ

культе Николая II, расстрелянного в Екатеринбурге в 1918 г. Болтунова показывает, как сознательная попытка Центра преодолеть советское наследие полагалась на архаический политический сценарий сакральности верховной власти, а точнее – личности правителя.

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