

**“The Road to the Stars is Paved by the Communists!”:
Soviet Propaganda and the Hero-Myth of Iurii Gagarin**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses Soviet propaganda of the world's first cosmonaut, Iurii Gagarin, and the first-manned space flight, *Vostok 1*, which took place on April 12, 1961. This thesis compares official Soviet biographies of Gagarin's life and Communist Party resolutions of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Key documents include Gagarin's autobiography *The Road to the Stars* (1961), and the Third Party Program of 1961. It concludes that the Gagarin propaganda closely corresponded to Party directives. In doing so, this thesis analyzes the key themes of the propaganda and suggests how the propaganda was used to legitimize the regime of Nikita Khrushchev.

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INTRODUCTION: SPACE AGE HISTORIES

To put the first man in space was a highly symbolic technological milestone. Well aware of the propaganda benefits to be derived from such a feat, the USSR and the USA were, in 1961, racing to be the first. To do so would earn an image of technological dominance that humanity would likely recall long into the future. At 9:06 AM Moscow time on 12 April, 1961, the Soviet Union launched Iurii Alexeyevich Gagarin aboard the spaceship *Vostok* (East) that would win this race. At 10:55 AM, after circling the globe at speeds reaching 28,000 kilometers an hour¹ and an altitude of 181 kilometers², Iurii Gagarin landed unharmed in a field near Saratov. In less than two hours Gagarin had claimed for the Soviet Union what was perhaps the most impressive propaganda victory to date, and the state did not shy away from the immense boasting rights that the achievement had won.

In 1961, the Soviets' sophisticated propaganda apparatus gave primacy to Gagarin, saturating the press and broadcast media over the next weeks with reports of the hero and his flight. Introducing the cosmic pilot (*kosmicheskii pilot*)³ to the nation, they invariably painted his portrait with brushstrokes that accentuated the legitimacy of the personalities, policies, and ideology of Nikita Khrushchev's regime.

Press descriptions of Gagarin and his flight in space were not benign expressions celebrating the arrival of a long-anticipated dream of humanity. Rather, they were infused with political messages directed outward from Moscow to the world. Soviet propagandizing of the Gagarin celebrations forms a metaphorical window into how the Soviet state saw itself – or, more precisely, wished to be seen. It also provides insight into their view of the world outside of the Soviet Bloc. At this dawn of the space age, Soviet propagandists took a moment to assess the historical trajectory of human development, placing themselves, as the builders of socialism and the benefactors of the first man in space, at the pinnacle of progress. The successful flight of *Vostok* mirrored the Soviet Union's spectacular launch into modernity; credit for the victory in space went to socialism and her revolutionary vanguard – the Communist Party.

¹ *Pravda*, April 14, 1961, 3.

² *Pravda*, April 25, 1961, 1.

³ The word *Kosmonavt* (cosmonaut) had not yet been coined.

The Gagarin propaganda buttressed the Soviet regime's international authority at that time, echoing Khrushchev's foreign policy calls for international disarmament and decolonization. Domestically, the messages legitimized the Soviet Union's political system and the October Revolution, associating both with progress through secular, material, scientific rationalism, all cultivated by Marxist-Leninism. Khrushchev used the Gagarin celebrations to accentuate his political program and underscore his own legitimacy as Soviet Premier and a world leader.

One of Khrushchev's significant departures from Stalinist ideology had been the concept of 'peaceful coexistence'. The Soviet elite made it clear, however, that peaceful coexistence did not entail a relaxation of the ideological struggle. On the contrary, it mandated an intensification of propaganda operations – in effect a 'soft' approach. Indeed, at the 1956 Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party, Khrushchev suggested that communist parties in other nations could proselytize and gain power without resorting to violence.⁴ Domestic considerations as well convinced the Soviet elites to reorganize and revitalize the propaganda apparatus. By the mid-1950s it had become crucial for the Soviet Union to reinvigorate enthusiasm for socialism. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes in 1956 had coincided with an attack on the influence of "dogmatists" among propagandists, and calls to "brighten up" propaganda.⁵ The Party understood that it needed to make propaganda more accessible in order to more effectively communicate the changed face of the regime.

To achieve this reinvigoration, the Third Party Program called for an expansion of the press and publishing; more cultural venues such as libraries, theaters and clubs; the expansion of the television and radio network to cover the entire country; the development of more amateur cultural organizations, more scientific and technical laboratories and art and cinema studios. It also mandated the even expansion of cultural organs in order to raise the cultural level of the countryside.⁶

⁴ David Wedgwood Benn, *Persuasion and Soviet Politics*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 135.

⁵ Benn, *Persuasion and Soviet Politics*, 135-36.

⁶ The Third Party Program stated that: "Cultural development during the full-scale construction of communist society will constitute the closing stage of a great cultural revolution. At this stage all necessary ideological and cultural conditions will be created for the victory of communism. The growth of the productive forces, progress in engineering and in the organization of production, increased social activity of the working people, development of the democratic principles of self-government, and a communist

The Party worked to define propaganda's content and debated what form Soviet culture should take. Various resolutions set forth the specific propaganda objectives necessary to realize the economic targets of the Seven Year Plan as well as the lofty vision for the construction of communism detailed in the Third Party Program. By 1961, the image of the 'new Soviet' citizen clearly came into view with the adoption of a "moral code for the builders of communism" included in the new Party Program. The Gagarin propaganda closely followed the moral principles spelled out in pre-1961 resolutions and foreshadowed the late-1961 moral code. Even as Gagarin set off for the launch pad on the morning of his flight, he reportedly called back to his fellow cosmonauts: "One for all and all for one, lads!"⁷ Gagarin's alleged remark was a verbatim quote from the moral code. The anecdote illustrates the argument of this thesis that the Gagarin propaganda closely correlated to the vision of a 'new man' spelled out in various resolutions and the Party Program.

Indeed, Gagarin's various biographies revealed too much of the conspicuous hand of the state propaganda apparatus to be accepted as reliable accounts of the man's life and character. Still, by deconstructing what Gagarin's image was made to represent, we can ascertain a great deal about the political imperatives and ideological currents at work within the Soviet system of Gagarin's time. Instead of judging official biographical narratives of Gagarin as historical fact or fiction, this thesis instead seeks to understand Gagarin's representation.

In the broadest sense, this thesis explores the importance of cultural history by illuminating the relative importance given to culture in the Gagarin celebrations. It seeks to understand how the event, and specifically Gagarin's biography, was constructed and narrated in public discourse, focusing on how the propaganda was used to buttress the state's domestic agenda while upholding the state's foreign policy objectives. This thesis explores the tension between proclamations of the supremacy of the Soviet system and

reorganization of everyday life depend in large measure on the cultural advancement of the population. Absorbing and developing the best that has been created by world culture, communist culture will be a new, higher stage in the cultural progress of mankind. It will embody the versatility and richness of the spiritual life of society, a culture of entire people, of all mankind." Hodnett, Grey. (ed.) *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: Volume 4, The Khrushchev Years, 1953-1964* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 255-6.

⁷ Yaroslav Golovanov, *Our Gagarin* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), 125.

the message of Gagarin's achievement being for the benefit of humanity in general, and considers how these messages may have both contradicted and complemented each other. It analyzes the Khrushchev regime's wish to attain a position of global leadership, an aspiration that required them to address the legitimacy of their power both domestically and internationally. In addition to analyzing how Soviet authorities made use of Gagarin's domestic and international celebrity, this thesis probes the process by which Gagarin was chosen, how his biography was determined to be suitable, how his image was constructed and controlled, and what he was permitted and required to say. As such, it is a case study of state control of society through the construction of historical narratives, as it is exercised through the propaganda apparatus of the media.

Several major questions direct my research. Firstly, how did the state use the event for propaganda purposes; what were their objectives? What messages can be read from biographical narratives of Iurii Gagarin's life? How was Gagarin chosen to be the first cosmonaut, how was his biography determined to be suitable, or how was his biography altered or constructed for maximum propaganda value?

This thesis analyzes and compares the many official biographical sketches of Gagarin produced in the Soviet media. Special focus is given here to the flurry of works published in 1961. The most significant of these was Gagarin's 1961 autobiography *Doroga v kosmos* (The Road to the Stars)⁸. This and other works produced in the year of Gagarin's flight are compared further with the biographical details in later works including *Moi brat Iurii* (My Brother Iurii)⁹ first published in 1972 by Iurii Gagarin's older brother Valentin, and journalist Yaroslav Golovanov's posthumous tribute *Nash Gagarin* (Our Gagarin)¹⁰ as well as the more recent *Bessmertnye Gagarina* (Immortal Gagarin)¹¹ by Iurii Ustinov.

⁸ Iurii A. Gagarin, *The Road to the Stars*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961). The title of Gagarin's 1961 autobiography – *The Road to the Stars* – was echoed in another Soviet publication of that year: *The Road to the Stars is Paved by the Communists!* The longer title is borrowed for this thesis to reflect the assertion made by official narratives that Iurii Gagarin's rise to heroism would not have been possible if not for the Communist Party. See: Iu. A. Gagarin, *Doroga v kosmos*, (Moscow: Pravda, 1961), and *Dorogu k zvezdam prokladyvayut kommunisty!*, (Moscow, Izdatelstvo Ministerstva Oborony SSSR, 1961).

⁹ Valentin Gagarin, *Moi brat Iurii: Dokumentalnaya Povest'* (Moscow: ITRK, 2002).

¹⁰ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*.

¹¹ Iurii Ustinov, *Bessmertnye Gagarina* (Moscow: Geroi Otyechestva, 2004).

This thesis compares these sources to various Party resolutions of the late 1950s and early 1960s to advance the argument that biographical narratives of Iurii Gagarin succinctly correlated to the Party's plans to ideologically and culturally educate 'new Soviet' citizens. As such, this thesis is situated at an intersection of the political and cultural history of the Khrushchev period.

For Khrushchev, who only five years earlier denounced Stalin's cult of personality, the creation of a hero figure outside of politics may have seemed both advantageous and acceptable. At any rate, the Soviet Union under Khrushchev was in a unique position historically to understand and employ the power of the personality cult. By creating a 'hero' out of Gagarin, the Soviet state sought to create a cultural icon, a revered figure who could perform as a role model and a mouthpiece for the general line.

According to Gagarin's biographers, his heroic journey to become the first cosmonaut was a product of his character. In simplest terms he was a happy worker. This simplification mirrored the moral imperatives laid out in the period's various resolutions on the functions of propaganda. Propagandists and all Party members were explicitly directed to vigorously labor to shape people's attitudes towards fulfillment of these goals. Since the effectiveness of their work would be measured by increases in the production capacity of the working masses, it is no wonder that Gagarin's biographical portrait was that of a happy and selfless worker.

Gagarin's biographies echoed other basic facets of the propaganda plan. His life story effectively argued the virtues of Leninist ideals, scientific-atheism, and the 'science' of Marxism-Leninism and dialectical-materialism. Gagarin was molded into an example of the 'correct' way to wage the struggle between the new and the old. As proof of the 'new era' and a tireless builder of communism, he was a powerful symbol of Soviet progress. His almost messianic ability to calm quarrels earned him an image as a dove of peace and made him an ideal spokesperson for peaceful coexistence. Paradoxically, he also cast the United States as an imperialistic and militarily aggressive power, and championed the defensively armed Soviet Union. The propaganda directives of the late 1950s and early 1960s literally overwhelmed Gagarin's biography; there was little else to it.

To the Soviet state, Gagarin's flight was more than a technical and scientific achievement; it was an ideological victory which Iurii Gagarin's image was molded to reflect. The image of Gagarin that emerged was an icon of the scientific culture that the Soviet authorities felt would lead to the international triumph of socialism. The Soviet regime vaunted Gagarin's achievement as the start of "a new era in the development of mankind."¹² They narrated a grand sweep of history from the primordial to the present to illustrate the immensity of the achievement and to credit the Soviet system with reaching the highest pinnacle in the teleological progress of humanity. Gagarin, as a symbolic representation of this dawning technological age, was neither wholly created by the propaganda nor launched into the mythology of immortality without its assistance.

This thesis differs from other broader narrative histories of Soviet space exploration such as those by Walter A. McDougall¹³ and James Harford¹⁴ in its focus on the creation of the hero-myth of Iurii Gagarin. Jamie Doran and Piers Bizony¹⁵ did focus on Gagarin in their work, but they tried to find the 'truth behind the legend' instead of considering the legend itself. This thesis takes up the study of Soviet propaganda pioneered by Frederick Barghoorn¹⁶, Antony Buzek¹⁷, Martin Ebon¹⁸, David Wedgwood Benn¹⁹, and Baruch Hazan²⁰. Works by each of these writers, however, differs from this thesis in approach and methodology, for the present work introduces methods of cultural history into the study of Soviet propaganda. Most similar to this thesis, then, are

¹² *Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 3.

¹³ Walter A. McDougall, ... *The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

¹⁴ James Harford, *Korolev: How One Man Masterminded the Soviet Drive to Beat America to the Moon* (New York: John Wiley & Sons), 1997.

¹⁵ Jamie Doran and Piers Bizony, *Starman: The Truth behind the Legend of Yuri Gagarin* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998).

¹⁶ Frederick C. Barghoorn, *Soviet Foreign Propaganda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

¹⁷ Antony Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964).

¹⁸ Martin Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1987).

¹⁹ Benn, *Persuasion and Soviet Politics*.

²⁰ Baruch A. Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda: A Case Study of the Middle East Conflict* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1976). And: *Soviet Impregnational Propaganda* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982).

culturally-oriented Soviet propaganda case studies of other periods, such as John McCannon's²¹, Karen Petrone's²², and Jeffery Brooks'²³ histories of Stalinist culture.

In particular, McCannon's research into the 1930s portrayals of Arctic aviators who reached the North Pole provides a precedent for this essay, as one could argue that the celebrations of these pilots in the Stalin era influenced the planners of the Gagarin celebrations. Soviet propaganda about outer space bore a close resemblance, and in many ways can be considered a continuation of the Arctic propaganda of the 1930s. The following statement by McCannon can be extended into the stratosphere and the century's later half:

If there was a single venue in which technological development, visions of modernity, and the public imagination can be said to have fully converged during the first half of the twentieth century, it would be in the skies.²⁴

The skies – and space beyond – provided a perfect backdrop for the state to project ideals of progress and expansion, for the skies covered every corner of the Union and beyond. As with McCannon's studies, the Soviet space propaganda campaign offers a case study in the process of a propaganda apparatus interacting with the state and society, and affords a glimpse into the Soviet world-view and self-image. Like the Arctic myth of the 1930s, Soviet narratives of space exploration – infused with official values expressed in propaganda, ritual, and symbols – constituted a “master fiction”.²⁵ As a fiction, the text of Soviet space culture expressed the world-view of its authors, which was in some ways ‘socialist-realist’ – as McCannon suggested. In more general terms, the world-view reflected the dominant ideology of dialectical-materialism.

²¹ John McCannon, *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union, 1932-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), and: “Positive Heroes at the Pole: Celebrity Status, Socialist-Realist Ideals and the Soviet Myth of the Arctic, 1932-39,” *The Russian Review*, 56 (July 1997): 346-65.

²² Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

²³ Jeffery Brooks, *Thank You Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁴ McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 68.

²⁵ Ibid. McCannon borrowed the term from Clifford Geertz.

McCannon called this “modern myth” one way in which a “totalitarian” regime could “command loyalty, or at least obedience” from its subjects.²⁶ Still, as McCannon noted, Soviet propaganda was subtler than “brainwashing”.²⁷ The Soviet Union not only needed to communicate with and educate its population. Because its ideology was based on the premise of revolution, the Soviet state was also required to mobilize its subjects. This required inspiration, at times took the form of violent coercion, but at other times, such as with the Gagarin propaganda, it was more optimistic and imaginative. While this type of study may suggest how state propaganda informed and affected the perceptions and culture of ordinary citizens, the question of how the population received these messages largely lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

Jeffrey Brooks has elaborated on how in the Stalin era a type of ritualized gratitude to the Communist Party existed. This has resurfaced in my research through the formulation that the “selfless endeavor of our people” was typically subordinated to the higher “leadership of the Communist Party”.²⁸ My work will complement these works, as well as provide a post-Stalin counterpoint that will, hopefully, broaden the scope of studies of Soviet propaganda and propaganda in general.

This thesis aims to prove the intimate relations between the official accounts of Gagarin’s life and the propaganda directives employed at the time of his flight. “Chapter One: The Agitprop Apparatus”, summarizes the reorganization of the propaganda apparatus in the years before *Vostok* and argues that Stalin’s successors fully recognized the importance of propaganda and worked steadfastly to reinvigorate the agitation and propaganda system. The chapter also summarizes how the propaganda apparatus’ reorganization was manifested in the mass press. Gagarin’s flight came at the culmination of this process of revitalizing propaganda.

“Chapter Two: The General Line” outlines the major themes of Party resolutions on propaganda in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This chapter focuses more closely on the specific propaganda content that was called for by the Party and highlights the themes

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 1.

that influenced the Gagarin propaganda. It concludes that the propaganda themes most relevant to the Gagarin propaganda were most fully elaborated in the Third Party Program of 1961.

The next three chapters analyze the Gagarin propaganda, comparing it to the Party's directives summarized in Chapter Two. "Chapter Three: Our Gagarin" probes how Soviet propagandists reconciled the paradox of creating an individual hero within a society ideologically oriented towards collectivism. It argues that Gagarin was selected to be the first cosmonaut in part due to his modest background and investigates some of the most significant metaphors used to situate Gagarin within the collective. The chapter concludes that these metaphors – of unity, of other heroes, and of family – effectively transposed Gagarin's heroism to the entire Soviet collective.

"Chapter Four: The Road to the Stars" assesses the propagandists' expressions of the Russian and Soviet past and shows how the Gagarin propaganda described a Marxist and dialectical-materialist interpretation of history. It argues that this world-view was used to support the notion that the Soviet Union's revolutionary history had made *Vostok* possible, resulted in an orientation towards a global clash of communist and capitalist ideologies, and allowed the propagandists to practice historical revisionism.

"Chapter Five: The Molding of the Rising Generation" outlines the propagandists' visions of the future, and argues that the Gagarin propaganda reflected a cult of the 'new' that was predominantly directed towards youth. It addresses how Gagarin's image as a 'happy' and 'hard-working' materialist promoted devotion to the Party, scientific-atheism and increased productivity. It concludes that these themes reflected Party resolutions calling for 'new Soviet' citizens to build the 'material basis of communism'.

"Conclusion: Immortal Gagarin" views the Gagarin propaganda in the context of de-Stalinization and argues that it was a useful tool for legitimizing the new regime. It assesses the success of the Gagarin hero-myth in considering the key figures' – Khrushchev, Gagarin, Stalin and Lenin – final resting places, and probing post-Soviet judgments of Gagarin.

CHAPTER ONE: THE AGITPROP APPARATUS

By way of introduction to the topic of Gagarin propaganda, this chapter describes the development and roles of the various organs of the Soviet agitation and propaganda apparatus, and outlines the basic components of it at the time of Gagarin's flight. It aims to portray this system as a highly complex and evolved machine that paid considerable attention to the shaping of Soviet society. This chapter highlights the reorganization of the propaganda mechanism that took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s and argues that these changes constituted an intensification of Soviet propaganda operations.

Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Party invested considerable energy into molding society through propaganda. Remarkable new technical developments and ideological concepts were injected into what was already a sophisticated propaganda system. Tactics that had withered under Stalin were revived in a concerted attempt to renew a Leninist mobilization of the masses. Conceptualizations of things "young" and "new" were pushed to the forefront of propaganda operations, and youth involvement in propaganda was stepped up. New media such as radio and television were more vigorously employed. Gagarin propaganda constituted one of the first – and perhaps the most significant – examples of the newly revitalized propaganda apparatus.

After first considering Soviet and Western definitions of propaganda and agitation, this chapter traces the evolution and primary functions of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) as well as the primary newspapers, publishing houses and news agencies. It then summarizes various propaganda organs that do not neatly fall within the realm of the printed word – principally radio and television. After briefly surveying the major foreign propaganda organs and international front organizations, this chapter concludes with an analysis of Party resolutions that most shaped the Gagarin propaganda.

The term 'propaganda' originated in 1622 when Pope Gregory XV created the Vatican's missionary arm – the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Sacred Congregation for Propagation of the Faith) – to combat the spread of Protestantism.

Western nations during the First World War used the term pejoratively to describe the falsehoods of their enemies. Despite attempts in the 1920s by self-proclaimed propagandists like Edward Bernays to rescue the term, the negative connotations attached to 'propaganda' have survived in the West. Since then the English-speaking world has preferred terms like Bernays' 'public relations' or Walter Lippmann's 'manufacturing consent' to describe the work of professional experts in manipulating public-opinion. In his introduction to Bernays' 1928 text *Propaganda*, Mark Crispin Miller noted that Western practitioners of the art, like their counterparts in the Soviet Union, considered propaganda a revolutionary "science".²⁹

The concept of 'manipulation' commonly appears in definitions of 'propaganda'. To Harold Lasswell, "Propaganda relies on symbols to attain its end; the manipulating of collective attitudes."³⁰ Lasswell specified that the intended 'end' of propaganda is the manipulation of a person or persons, the 'means' with which propaganda operates distinguishes it from other more violent forms of manipulation. As Lasswell also noted, propaganda is symbolic, using the "manipulation of representation" to achieve its goal of manipulating people.³¹ Baruch Hazan also defined 'propaganda' as a "process of manipulating symbols".³² In the hands of a powerful state, with sufficient control over the flow of information, the scope of this "manipulation of symbols" often encompasses the narration of history. As a form of communication between a state and the people it governs, propaganda intersects both politics and culture.

Hazan also offered the notion of 'impregnational propaganda' – a type of propaganda less concerned with motivating specific actions, and more designed to induce favorable attitudes towards the propaganda source.³³ At first glance the likable image of Iurii Gagarin might be categorized as impregnational propaganda. But his image went

²⁹ Mark Crispin Miller, "Introduction" in Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2005), 13.

³⁰ Quoted by Harwood Childs, *Introduction to Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1940), 86.

³¹ Harold Lasswell, "Propaganda," in E.R.A. Seligman (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1933), 12: 521.

³² After deliberating many alternatives, Hazan arrived at this carefully considered definition: "Propaganda is the preconceived, systematic and centrally coordinated process of manipulating symbols, aimed at promoting uniform behavior of large social groups, a behavior congruent with the specific interests and ends of the propagandist." Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 12.

³³ Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 29.

even further than “motivating specific actions” by attempting to shape people’s morality. Hazan’s description of propaganda fulfilling the role of a “mass leader” often operating as a “personality builder” more captures the essence of the Gagarin hero-myth.³⁴

In the Soviet Union ‘propaganda’ was a noble act, a Communist’s duty, and one of the fundamental processes of constructing socialism. Soviet elaborations of the difference between ‘propaganda’ and ‘agitation’ usually referred to Georgi V. Plekhanov’s statement that, “the propagandist conveys *many* ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator conveys only one or a few ideas, but to a great mass of people”.³⁵ Khrushchev, however, blurred the distinction between the two concepts, indiscriminately swapping one term for the other, or replacing them altogether with the euphemisms “ideological work” or “Communist education”.³⁶ Since this trend towards a conflation of terms was reflected in Party literature in the late 1950s and early 1960s, this essay considers these expressions as synonymous with ‘propaganda’. A 1963 article attempted to clarify why Plekhanov’s definition had suffered in recent years:

What Plekhanov said about propaganda and agitation was right for his times. Today things have changed. Propaganda and agitation have come closer to each other. Agitation has become more profound, and acquired the character of propaganda. Propaganda is now more aimed at a narrow circle of people. The Communist reality turned propaganda to something more massive and accessible.³⁷

Even the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* admitted that agitation and propaganda were only “relatively independent”, and defined ‘propaganda’ as: “the dissemination of political, philosophical, scientific, artistic, or other views or ideas, with the aim of instilling them in the public consciousness and encouraging mass action”.³⁸ ‘Agitation’ was defined as: “the spreading of a certain idea or slogan that arouses the masses to action.”³⁹ Agitation and propaganda differed in terms of their method. Still, Lenin’s principle of *partiinost* required that the content of each conform to a ‘general line’ based

³⁴ Ibid., 27.

³⁵ A. M. Prokhorov, Editor-in Chief, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (New York: MacMillan, 1973), 1: 137.

³⁶ Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 33.

³⁷ L Ilyichev et al. (eds.), *Partiinaya Propaganda I Sovremennost* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1963), 50.

³⁸ Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 21: 269.

³⁹ Ibid., 1: 137.

on the resolutions and directives of the highest Party organs.⁴⁰ The core narratives of Gagarin's life and flight, for instance, were projected in a unified voice that was consistent across the spectrum of official Soviet media.

Agitation and propaganda had long been an important focus for the Soviet state's energies; decades of theory and practice had elaborated the Agitprop apparatus into a highly organized and efficient system. Lenin's early writings on the importance of propaganda greatly influenced the Soviet development of a sophisticated and organized propaganda apparatus. Since the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903 adopted his resolution "On the Situation in Propaganda", the Bolsheviks devoted considerable energies to propaganda activities. The Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) was first created in September 1920 by the secretariat of the Central Committee of the Party. After the functions of the Governmental Press Bureau were transferred to it in the summer of 1921⁴¹, Agitprop soon controlled all facets of Party agitation and propaganda.⁴²

The various name changes of the department between 1921 and 1948 highlight Agitprop's purpose: 'Agitation', 'Propaganda', 'Mass Campaigns', 'Culture', 'Leninism', and 'Ideology'.⁴³ The long history and early creation of the department also reveal the high level of significance that the Soviet state attributed to the issue of shaping and defining the ideological climate and culture of society. Regular reforms to the Agitprop apparatus served not only to fine-tune the machine but also to reshape the system according to contemporary propaganda goals.

Constant throughout Agitprop's development, though, was the fundamental principle that propaganda should serve to reeducate society in the communist mold. In his study *How the Communist Press Works*, Antony Buzek summarized how Lenin perceived

⁴⁰ *Partiinost'* was defined by the *Small Soviet Encyclopedia* as "devotion to Party principles and total adherence to Party ideology and the current political line" *Small Soviet Encyclopedia* (2nd Edition) (Moscow, 1958), 7: 634-635.

⁴¹ *Izvestiya Tsentral'nogo Komiteta*, No. 28, March 1921. Cited in Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 35.

⁴² A. Inkeles. *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1967, 32.

⁴³ Between 1929 and 1934, Agitprop was divided into a Department of Agitation and Mass Campaigns and a Department of Culture and Propaganda. United again in 1934 as the Culture and Propaganda of Leninism Department, the organ returned to its original name – the Propaganda and Agitation Department – in 1935. From 1939 to 1948 Agitprop functioned with the status of a Directorate until that system was abolished and Agitprop again was made a Department. See John Clewes, *Soviet Propaganda Techniques*, (London: Methuen and Co., 1964), 12-13.

propaganda as an educational tool for the entire population: "The end product should have been an entirely new man, the Soviet man, the man of communist society."⁴⁴ The official representation of Iurii Gagarin was a detailed portrait of what the Party wanted such a 'new man' to be.

An organ of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and thus organized on CPSU lines, Agitprop was subject to Party discipline. Party members were appointed to key positions in Agitprop and as editors and managers of the various media organizations. A member of the Presidium usually supervised the ideological aspects of Agitprop's activity. The responsibility of heading the central Agitprop was usually assigned to one of the most trusted secretaries of the central secretariat. At the time of *Vostok*, L. Ilyichev was the man in charge, as head of the Agitprop Department from 1958 to 1961 and then as Chairman of the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee, which was effectively Agitprop under a new name.⁴⁵

In practice Agitprop conformed to the CPSU structural principles of 'democratic centralism' within a 'territorial-production structure', and so was not simply one department but many.⁴⁶ This administrative model effectively allowed central organs to maintain a high degree of control over peripheral organizations throughout the Soviet Union's various republics right down to the basic unit – the 'primary organizations' in factories, offices, and collectives. The organization at the 'democratic center' of this elaborate propaganda system was the Agitprop department attached to the secretariat of the Central Committee. This central Agitprop department channeled directives from the Presidium and Congresses into a 'general line' to be followed by the lower level Agitprop offices in the peripheries.⁴⁷ Agitprop did not itself engage directly in propaganda operations such as publishing but instead created and disseminated the state's propaganda policy.⁴⁸ With this system the Department oversaw the content of all Soviet press and

⁴⁴ Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works*, 28.

⁴⁵ Priscilla Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962-1964* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), vii.

⁴⁶ The 'territorial-production structure' meant that higher-level organs – generally headquartered in Moscow – oversee the various lower-level regional and local organizations through the administrative territorial divisions of the USSR. See Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works*, 33.

⁴⁷ Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works*, 32-37.

⁴⁸ At the lowest level were the *agitpunkty* – agitation and propaganda centers for political and educational instruction situated at the local level, sometimes just in a railroad station. An elected 'party committee'

publishing from the mass daily newspapers right down to leaflets and the so-called “wall newspapers”.

The Central Committee’s Agitprop was also divided into sections to oversee various types of media that fell more or less outside the realm of the printed word. While these divisions are fluid, scholars agree that they basically comprised the following areas: Party Propaganda; Mass Propaganda; Agitation; Culture; Central Press; Republic, *Krai* and *Rayon* Press; Local Press; Radio; Television; Schools; Sciences; Publishing; Belles Lettres; Arts; Film; and Sports and Gymnastics.⁴⁹ The sophisticated propaganda apparatus was thus structured to direct both literature and other forms of propaganda. The Agitprop Department operated within many Soviet cultural spaces, and was able – as with Gagarin – to fill these cultural spaces with a consistent message.

Between Stalin’s death in 1953 and Gagarin’s flight in 1961, the Agitprop apparatus underwent a series of reforms as the Soviet system experienced the dual processes of de-Stalinization and later Khrushchevism. Almost immediately after Stalin’s death, his successors began to address and attend to the weaknesses within the propaganda system that had gone unchecked under the dictator. Stalinist simplification of propaganda themes, heavier reliance on coercion through mass terror, and the excessive elaboration of Stalin’s ‘cult of personality’, led his successors to realize the necessity for a reinvigoration of propaganda operations. At a Central Committee conference in late 1953, Khrushchev said that:

The firmly rooted stereotypes and time-worn methods whereby everything is written according to a single pattern must be vigorously driven from the newspaper pages . . .

performed the executive function in each of these organizations from the lowest to the highest. Every committee above and including the *rayon* (district) level had a secretariat: a group of secretaries charged with administrating over such areas as organization, education, industry, or agitation and propaganda. Every secretariat above the *rayon* level thus had its own Agitprop department dedicated to directing propaganda activities in the local administrative area. Secretaries of the primary organizations charged with directing agitation and propaganda were also grouped into collectives (*agitkollektiv*), with the higher-level departments, which were larger and better represented.

⁴⁹ Bruno Kalnins. *Der sowjetische Propagandastaats* (The Soviet Propaganda State), Stockholm, 1956, 38-39. Cited in Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works*, 36

Material must be more varied, and more thought must be given to content and form of presentation.⁵⁰

The Central Committee and the three Congresses held between 1956 and 1961 issued several resolutions and decisions on propaganda and agitation.⁵¹ In particular, the XX Congress of 1956 devoted considerable attention to restructuring and revitalizing propaganda operations. The Party resolved to “implement thorough measures” to “overcome” and “liquidate” the “cult of personality” that surrounded Stalin.⁵² Part of this process would be “to mobilize our cadres, all communists and the broadest masses of the toilers.”⁵³ Additionally, the Congress approved measures to improve the education of Party cadres, to draft a new Party Program, and to “create more favorable conditions for the full and all-around illumination of the life and activities of V. I. Lenin and the popularization of the ideas of Leninism”.⁵⁴ These developments were in a sense framed by this elaboration of a cult of Lenin; the renewed focus on the ideological education and mobilization of the masses was a return to Leninist ideals. The vision set forth at the XX Congress would shape the reformation of the propaganda apparatus in the next years, and would eventually become embodied in the hero-myth of Iurii Gagarin. One of the most significant aspects of the Gagarin propaganda – its striking correlation to the moral code elaborated in the Third Party Program – was thus connected to the Congress where Stalin was denounced.

More than simply removing the “pervasive falsehood and obscurantism” of Stalinist propaganda – as Grey Hodnett defined the de-Stalinization of propaganda – the reform process also saw the introduction of new technologies and methods in an attempt to increase the appeal of propaganda.⁵⁵ It was clear to Soviet authorities that broadening the reach of propaganda, and heightening its effect, would require a measurable injection of vitality. By the mid-1950s it had become crucial for the Soviet Union to reinvigorate ‘real’ enthusiasm for socialism. Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s crimes in 1956 had coincided with the start of an attack on the influence of “dogmatists” among

⁵⁰ Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works*, 84.

⁵¹ The XX Congress (1956), XXI Extraordinary Congress (1959), and XXII Congress (1961).

⁵² Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 52.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

propagandists, and an attempt in general to “brighten up” propaganda.⁵⁶ The Party understood that it needed to make propaganda more accessible, in order to give the regime a new face. In 1956 and 1957, for example, the CPSU newspaper *Pravda* criticized the Soviet press in general for being too “insipid, lifeless, deadly dull and difficult to read”.⁵⁷ By 1960 the Party would further criticize propaganda’s narrow “sphere of influence, [...] weak mass character, and its not always intelligible form of presentation.”⁵⁸

Press reforms in 1953 and 1956 increased the use of pictures and photographs in Soviet newspapers. After 1956, newspapers – especially those designed to attract audiences less likely to respond to dry text, such as the youth paper *Komsomolskaia pravda* – began to include six to twelve pictures in papers that were typically only four to six pages long. After 1959 an illustrated supplement called *Nedelia* (Week) was also included with Sunday editions of *Izvestiia*.

The heightened visuals were not simply for enhanced pleasure; in February 1958, the Agitprop officially condemned ‘content-less’ pictures.⁵⁹ The basic tenets of the ‘general line’ obliged journalists to avoid the twin errors of ‘objectivism’ – not providing a class evaluation – and ‘escapism’ – presenting material that was socially or politically irrelevant.⁶⁰ The resolution against content-less pictures signaled that Stalin’s successors were not turning away from the invasive and indoctrinating features of agitation and propaganda, but instead were looking to increase its power and scope.

After 1956 the Party energetically campaigned to increase newspaper circulation, which prior to then had been, on the whole, relatively low. By 1961 the total average one-issue circulation of Soviet newspapers reached 68.7 million. Changes in the supply of newspapers reflected the demands of the Soviet state more than it did the demands of the marketplace. For instance, the rise of *Pravda*’s circulation through this period was the result of a concerted effort to increase Party influence on the masses. In the 1920s *Pravda* was not the highest circulating daily in the Soviet Union. By 1953 though, *Pravda*

⁵⁶ Benn, *Persuasion and Soviet Politics*, 135-36.

⁵⁷ Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works* 84.

⁵⁸ Benn, *Persuasion and Soviet Politics*, 136.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

circulated nearly the same numbers as the rival *Izvestiia* and in 1961 *Pravda* produced about fifty percent more papers than *Izvestiia*.

The twenty-two central, all-union newspapers that existed in 1961 exercised immense and growing influence within the Soviet press. The lower-level publications took their cues from those papers most closely associated with the highest organs of the Party, government and public organizations. The total circulation figures for those twenty-two newspapers, already the highest as a group, continued to rise from 23.5 million in 1961 to 26 million in 1962.⁶¹

While papers issued by the Party organs themselves, such as *Pravda*, carried more weight in terms of dictating the general line, a large variety of papers were directed towards special groups. Though adjusted according to state prerogatives, circulation figures for these smaller presses also rose through the post-Stalin and Khrushchev periods. The *komsomol* and pioneer papers for youth and children, for example, reached an average one-issue circulation of 15.2 million by 1961.⁶² The revitalization of the press thus extended into the lower levels. Regional and local newspapers tailored the general line to reach their local audience's language or interest groups, thus broadening Agitprop's scope. Even 'wall newspapers' were the focus of Party attempts to increase the mobilizing power of the press.

The changes undergone by the leading newspapers, publishing houses and news agencies in the late 1950s reflected the developments within the propaganda system. It is useful to summarize the status of the major newspapers *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, and *Komsomolskaia pravda*, as well as the news agencies TASS and *Novosti* at the time of Gagarin's flight. Each of these organs contributed immensely to the formation of Gagarin's image. Some of the more significant publications dedicated to Iurii Gagarin are also outlined here. The manner in which these publications propagandized Gagarin will be analyzed in later chapters.

⁶¹ Ibid., 71,

⁶² 1961 figures published in *Sovietskaya pechat*, October 1961, 10-23. Cited in Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works*, 69-70.

The largest and most influential of Soviet newspapers by the early 1960s was *Pravda* (Truth), the official organ of the CPSU.⁶³ With the highest 1961 circulation of any Soviet newspaper at 6 million copies daily, *Pravda* was especially significant to the Gagarin propaganda.⁶⁴ As the newspaper with the most direct access to the highest Party leadership, *Pravda* best reflected the most dominant Party currents. A board approved by the Party headed the newspaper's editorial staff. *Pravda*, the Party and Agitprop were all closely linked through their senior personnel. Ilyichev, for instance, the head of Agitprop, was both a Central Committee Secretary and a former deputy editor of *Pravda* from 1949 to 1952.

Like other Soviet newspapers, *Pravda* pushed all other news aside to make way for official narratives of *Vostok's* "great victory", including transcripts of in-flight communications with Gagarin and introductory biographies of the "hero-pilot", announcements of the arrival of a "new era", and general congratulatory praise to the "genius" of the Soviet people and the leadership of the Communist Party. Amongst this flood were transcriptions of speeches delivered at an April 14 mass demonstration in Red Square and at a press conference in the Moscow Scientists' Club the next day. I will analyze these early issues of *Pravda* for they offer the earliest descriptions of Gagarin and his flight. *Pravda* also played a vital role in spreading the Party resolutions; around

⁶³ *Pravda* was established by the Sixth (Prague) All-Russian Conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) in January 1912, its first issue in St. Petersburg on 5 May, 1912, and first legal publication on 22 April, 1913 – under the editorship of Lenin. The paper was banned and its editors arrested on 8 July, 1914, however. After the Tsar was overthrown, *Pravda* officially began publishing on March 5 1917 as the organ of the Central Committee and the St. Petersburg Committee of the RSDLP. *Pravda* then played an important role in disseminating the Bolshevik line and ultimately contributed to their seizure of power in November 1917. The paper followed the government when it was moved to Moscow, and since March 16 1918, *Pravda* continued to be published from Moscow. Reassigned in name to be the official organ of the Moscow Committee of the RCP (Bolshevik), then, after 1925, the ACP (Bolshevik), *Pravda* eventually became, in 1952, the organ of the Central Committee of the CPSU. During the five-year plans of the 1930s, *Pravda* promoted shock-work methods and the Stakhanovite movement, and played a significant role in cultivating the Cultural Revolution. Leading up to and during the Great Patriotic War, *Pravda* spread messages of patriotism and "proletarian internationalism", while campaigning against fascism and "imperialist war-mongers". After the war *Pravda* focused its propaganda efforts on the restoration of the economy, the "establishment of the world socialist system, the national liberation movement, and the peace policy of the USSR." *Pravda* also widely publicized proceedings as well as published the reports of the various major Party, state and public organizations. Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 20: 504-5.

⁶⁴ Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works*, 71.

the time of *Vostok* the newspaper devoted much ink to discussing drafts of the new Party Program.⁶⁵

With its own publishing house and printing house⁶⁶ directly connected to it, *Pravda* also published all Party political magazines including, since 1932, the satirical magazine *Krokodil*.⁶⁷ With Gagarin the magazine's 'satire' was thin. The 20 April, 1961 cover featured a drawing of a celebratory crowd heaving the smiling cosmonaut into the air. The mildly ironic caption cited Gagarin's comment that "The flight continued normally. I adapted well to the conditions of weightlessness."⁶⁸ In 1961, the *Pravda* Publishing House produced the Russian language version of Gagarin's autobiography⁶⁹ as well as a 343-page book – *The First Manned Flight in Space*⁷⁰ – collecting materials on Gagarin published in the *Pravda* newspaper.

The newspaper *Komsomolskaia pravda* – an organ of the Central Committee of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League (Komsomol) – was published in Moscow six times a week.⁷¹ Geared towards youth, the paper placed itself at the forefront of the new spirit between 1956 and 1958. Aleksei Adzhubei, Khrushchev's son-in-law, served on the board of editors at *Komsomolskaia pravda* between 1951 and 1957, and from 1957 to 1959 was the editor-in-chief. His performance at *Komsomolskaia pravda* must have impressed his superiors for he was appointed to head *Izvestiia* in 1959, and by decree directed to similarly reshape that paper.

⁶⁵ According to the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, *Pravda* was "active in disseminating the ideas of the CPSU program adopted at the Twenty-second Party Congress in 1961." The Encyclopedia also said that: "Nearly 16,000 readers of *Pravda* participated in a discussion of the draft of the new program and party rules, and a number of special issues were devoted to detailed discussions of various provisions in the CPSU program." Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 20: 505.

⁶⁶ The *Pravda* Publishing House, and the V. I. Lenin Printing House of the Newspaper *Pravda*.

⁶⁷ *Krokodil* was a weekly supplement to *Rabochaya gazeta* (The Worker's Paper). *Krokodil's* tasks were formulated in the decrees "On the Magazine *Krokodil*" (1948), and "On the Shortcomings of the Magazine *Krokodil* and the Steps Needed to Eliminate Them" (1951). According to the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*: "Armed with satire and humor, *Krokodil* wages a struggle against what is unfavorable and alien to Soviet life and exposes bourgeois ideology and imperialistic reactionism." Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 13: 514.

⁶⁸ *Krokodil*, No. 11, April 20, 1961, front cover.

⁶⁹ Gagarin, Iu. A. *Doroga v kosmos*, Moscow: *Pravda*, 1961.

⁷⁰ *Pervyi polet cheloveka v kosmos: material, opublikovannye v "pravde"* (Moscow: *Pravda*, 1961).

⁷¹ *Komsomolskaya pravda* began with a resolution of the Thirteenth Congress of the RCP (Bolshevik) in 1924 and published its first issue on 24 May, 1925.

Under Adzhubei's editorship, *Izvestiia* tripled its circulation between 1957 and 1961 to reach a daily total of 4.1 million.⁷² *Izvestiia*, the Russian word for "news", was an organ of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.⁷³ One of the most prominent daily newspapers, *Izvestiia* had correspondents situated throughout the republics as well as in foreign countries. The newspaper grew in significance and circulation in the years preceding Gagarin's flight. After 1 June, 1960, two editions of *Izvestiia* were published each day – an evening edition for the Moscow region and a morning edition for other regions.

Izvestiia also had its own publishing house, founded in Moscow in 1927.⁷⁴ Independent divisions there produced newspapers, books and journals.⁷⁵ Publications were typeset there into all the languages of the republics and also into European languages. Additionally, the publishing house printed various documents such as decrees, laws, and stenographic materials issued by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. In 1961 the publishing house issued the 126-page book *Soviet Man in Space* to celebrate Gagarin's flight.⁷⁶

In order to better understand the nature of information control within the Soviet news system, it is necessary to examine the roles played by the Soviet wire service TASS, and the feature agency Novosti. Both played a central role in the dissemination of propaganda, and the histories of the two organizations also highlight developments in attitudes towards propaganda in the Khrushchev era. TASS, the acronym for the *Telegrafnoe Agentstvo Sovetskogo Soiuza* (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union) was

⁷² Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works*, 71.

⁷³ *Izvestia* was the shortened name of the *Izvestiya Sovetov Deputatov Trudiashchikhsia SSSR* (News of the Soviets of Working Peoples' Deputies of the USSR). This was the name the paper held since 26 January, 1938. Begun in Petrograd on 13 March, 1917 as the *News of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies*, on 9 November, 1917 the paper became the official newspaper of the Central Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet and the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. On 14 July, 1923, it was made the organ of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee.

⁷⁴ The *Izvestiia Sovetov Deputatov Trudiashchikhsia SSSR* Printing House.

⁷⁵ Among the many journals published by the *Izvestiia* Publishing House were the literary journals *Novyi Mir* (New World), and *Inostrannaia literatura* (Foreign Literature).

⁷⁶ *Sovetskii chelovek v kosmose: spetsial'nyi vypusk* (Moscow: *Izvestiia*, 1961).

the “central news organ” of the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ Unlike most Western wire services, TASS was directly controlled by the state and the agency’s content was dictated by state prerogatives.

TASS operations included the collection and dissemination of news reports to all the organs of the Soviet press, television, radio and other subscribing organizations both domestic and international. Additional Telegraph Agencies of the Union Republics also operated under the authority of their Republic’s Council of Ministers and the central Telegraph Agency. The Republics’ agencies translated the central agency’s reports into the languages of the Republics and reported local news back to the busy central headquarters in Moscow. The agency also had offices abroad.⁷⁸

Nikolai G. Palgunov, director general of TASS from 1953 to 1960, significantly modernized the news service, and is credited with creating the foundation for subsequent developments within the agency.⁷⁹ Under Palgunov the agency purchased teleprinters from United Press and further augmented its technological revitalization with equipment seized from Nazi Germany and bought from the United States. He considered the simple distribution of information to be “a mere photographic process” and redefined the agency’s role to disseminate information “based on Marxist-Leninist theory, which

⁷⁷ Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 25: 464.

⁷⁸ TASS, like Agitprop, had origins early on in the creation of the Bolshevik state. In fact its lineage can be traced to the Tsarist era with the formation on 1 September, 1904, of a governmental press agency, the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency (SPTA). Subordinated by Prime Minister Petr Stolypin to the direct control of the Council of Ministers on 31 December, 1909, the SPTA continued to operate as a vital organ of Russian state propaganda. The agency was renamed the Petrograd Telegraph Agency (PTA) on 19 August, 1914. After seizing the PTA on 7 November, 1917, Leonid Stark, the Military Commissar who led the takeover of the agency, wrote and wired to the world the first reports of the Bolshevik coup. A decree of the Council of People’s Commissars dated 18 November, 1917 made the PTA the “central news organ” of the Soviet state. Merged with the government press bureau – the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Council of Workers’, Peasants’ and Soldiers’ Deputies – and moved with the government to Moscow in March of 1918, the PTA was rechristened the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA) on 7 September of that year. ROSTA effectively replaced all similar services, which were also shut down at this time. By 1925 ROSTA was restricted to the Russian republics and superceded by TASS, which was established on 10 July, 1925 as an All-Union organ. TASS soon began to quickly expand its operations to eventually comprise the news agencies of all the Soviet republics, and in the process became closely associated with Soviet power and authority, enjoying considerable status as the official mouthpiece of the Soviet political system. By 1955 TASS held offices in nearly 40 countries; by the early 1960s TASS offices operated in 65 countries. TASS’ status as part of the political apparatus was made official in December 1971 when the press agency became a government Ministry. Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 25: 464.

⁷⁹ Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 179.

provides an analysis of events.”⁸⁰ Palgunov believed that Communist Party direction was the “strength of the press”; his restructuring of TASS reflected his contention that “Information must be didactic and instructive.”⁸¹

Dmitiri F. Goryunov became director of TASS after Palgunov’s 1960 retirement. A former chief editor of *Komsomolskaia pravda* (1949-1957) and deputy chief editor of *Pravda* (1957-1960), Goryunov remained at the helm of TASS for seven years and continued the technical and editorial modernization efforts begun by Palgunov.⁸²

The *Agentstvo pechati novosti* – *Novosti* or APN for short – was founded in 1961 in Moscow as a “public information service”.⁸³ In his *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, Martin Ebon characterized the formation of *Novosti* as symbolic of “a Soviet effort to get away from the gray, dour image presented to the world by the TASS news service.”⁸⁴ Baruch Hazan agreed that *Novosti*’s creation was the “answer” to Soviet authorities’ perception that the agency had become too closely associated with the government and furthermore “was not geared to deal with new imaginative forms of propaganda.”⁸⁵

Delegates at a 21 February, 1961 conference decided that a new press agency for public organizations was necessary. Representatives of the public organizations that attended the conference drafted a charter for *Novosti*, the APN Charter, which was approved on 3 April, 1961. A “Council of Founders” was formed to govern *Novosti* including “non-governmental” organizations such as the Union of Journalists, the Union of Writers, the Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, and the Znanie (Knowledge) Society. One of the most prominent members of this board was Aleksei Adzhubei. Boris Burkov was the first Board Chairman of *Novosti* from 1961 to 1970. Between 1954 and 1960, Burkov had been Chief Editor of the newspaper *Trud* (Labor). As Hazan has noted, the “common

⁸⁰ Ibid., 172-173.

⁸¹ Ibid., 173.

⁸² Ibid., 180.

⁸³ Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 1: 652. *Novosti* had its origins in the 24 June, 1941 creation of a Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformburo) answerable to the Council of People’s Commissars and the Central Committee of the CPSU. The bureau’s mandate was to direct coverage of international and domestic news in the press and on the radio with a strong focus on military developments during the Great Patriotic War. *Novosti* was formed on 3 April, 1961 on the basis of the Sovinformburo.

⁸⁴ Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 205.

⁸⁵ Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 43.

denominator of these ‘public’ organizations is their association with propaganda activities.”⁸⁶ They were neither independent of the propaganda apparatus and the ultimate authority of CPSU directives, nor were they – as their own propaganda contends – “non-governmental”.

While *Novosti* flourished throughout Khrushchev’s reign and beyond, the timing of *Novosti*’s creation in April 1961 made Gagarin’s flight one of the first expressions of the new agency’s mandate: “Expansion of the exchange of various types of information will contribute to establishment of a spirit of mutuality and cooperation in the struggle for peace and friendship between peoples.”⁸⁷ *Novosti* thus had an international outlook from its conception. As the Soviet Union in some regards moved closer to parity with the United States, the imperative for remodeling the Soviet image abroad increased. Khrushchev’s calls for decolonization and disarmament were largely directed towards a global audience. This required international propaganda; as Hazan wrote, propaganda was an “effective means” for the Soviet Union to manage international relations.⁸⁸ After his 1970 retirement, Burkov reviewed his *Novosti* experience and recalled that *Novosti*’s “primary task” had been to promote the Soviet Union to the international audience.⁸⁹

Novosti’s reach was indeed vast; the APN publishing house published more than 35 million items – including books, newspapers, magazines and albums – in the USSR and abroad between 1965 and 1967. The agency had its own television service and the APN photo service prepared vast numbers of photos for the Soviet press. Between 1960 and 1965 Soviet production of books in foreign languages rose from 40 million to 44 million copies. The number of languages also increased over that period from 24 in 1960 to 27 in 1965.⁹⁰ By 1968 APN had offices in all of the Soviet Republics and in 73 foreign countries, was publishing in 56 languages and circulating materials in 110 different countries.⁹¹ *Novosti* oversaw the operations of the Foreign Language Publishing House which in 1961 published the English translation of Gagarin’s autobiography *Road to the*

⁸⁶ Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 43.

⁸⁷ Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 205.

⁸⁸ Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 34.

⁸⁹ Boris Burkov, *Za Rubezhom*, January 8-14, 1965, cited in Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 206.

⁹⁰ *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, USIF Research Service, Washington, 1972, 45. Cited in Hazan, 62-63.

⁹¹ Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 1: 652.

Stars. Another important *Novosti* organ was Progress Publishers, which produced *Our Gagarin* in 1979.⁹²

Those who held the prestigious posts at the helm of the major news organs were typically well integrated into the Soviet elite, performing a number of positions. Most were also symbolically honored for their services with the various Prizes or Orders given to note exceptional contributions to society. Adzhubei, for instance, served as a secretary of the Union of Journalists, made several trips abroad including accompanying Khrushchev to the US in 1959 and to Asia and Austria in 1960, and won the Lenin Prize in 1959 and the Order of Lenin in 1962.⁹³

Another significant tool for Soviet propaganda directed towards the international community was the creation of a network of international front organizations. One of the most significant front organizations was the World Peace Council (WPC), which was first established at the Prague Congress in April 1949.⁹⁴ Many of the largest front

⁹² *Novosti* also edited and produced the English language magazine *Sputnik*, a collection of articles and images drawn from the Soviet press and packaged in a full color and accessible format. Another important *Novosti* creation – the glossy magazine *Soviet Life* – was published in the United States as part of an agreement with the U.S. Information Agency in exchange for their right to publish their magazine *Amerika* in the Russian language in the Soviet Union. Publications originating in the USSR were also made available to American audiences through book sellers inside of the United States, such as New York's Four Continent Book Corporation, Chicago's Imported Publications, Inc., and San Francisco's Znanie Book Store. Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 207 & 110.

⁹³ Ilyichev, the head of Agitprop in 1961, was a Central Committee Secretary and a former deputy editor of *Pravda* (1949-1952) and head of the Press Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry (1953-1958). Palgunov also served other placements within the apparatus during his tenure at TASS and was awarded for his achievements. Palgunov was a chairman of the organizational bureau of the Union of Journalists of the USSR (1956-1959) and as a secretary of the Union of Journalists in 1959. He was awarded the Order of Red Banner of Labor in 1958 and 1962. A Party member since 1940, Goryunov also held a number of posts and was distinguished with awards for his service. Goryunov was a deputy chairman of the organizational bureau (1956-1959) and a secretary (1959) of the Union of Journalists, and awarded the Order of Red Banner of Labor in 1957 and 1965, a medal "For Valiant Labor" in 1960, and the Order of Lenin in 1962. Like other key figures within the propaganda apparatus, Burkov held a number of positions both within and outside of the fields of publishing and propaganda and he was honored by the state for his contributions. Burkov was a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet. Within the Union of Journalists, Burkov was a Bureau member since 1956, a Board Secretary from 1959-1966, and Deputy Chairman of the Union of Journalists after 1966. He won an Order of Red Banner of Labor in 1957, and an Order of Lenin in 1962. The news organs themselves were also honored; most of them won prestigious Orders in 1962. In 1962, *Pravda* was awarded its second Order of Lenin. *Izvestiia* won the Order of Lenin in 1967 for remaining: "faithful to the traditions of the Leninist *Pravda*" and for "implementing the Party's Leninist general line". *Izvestia*, Mar. 13, 1967, 1.

⁹⁴ Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 86.

organizations also had their own fronts; the World Peace Council, for instance, had at least 11 major fronts in 1987.⁹⁵

This outline of the organs of the Soviet propaganda apparatus is admittedly biased towards the written word over the manufacture of cultural products such as visual art, music, film, or consumer items. Scholars have noted a Soviet penchant towards literocentrism. Nancy Condee, for instance described literature as the “primary cultural field” and “crown jewel of Soviet culture”.⁹⁶ Still, while the study of literature does provide a fruitful analysis of Soviet ideology and conceptions of culture, it fails to suggest the totality within which that culture is experienced. The network of propaganda organs described so far reflected and in many ways shaped, but most certainly did not contain the entirety of the Soviet propaganda apparatus.

Agitprop’s concerns with shaping culture demanded the construction of ideologically imbued messages across a broad spectrum of possible cultural spaces and artifacts. Analysis of the meanings invested in, or attached to, consumer items can be especially fruitful within a centralized economy. The state apparatus has more control over the manufacture of goods, and has the prerogative to imbue them with symbols. To adequately assess the sheer volume of cultural products outside of the litero-center would be a daunting task, certainly one outside the scope of this essay. Nonetheless, an incomplete catalog of Gagarin artifacts would help to suggest the vast reach of the Soviet propaganda apparatus. Gagarin’s image, as we shall see, was – almost literally – everywhere.

One major outlet for Soviet propagandists to disseminate their messages was radio. The Bolsheviks recognized early on the potential of the medium. Both Radio Moscow and the Comintern Radio Station commenced broadcasting in 1922 and foreign language broadcasts began the next year.⁹⁷ Regular broadcasting began in the Soviet Union on 23 November, 1924 with a first ‘issue’ of radio news.⁹⁸ The effectiveness of

⁹⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁹⁶ Nancy Condee, “Cultural Codes of the Thaw”, in Taubman et al., *Nikita Khrushchev*, 161.

⁹⁷ Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 64.

⁹⁸ A Radio Commission of the Central Committee of the RCP(B) was set up in 1925 in order to supervise radio broadcasting. Between 1925 and 1927 several of the republics received their own radio stations. An

Soviet radio was strengthened in the years before *Vostok*. 1 October, 1960 saw the beginning of twenty-four hour Soviet broadcasting. By 1961 total programming increased to 78 hours per day. TASS and *Novosti* provided the news content of Soviet radio and television.

Radio was an attractive option to Soviet authorities as part of their overall effort to reach the masses and especially as a tool to connect with international audiences. In October 1929 Moscow began transmitting regular radio broadcasts “addressed to mass foreign audiences” first in German and later in French and English.⁹⁹ By 1961 Radio Moscow’s international broadcasts for the year had reached 1067 hours and 15 minutes.¹⁰⁰ Average daily broadcasts to foreign countries in the 1960s totaled 140 hours in 10 Soviet and 46 foreign languages.¹⁰¹ The number of foreign languages employed by Radio Moscow escalated from 45 to 84 between 1958 and 1971, while the average hours per day directed towards foreign audiences doubled between 1960 and 1970.¹⁰² Soviet broadcasting steadily grew and sustained impressive growth rates through the Khrushchev period and beyond, reflecting Soviet authorities’ solid approval of the efficacy of the medium.

On the morning of 12 April, 1961, Soviet radio played the patriotic song *How Spacious is My Country* just before revealing to the world the news of *Vostok*’s launch. Bulletins sustained the suspense as they regularly updated listeners on the progress of Gagarin’s flight. Loudspeakers in public squares beckoned Soviet citizens to stop their daily routines to witness history in the making. Streetcars, factories, shops and schools quit their normal operations so that people could follow the radio reports. Other sounds

All-Union Committee for Radio Broadcasting was established in 1931 within the People’s Commissariat for Posts and Telegraphs. The next year, several local committees were organized in various republics and oblasts. In 1933 the Statute of the All-Union Committee for Radiofication and Radio Broadcasting of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR was approved. The administration of Soviet radio broadcasting was centralized under the statute. By 1936 a first All-Union Radio Festival was held to announce the beginning of the exchange of radio programs between the Soviet Union’s various republics. A 1944 decree was adopted by the Council of People’s Commissars to strengthen the technical and material basis of radio operations. By 1948 All-Union Radio broadcasted a total of 45 programming hours per day spread over three separate programs. Soviet authorities attempted to place radio receivers in every *kolkhoz* (collective farm).

⁹⁹ Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 10: 56.

¹⁰⁰ Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 66.

¹⁰¹ Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 21: 418.

¹⁰² “Problemy teledidnaia i radio”, in *Nauka i tekhnika*, Moscow, 1971, 201-202. Cited in Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda*, 70.

inspired by the flight that received airtime on Soviet radio included the 1961 song *Gagarin March*¹⁰³, which was written and recorded especially to celebrate the flight, as well as the 1962 version of *Glory to the Forward-Looking*¹⁰⁴ and Vladimir Bunchikov's 1949 song *We Are High-Flying People*. The Soviet record label Melodiya records also issued one full disc to commemorate Gagarin's flight.¹⁰⁵

Television also played an important role in the Party's "ideological work".¹⁰⁶ Television receivers went into mass production towards the end of the 1940s. In 1951 a Central Television Station began operating, and by February 1956 they had broadened their operations to a second channel of broadcasting. The May Day celebrations in Red Square were covered on television for the first time in 1956. In 1957 a Committee for Radio Broadcasting and Television of the Council of Ministers was established. By 1960, 103 television studios and transmitters operated and daily programming had reached 276.5 hours. That year a daily news program *Television News* began broadcasting, and the *Mosfil'm* studios established a *Telefil'm* organization to prepare television serials. The 1960s also saw the rapid development of Soviet television broadcasting intended for foreign audiences. A January 1960 CPSU decree and the 1961 Party Program both acknowledged the significance of television for furthering the reach of ideological education and called for more vigorous use of the medium.

Television was in itself a symbol of technological progress; the growth of its reach and capabilities reflected the practical applications to be derived from the conquest

¹⁰³ *Gagarin March* featured the lyrics: "I dlya nas dorogi novye otkryl (and a new way opened for us)".

¹⁰⁴ Composed by Aleksandra Pakhmutova with lyrics by Sergei Grebennikov and Nikolai Doboronravov, and singing by Viktor Kokhno.

¹⁰⁵ The Melodiya record was called *Towards The Stars: Songs of Cosmos by Soviet Authors* and featured tracks with titles like: *I Believe Friends*, *The Pioneer Of Starry Tracks*, *You Dream Of Flights In Space*, *Gagarin Constellation*, *Smolensk Road*, and *How Yura Saw Us Off*. Viktor Kamkin *Melodiya Catalog* 2004, 9: 9100060 Melodiya Code: 33D032813-14. Another Melodiya record – *Yaroslav Smeliakov. Poems* – featured a poem called *Iurii Gagarin* read by Smeliakov. Viktor Kamkin *Melodiya Catalog*, 190: 9100378 Melodiya Code: 33D31433-34.

¹⁰⁶ Soviet experiments with the technology of television began in the 1920s and the first transmission was achieved in 1932. The first program created especially for the new medium was broadcast in Leningrad in 1938 and regular broadcasting commenced in Moscow and Leningrad in 1939. Television broadcasting was suspended during the War but recommenced on 7 May, 1945. On December 15 of that year regular twice-a-week broadcasting resumed in Moscow. Leningrad followed suit in 1947.

of outer space.¹⁰⁷ On 14 April, 1961, Western viewers of the Eurovision network saw the Red Square celebration for Gagarin, which was broadcast from Tallinn, Estonia, and relayed at Helsinki to the West. A 1961 newsreel entitled *May Day Strides Across the Land* highlighted Gagarin and Khrushchev riding in a motorcade as well as posters of Gagarin tied to balloons and ascending into the sky. In July 1961, a documentary film called *With Gagarin to the Stars* was produced in both Russian and English that showed the cosmonauts doing physical training and undergoing rigorous tests.¹⁰⁸

The Soviets had a long history of infusing public space with ideological symbols through the erection of monuments. A 12 April, 1918 decree had early on laid out the basis for removing pre-Revolutionary monuments and erecting a Revolutionary civic culture through monuments.¹⁰⁹ Monument propaganda inspired Soviet decorative arts, played an important tool for ideological education, and provided a means to make ‘new’ the appearance of Soviet cities. Statues of Gagarin were erected in many Soviet cities; Moscow, Saratov, Komsomolsk na Amur, and Zvyozdny Gorodok (Star City) all have monuments honoring the cosmonaut. Also, a 40-meter high titanium obelisk marks the landing site of *Vostok* in the countryside near Saratov. In 1964, a 100-meter tall titanium monument – in the shape of a stylized spaceship and its rocket’s trail – was erected to house the Memorial Museum of Cosmonautics on the grounds of the All-Union Exhibition Center (VDNKh) in Moscow. Also in Moscow, on Leninskii Prospekt, stands a highly stylized 30-meter-tall Gagarin. Here the cosmonaut looks like a comic-book super-hero with a rocket’s trail coming out of his feet.

Another significant method of infusing Soviet society with a new identity and social code was the celebration of ritual holidays – the so-called ‘special days’. The special days served as a focus for agitational campaigns. Most of these days celebrated

¹⁰⁷ For instance, in 1962 television signals from the spaceship *Vostok 3* and *Vostok 4* were broadcast on Soviet television. In 1965 Moscow and Vladivostok exchanged television signals via the Soviet space satellite *Molniia 1*. Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 25: 484.

¹⁰⁸ Fictional films also reflected the new interest in space that *Vostok* had generated. Alexander Rekemchuk’s 1962 novel *Molodo-zeleno* (Callow Youth), in which several of the characters are inspired by Gagarin’s flight to volunteer for trips to the moon, was made into a movie directed by Konstantin Voinov in 1962.

¹⁰⁹ The resolution was called: “On Removing Monuments Erected in Honor of Tsars and Their Servants and Developing a Project for Monuments Dedicated to the Russian Socialist Revolution (On Monuments of the Republic)”.

different professions, such as – to name only two out of dozens – Fisherman's Day¹¹⁰ or Food Industry Workers' Day¹¹¹. Of the 35 Special Days of the USSR listed in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 13 of them were established in either 1965 or 1966. This trend towards naming of special days seems to have been inaugurated by the establishment of Cosmonautics Day in 1962, observed each year on April 12 in commemoration of Gagarin's flight.¹¹²

"Theatricalized holidays" were themed mass presentations staged to celebrate important events and anniversaries. They were a significant part of mass agitation tactics since the early years of Soviet rule. For instance, in Petrograd in 1920 8,000 participants and approximately 100,000 spectators took part in *The Storming of the Winter Palace*. Moscow and Leningrad both staged *A Glorious Deed* in 1934 to honor the survivors and aviators of the Cheliushkin expedition. During the Sixth International Festival of Youth and Students in 1957, Moscow held 17 theatricalized holidays. In the 1960s theatricalized holidays were an important part of the All-Union Festivals.¹¹³ Annual parades and rallies to mark important days had long been an integral practice of Soviet celebration culture. These traditions of mass spectacle certainly informed the staging of Gagarin's celebration in Red Square on 14 April, 1961.

¹¹⁰ The second Sunday in July.

¹¹¹ The third Sunday in October.

¹¹² Cosmonautics Day was established on 9 April, 1962. Some of the special days were observed in honor of the toilers within the propaganda apparatus. Indeed, the first of these special Days to be observed was in commemoration of the newspaper *Pravda*; the tradition began even before the 1917 Revolution. On 5 May, 1914, the Bolsheviks began celebrating a "working-class press day" on the second anniversary of the first issue of *Pravda* on 5 May, 1912. The day has been officially observed as Press Day since *Pravda's* tenth anniversary in 1922. A 1945 decree established 7 May as Radio Day to commemorate A. S. Popov's demonstration of a wireless receiver on that day in 1895.

¹¹³ An offshoot of this culture of mass spectacles, theatrical concerts also more widely occurred in the 1960s Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* 25: 578. The smaller scale but related practice of the "living newspaper" or "oral journal" was also revived in the 1960s. This agitation genre originated in the Civil War fronts and consisted of public presentations of contemporary news by individuals or small groups. Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 9: 339.

CHAPTER TWO: THE GENERAL LINE

Through the press and other propaganda organs images of Gagarin were spread throughout the Soviet Union, but what did his image mean? To answer this question it is helpful to look at the various resolutions made during the late 1950s and early 1960s in regards to propaganda's content. In order to assess how closely the Gagarin propaganda mirrored the prerogatives of the state, it is necessary to summarize the 'general line' at the time of *Vostok*. This requires an analysis of the key political documents of the period. Other scholars familiar with the topic of post-Stalin Soviet society have offered some insight into identifying the most significant expressions of the political and cultural climate of the period leading up to Gagarin's flight.

Mark Sandle neatly summarized the socio-cultural developments and ideological climate of the Khrushchev era as "*Equality, Atheism and Peaceful Coexistence*".¹¹⁴ Nancy Condee described Soviet culture of the late 1950s in the following way: "The story of Thaw politics is about culture. The story of Thaw culture is about politics. Neither can be told without the other . . . Politics provides the four crucial dates, a kind of pulse that drives and accentuates the cultural events: 1953, 1956, 1961, 1964."¹¹⁵ The four dates correspond to Stalin's death in 1953, the 20th Congress of 1956 (and specifically the delivery of Khrushchev's Secret Speech there), the 22nd Congress of October 1961 (where the Third Party Program was approved and the decision was made to remove Stalin's corpse from Lenin's Mausoleum), and Khrushchev's sudden October 1964 ouster from power. While Grey Hodnett simplified his breakdown of the same period (1953-1964) into two periods: a succession struggle (1953 – 1957) and the Khrushchev era proper (June 1957 to October 1964), he nonetheless recognized the 1956 20th Congress as the "watershed" of de-Stalinization. To Hodnett, the 21st (1959) and 22nd (1961) Congresses were the formal testaments of Khrushchevism and the Third Party Program "its most thorough expression".¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Mark Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism*, (London: UCL Press, 1999), 292.

¹¹⁵ Condee, "Cultural Codes of the Thaw", 160.

¹¹⁶ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 6

Looking more closely at the subject of propaganda, one can identify several key texts on the subject of propaganda within the period. It is worthwhile to note that many of these resolutions were published in major Soviet newspapers. A 10 November, 1954 resolution of the Plenum of the Central Committee “On Errors in the Conduct of Scientific and Atheistic Propaganda among the Populace” specified “an ideological struggle of the scientific, materialistic world view against the anti-scientific, religious world view.”¹¹⁷ Several of the resolutions of the 20th Congress are relevant to this analysis of the Gagarin propaganda. The 25 February, 1956 approval of Khrushchev’s Secret Speech “On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences” – and its later elaboration as the 30 June, 1956 resolution “On Overcoming the Cult of Personality and its Consequences” – outlined the course of action: to counter the Stalinist trend towards the glorification of the individual with a return to Leninist principles of collectivism.¹¹⁸ On the same day as Khrushchev’s Secret Speech, the Congress also resolved to draw up a new Party Program, the first since 1919.¹¹⁹ This document – ratified in October 1961 – would outline the future objectives for the Communist Party including a “*moral code of the builder of communism*” which would detail the principles by which the new Soviet citizen should live.¹²⁰ Although the Third Party Program would not be ratified until after Gagarin’s flight it most clearly defined the type of character that propaganda intended to mold. The Third Party Program did not come out of nowhere, however. Taken as a whole, other resolutions leading up to Gagarin’s flight clearly indicated the direction that the general line was taking. By 1961, the moral code and the hero-myth of Iurii Gagarin would represent a culmination and a refinement of the Khrushchevian ideals laid out in the late 1950s.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 36. The resolution appeared in *Pravda* on 11 November, 1954.

¹¹⁸ Or: “to implement through measures ensuring that the cult of personality – which is alien to Marxism-leninism – will be overcome, that its consequences in all areas of party, state, and ideological work will be liquidated, and that the norms of party life and the principles of collective party leadership worked out by the great Lenin will be strictly implemented.” Ibid., 52. The resolution “On Overcoming the Cult of Personality and its Consequences” was published in *Pravda* on 2 July, 1956.

¹¹⁹ The resolution “On Preparing a New Programme for the CPSU” appeared in *Pravda* on 25 February, 1956. Ibid., 52-3.

¹²⁰ All italics in quotations are after the originals. Ibid., 247-50.

In the wake of the 20th Congress further resolutions were passed to increase the publication of Lenin's writings.¹²¹ A 9 March, 1957 decision reprimanded and replaced the editors of the historical journal *Voprosy Istorii* (Questions of History) for departing from "the Leninist principle of a party approach to history" which constituted a "relaxation in the struggle against bourgeois ideology in historiography".¹²² In other words the only 'correct' historical science was Marxist historical-materialism. The editors of *Voprosy Istorii* had committed the mistake of 'objectivity'. Another resolution dated 22 January, 1957 outlined methods for strengthening "economic and cultural construction".¹²³ On 22 October, 1957 a Plenum of the Central Committee resolved to remove Marshal Zhukov as Minister of Defense for "violating Leninist party principles" by creating a "cult of Comrade G. K. Zhukov" and attempting to diminish Party interference in the operations of the army.¹²⁴ With this act the Party began to firm up its control over the armed forces. A 17 December, 1957 resolution outlined methods for trade unions to better their "educational and cultural enlightenment work" and called for party guidance of trade unions to be stepped up.¹²⁵ The particular traits that trade unionists were commanded to develop approximated a sketch of the "new Soviet" character type more fully laid out in the moral code of the 1961 Party Program.¹²⁶

The 21st Extraordinary Congress of 1959 reiterated the importance of propaganda and clarified the ideal Soviet citizen that it would help to create. Convened to approve the details of the Seven-Year Plan, the Congress also outlined the Party's ideological goals.

¹²¹ The resolution was called "On the Organization of the Public Works of V. I. Lenin". Ibid., 81-2.

¹²² The resolution was called "On the Journal *Voprosy Istorii*". Ibid., 88-90.

¹²³ The resolution "On Improving the Work of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies and Strengthening their Ties with the Masses". Ibid., 73-81.

¹²⁴ The resolution "On Improving Party Political Work in the Soviet Army and Navy" was published in *Pravda* on 3 November, 1957. Ibid., 100-102.

¹²⁵ The resolution "On the Work of the Trade Unions of the USSR" was published in *Pravda* on 19 December, 1957. Ibid., 103-110.

¹²⁶ The resolution stated: "The trade unions must inculcate in the masses the spirit of Soviet patriotism, socialist internationalism, and friendship among peoples; they must develop in the working people a sense of proprietorship in their country and increase their sense of responsibility to the homeland for the fulfillment of production plans, for technical progress, for the further development of the society's production forces, and for the creation of an abundance of material goods in the country. To this end it is necessary to explain more extensively the domestic and foreign policy of the party and government, and to propagate political and scientific knowledge, making full use of all the means and capabilities of clubs, libraries, the press, motion pictures, radio, television, and amateur work in the arts. It is an important task of the trade union organization to conduct widespread production and technical propaganda and to assist all workers in raising their cultural and technical level". Ibid., 107.

A resolution adopted by the delegates on 5 February, 1959 called for an “intensification” of propaganda with a special focus on instilling in young people a “communist attitude towards labor”. The Seven-Year Plan outlined a “new era of historical development” in which socialism had “achieved a complete and final victory” and the building of communism would now begin. The report stressed that as society came closer to achieving communism “moral stimuli to work for the well-being of society will take on increasing significance” and it called for improved “social relations . . . based on the principles of comradely cooperation, friendship, and mutual understanding.”¹²⁷ An 11 March, 1959 resolution praised the agitation work being done in one region and held it up as an example of the proper level of enthusiasm. Here again special attention was given to the propagation of “communist morality” and “scientific atheism”.¹²⁸ While not yet clarified to the degree it would be in the 1961 Party Program, the moral code clearly was being elaborated in these earlier resolutions.

The 9 January, 1960 resolution “On the Tasks of Party Propaganda under Present Conditions” – a summation of the achievements, shortcomings and goals of Soviet “ideological work” – was the last key document on propaganda before Gagarin’s flight. The resolution outlined four factors influencing the direction of propaganda. In the first place, economic advancement required heightened indoctrination of the workers. Secondly, self-regulation would become increasingly important as communist administration was implemented. Thirdly, propaganda’s primary task would be to inculcate a new morality in the Soviet citizen. And finally, ideological work was more, and not less, important within a foreign policy defined by the principle of peaceful coexistence.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ The resolution “On the Report by Comrade N. S. Khrushchev ‘Control Figures for the Development of the Economy of the USSR in the Years 1959-65’” was published in *Pravda* on 7 February, 1959. Ibid., 124-132.

¹²⁸ The resolution was called “On the State of Mass Political Work among the Toilers of Stalino Oblast and Measures for Improving It”. Ibid., 133-138.

¹²⁹ The resolution reads: “in the first place: successful implementation of the programme of communist construction, the creation of the material and technical base of communism, the further strengthening of the economic might of the USSR, and the achievement of an abundance of material goods depend directly upon heightening the level of consciousness of the toilers; in the second place: as socialist democracy develops and as the socialist state system becomes gradually transformed into communist social self-administration, the method of convincing and educating the masses becomes increasingly the basis for regulating the life of Soviet society;

Taking stock, the resolution praised the recent successes in the propaganda sphere. Efforts to counter “dogmatism” – a euphemism for Stalinism – by providing greater access to the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin had proven successful. The “lively and more variegated” forms of propaganda had likewise done much to improve “ideological life”. In a critique of propaganda’s weaknesses, the document set forth what the Party expected from agitation work in the next phase. Propaganda’s isolation from workers’ lives and its lack of mass appeal were identified as its major shortcomings. Propaganda should be more practical and more accessible the report said, it should trade in its “drabness, dryness and lack of expressiveness” for a “differentiated approach” that better assessed the characteristics – such as age and occupation – of its audience and made better use of propaganda instruments such as the press, radio and television. In short, the resolution demanded that “every Soviet person” be reached.¹³⁰

The resolution called for a bolder approach to the ideological and cultural education of the masses. Propaganda should no longer accept being “passive and on the defensive with respect to idealistic religious ideology” or “conciliatory toward remnants of the past in the consciousness of Soviet people.” It should inculcate “unshakable faith in the cause of the party and the people, of collectivism and love for work, of socialist internationalism and Soviet patriotism, of lofty moral principles of the new society”. Since “concrete production results” would be the measure of propaganda’s effectiveness, instilling “selfless labor” and the will to “economize and be thrifty with state instruments and wealth” was emphasized. One of the purposes of the principle of peaceful coexistence, the report admitted, was to “instill pride in the toilers” and “to arouse in each Soviet person a burning desire to strengthen the might of the Soviet Union”.¹³¹

The Third Party Program detailed what form the renewed ideological climate should take. The Party Program was traditionally the document that set out the Party’s

in the third place: at the present time the formation of the new person with communist character traits, habits, and morality, and the liquidation of the remnants of capitalism in people’s consciousness, are among the chief practical tasks;

in the fourth place: the peaceful coexistence of states with different social orders in no way weakens the ideological struggle. Our party has conducted an implacable struggle for communist ideology – the most progressive and genuinely scientific ideology of the present age”. Ibid., 140.

¹³⁰ The resolution was published in *Pravda* on 9 January, 1960. Ibid., 140-153.

¹³¹ Ibid.

goals for the future. The 1919 Program outlined the construction of socialism as a precursor to the development of communism. In 1936, Stalin officially, and somewhat arbitrarily, pronounced this task complete. His announcement made a new program necessary – the 18th (1939) and 19th (1952) Congresses each created a commission to draft a new Party Program. While several drafts were circulated among the Party elite between 1938 and 1952, none of them was ever published or adopted as policy.

But how should they bring about the features of the higher phase of communism? This required the withering away of the state, of money, of inequality, of the distinctions between mental and manual labor, or between the urban and the rural, and all of it was to be accompanied by unprecedented material abundance. It was necessary to mobilize the masses and infuse them with a new ideology in order to carry out the next stages of development.

Gagarin's character read like a blueprint for the moral code published as part of the "Program of the CPSU" dated 31 October, 1961. Briefly deconstructing the Party Program will help to illustrate the moral code's purpose. Under the second Section, devoted to building (in capital letters) "COMMUNISM – THE BRIGHT FUTURE OF ALL MANKIND"¹³² was Subsection Five, concerned with: "THE TASKS OF THE PARTY IN THE SPHERES OF IDEOLOGY, EDUCATION, INSTRUCTION, SCIENCE, AND CULTURE".¹³³ The further divisions of Subsection Five indicated the major propaganda concerns:

- a. The shaping of a scientific world outlook*
- b. Labour education*
- c. The affirmation of communist morality*
- d. The promotion of proletarian internationalism and socialist patriotism*
- e. All-round and harmonious development of the individual*
- f. Elimination of the survival of capitalism in the minds and behavior of people*
- g. The exposure of bourgeois ideology*¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid., 208.

¹³³ Ibid., 245.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 246-250.

Under the heading “*c. the affirmation of communist morality*” the Program again emphasized the increasing importance of morality as “administrative control . . . diminishes”. Acknowledging the fundamental contribution that the “revolutionary morality of the working class” made to society’s “moral advancement”, the Program nonetheless argued that, “As socialist and communist construction progresses, communist morality is enriched with new principles, a new content”.¹³⁵ The Program then set forth the new principles of communist morality, the so-called “*moral code of the builder of communism*”. Since this essay is attempting to correlate the Gagarin propaganda with the moral principles of this code, it is necessary to provide the moral code in full:

devotion to the communist cause; love of the socialist motherland and of the other socialist countries; conscientious labor for the good of society – he who does not work, neither shall he eat; concern on the part of everyone for the preservation and growth of public wealth; a high sense of public duty; intolerance of actions harmful to the public interest; collectivism and comradely mutual assistance; one for all and all for one; humane relations and mutual respect between individuals – man is to man a friend, comrade and brother; honesty and truthfulness, moral purity, modesty, and unpretentiousness in social and private life; mutual respect in the family, and concern for the upbringing of children; an uncompromising attitude to injustice, parasitism, dishonesty, careerism and money-grubbing; friendship and brotherhood among all peoples of the USSR; intolerance of national and racial hatred; an uncompromising attitude to the enemies of communism, peace, and the freedom of nations; fraternal solidarity with the working people of all countries, and with all peoples.¹³⁶

Summarized, the basic themes outlined in this theoretical manifestation of Soviet propaganda begin to draw up an adequate framework within which the Gagarin propaganda can be deconstructed. The resolution called for ideological instruction of enough scope and efficacy to replace religious, bourgeois, and other ‘old’ beliefs with a world-view solidly based on the science of Marxism-Leninism or historical-materialism.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 247.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 247-8.

In doing so, it strongly emphasized the 'future' and the 'new' expressing these concepts as increased attention to youth, new technologies, and the building of communism.

These resolutions were most clear in their mandate for an intensification of ideological education. One goal was to make the content of ideological instruction less theoretical and more functional. Another was to increase party supervision of public organizations and at the same time heighten party members responsibility towards 'educating' themselves as well as others. Though they sought to increase ideological instruction both within the Party and within society, every Party member was expected to be an active agitator and propagandist. Agitation work was the "most important duty of every Communist" and propaganda a "fundamental . . . party assignment".¹³⁷ Considering that Iurii Gagarin became a Communist Party member in 1960, by the time of his flight he must have been well initiated into his duties as a propagandist. Perhaps his selection as the first cosmonaut was in some way due to his reliability as an agitator. What is clear though, is that Gagarin's biography constituted propaganda that completely conformed to this propaganda model, and that the cosmonaut himself participated in the construction of his image.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 145 & 149.

CHAPTER THREE: OUR GAGARIN

In this analysis of what Soviet propagandists put forth as the path to heroism, Gagarin's ascent from childhood to become an 'immortal hero' is especially vital. It is essential to ask how much of Gagarin's image was constructed, or whether he was selected for duty on the basis of his background. The next chapter will focus on narratives of Gagarin's life before 12 April, 1961 in order to determine which of his characteristics and actions contributed to his selection as first cosmonaut and to his subsequent hero status.

After briefly arguing that Gagarin may have been selected for his propaganda value, this chapter will discuss how Soviet propagandists tackled the problem of mythologizing an individual hero within a state driven by a collectivist ideology. It will then show how the biographical narratives employed metaphors of unity, other heroes, and the family, in order to transfer Gagarin's heroism to the entire Soviet people while emphasizing his modesty to situate him firmly within the collective. Along the way it will defend the correlation between Gagarin's biography and state resolutions on propaganda.

While *Vostok* was still in orbit, Gagarin was already being publicly celebrated and promoted from a Senior Lieutenant to a Major, skipping one rank. Once the flight was successful he was immediately and internationally publicized as an "immortal hero". Soviet authorities clearly recognized the propaganda potential of the event; they must have put significant consideration into who would best represent Soviet interests in foreign journals, not to mention the world's history books. One of the key aspects of *The Road to the Stars* is that it offers an official narrative of how Gagarin was selected to be the first cosmonaut. This officially sanctioned autobiography of Iurii Gagarin would inform later biographies both in the Soviet Union and abroad.¹³⁸ The book's status as 'autobiography' should not be accepted uncritically. As the frontispiece admits, the text was published "as told to" *Pravda* correspondents N. Denisov and S. Borzenko and was edited by Nikolai Kamanin, a high-ranking officer of the Soviet Air Force and the Chief of Cosmonaut Training.¹³⁹ Considering that Gagarin was a Party member, we can assume

¹³⁸ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*.

¹³⁹ Kamanin was also one of the original seven hero-pilots of the Cheliushkin expedition for whom the Order of the Hero of the Soviet Union was newly created on 17 April, 1934. See, McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 68.

that he understood that to follow the general line was his unassailable duty. It therefore is difficult to discount Gagarin's complicity in the manipulation of his own biography to conform to the propaganda directives.

A longer and more detailed version of Iurii's childhood was written by his older brother Valentin with the help of Valentin Safonov and first published in 1972 – *Moi Brat Iurii* (My Brother Iurii)¹⁴⁰. Later biographical narratives – such as Yaroslav Golovanov's posthumous tribute *Nash Gagarin* (Our Gagarin) – for the most part simply rehash the material in Iurii's and Valentin's two books. Even Doran and Bizony, though they have labored to tell the "truth" about Gagarin's post-*Vostok* difficulties, have essentially accepted these official narratives of Iurii's pre-*Vostok* life. Their research has provided some insight into the cosmonaut selection process, particularly through their conversations with Gagarin's fellow cosmonauts German Titov and Alexei Leonov, as well as their access to Kamanin's diary. His diary revealed day-to-day accounts of the strengths and weaknesses of the cosmonauts as they endured the rigorous pre-flight examinations.

Gagarin's and Titov's smaller stature made both of them ideal choices for flight aboard the small space capsule. Another candidate whose size was appropriate was Grigory Nelyubov. Witnesses say that Nelyubov's aggressive desire to be first made him lose his chance for the job. Titov and Gagarin, on the other hand, navigated their way through the selection process by displaying a cooperative rather than competitive spirit.¹⁴¹

On April 3 Titov and Gagarin took part in a dress rehearsal, climbing into the space capsule for the benefit of a film crew. Each of them made a "moving farewell speech" on that day in front of their superiors.¹⁴² Perhaps an assessment of their public speaking abilities contributed to the final decision. Kamanin's diary entries gave no clue as to when the decision turned in Gagarin's favor, but they revealed that the cosmonaut's propaganda potential was on the agenda:

¹⁴⁰ V. Gagarin, *Moi Brat Iurii*.

¹⁴¹ Doran and Bizony. *Starman: The Truth behind the Legend of Yuri Gagarin*, 79.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 81.

it's hard to decide which of them should be sent to die, and it's equally hard to decide which of these two decent men should be made famous worldwide.¹⁴³

Doran and Bizony postulated that Titov displayed greater physical stamina and may have been purposely held back for the second *Vostok*, which was planned to be a longer flight. Still, these authors wondered whether Gagarin was ultimately chosen because the "political requirement" preferred the son of a farmer to the son of a teacher.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps Khrushchev was less impressed with Titov's middle-class background than with Gagarin's who was, like Khrushchev, the son of a peasant. Fyodor Burlatsky, Khrushchev's speechwriter and senior aide, claimed that the choice was made because:

Gagarin and Khrushchev were alike in many ways. They had the same kind of Russian character. Titov was more reserved, his smile wasn't so open, he had less charm. It wasn't just Khrushchev who chose Gagarin. It was fate.¹⁴⁵

At any rate, Gagarin's background, and especially what his biographers described as his ordinariness, was central to his appeal. Doran and Bizony agreed when they concluded that his "normality was the whole point."¹⁴⁶ Once the choice was made and the flight was done, Gagarin's biographers had ample opportunity to elaborate on the specific type of heroism that Gagarin's character represented. Some of the most often repeated key words in these works were 'ordinary', 'modest', 'happy' and 'hard-working'. One of Iurii's school principals summarized it well when he remembered: "Was he special? No. Just hard-working, lively and charming."¹⁴⁷ The affirmation of Iurii's ordinariness served an important propaganda purpose. The propagandists were constantly challenged with the paradox of creating an individual hero out of a collectivist ideology. His biographers strove to portray the positive attributes of this man, while being careful not to make him too exceptional. Still they had to narrate how Iurii had set himself apart from the other candidate cosmonauts; such a decision could not have been made at random.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 83.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 85.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 135.

¹⁴⁷ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 42.

The Gagarin propagandists clearly wrestled with the paradox of an individual hero within a collectivist state. At times they rationalized their work; other times they became defensively self-conscious. The mammoth tribute *Our Gagarin* began with the author Golovanov reflecting on the problem:

Most studies about Gagarin insist that Iurii was exceptional—and at the same time these books emphasize that Gagarin was somehow no different from anyone else, that his personality did not overshadow others, that he was “like everyone”. How is one to understand this?¹⁴⁸

Golovanov rationalized Gagarin’s hero-myth and ascendancy to immortality by linking Gagarin to his countrymen with a metaphor of physical unity: “Gagarin is a national hero in the fullest possible sense. He is as much part of the people who live and work here as they are part of him.”¹⁴⁹ Others resorted to similar figures of speech. The writer Lidia Obukhova remarked that, “It is impossible to give an account of someone’s life as something separate from all that surrounded it”.¹⁵⁰ Gagarin’s heroism was explained as a product of his social environment; he was a personification of common ideals, a son of the people, and a unifying force. Credit for his success went to ‘everyone’. And like everyone else, it was implied, Gagarin benefited from citizenship in the most progressive state on earth.

John McCannon suggested how, linked to the state and the *narod* (people) in the popular mythology, a hero effectively raises the masses with him. As McCannon described the creation of Arctic hero-myths, the hero provided a “model for all to emulate.”¹⁵¹ The end product, it was hoped, was that the entire Soviet Union would become a “nation of heroes.”¹⁵² In the meantime the propaganda clearly stressed that the *narod* had been “indispensable” to the hero; this in effect “symbolically displaced heroic glory . . . toward the common man and woman.”¹⁵³ Karen Petrone agreed that heroes were made to be imitated, and that, linked to others, their glory was made to seem as if it

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵¹ McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 98.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 108.

stemmed from somewhere else. Heroism was thus transposed onto the leader and the *narod*, and vice versa.

In the case of Iurii Gagarin, the hero's ascendance was carefully depicted as the result of the collective efforts of a 'large team', which literally encompassed the entire Soviet Union. Gagarin's flight was presented as "a result of . . . the inspiration, the talent, the persistence and the courage of millions of Soviet people"¹⁵⁴, and the scientists who "have followed [their] line unswervingly."¹⁵⁵ Likewise, it was Lenin's "unswerving assurance" that had led to "the inevitability of the triumph of socialism and communism."¹⁵⁶ The individual and the state went hand in hand. The most repeated, most important, perhaps most heroic character trait of Gagarin was that he was a Soviet citizen. Khrushchev invoked Vladimir Mayakovsky to enthuse that "the words 'Citizen of the Soviet Union' are proud words".¹⁵⁷ As *Pravda* noted, the flight had been:

a feat of the brave son of the Soviet land, Iurii Alexeyevich Gagarin. . . . a feat of large collectives of scientists. . . . of all the test workers. . . . of all the services. . . . a feat of the Soviet people. . . . guided by our Communist Party and Soviet government.¹⁵⁸

The unified voice of Soviet propagandists always listed these social groups in the same order, and the repetition indicated a hierarchy of importance. Statements that the "selfless endeavor of our people" had been performed "under the leadership of the Communist Party" underlined popular subordination to the higher authority.¹⁵⁹ As a collective unity, obedient to the leadership of the state, the Soviet people could accomplish 'great victories'. Gagarin, 'like everyone' else, recognized his place within the collective and the hierarchy; his heroism stemmed from his commitment to directives from above.

Gagarin's hometown, Gzhatsk, played an important role in situating the achievements of the hero within the Soviet collective. Metaphors of unity – of people existing as 'one' – echoed the assertion that the entire nation shared in Gagarin's heroism.

¹⁵⁴*Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

¹⁵⁵*Pravda*, April 25, 1961, 1.

¹⁵⁶*Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

¹⁵⁷"Read. Envy me, I am a Citizen of the Soviet Union." *Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

¹⁵⁸*Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 1.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*

As Golovanov pointed out, more than a dozen of Gagarin's fellow townsmen had also been named either Hero of the Soviet Union or Hero of Socialist Labor. Had farmers not grown food and soldiers not given their lives for Gagarin's sake, his flight would not have been possible.¹⁶⁰ The town and the *rayon* where it was located were both renamed 'Gagarin' in 1968. The heroic meaning invested in the cosmonaut's name was transferred, not only onto Gzhatsk, but also onto another "urban type settlement" in Sevan Raion,¹⁶¹ as well as a long list of factories, streets, clubs, komsomol organizations, et cetera. The name's increasingly frequent invocation would call to mind associations of the common heroism of the Soviet people. Gagarin was, after all, just like everyone else; pride in Gagarin would be translated into pride for one's own position in the collective.

Another way to affirm the hero's place in the collective was to show how many other heroes had contributed to his success. In his autobiography, Gagarin paid homage to the many other heroes that helped pave his road to the stars. Often, he lapsed into simple lists of names of political, military, and cultural figures – many of whom had been named official Heroes of the Soviet Union. Others were given special treatment; almost without fail, these heroes would articulate thinly veiled fulfillments of the propaganda directives. Providing so many heroes also widened the variety of role models for others to mimic. Gagarin reasoned that the path to heroism was in emulating other heroes: "we tried to imitate our idols in everything".¹⁶² The first "real Soviet hero" mentioned in Gagarin's autobiography, for instance, was an embodiment of the 'uncompromising attitude to the enemies of communism' and a horrific example of selfless devotion: a Russian pilot who sacrificed his life on a kamikaze-style suicide mission during the war.¹⁶³

Another Hero of the Soviet Union – Gagarin's flight commander Sergei Safronov – taught the future cosmonaut a valuable lesson that would ultimately come full circle in the *Road to the Stars*. Gagarin recalled Safronov "using his own interesting biography as an example he tried to show us future pilots how a real Soviet man and a real pilot is

¹⁶⁰ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 18.

¹⁶¹ Prokhorov, *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 5:, 165.

¹⁶² Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 45.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12.

made.”¹⁶⁴ Having learned this lesson, Gagarin became a ‘real pilot’ and man, and could now dutifully use his own biography to show other future heroes the way to becoming ‘real Soviet’ men. This was just the type of example from “real life” educating the ‘new man’ that the propaganda resolutions had been calling for.

So what did Safronov impart to his students that would make real men out of them? Gagarin recalled it was a lesson on the importance of “will power”.¹⁶⁵ Yet another Hero of the Soviet Union – who, not surprisingly, was in total agreement with Safronov about the fundamental necessity of ‘will power’ – helped to define ‘will power’ for Gagarin as: “the ability to govern one’s behavior, to keep one’s actions under control, and ability to overcome any obstacles and to fulfill the given task with minimum effort.”¹⁶⁶ The definition closely resembled the concept described in the moral code as ‘conscientious labor’. Another “experienced teacher” supplied Iurii with the following mantra: “It is one step from discipline to heroism.”¹⁶⁷ These narratives identified the cornerstone of heroism as the diligent application of one’s will to the completion of a given task. It is worth mentioning again that, as the resolutions specified, the effectiveness of propaganda would be measured by ‘concrete production results’.

Iurii recalled he and his fellow students at the First Chkalov Military Aviation Pilots’ School at Orenburg often gazing “attentively” at a gallery of portraits of famous airmen who had learnt to fly there. Among these 130 Heroes of the Soviet Union were Mikhail Gromov and Valery Chkalov – the Arctic pilot-heroes of the 1930s who John McCannon has studied. Gagarin described how the young students had “inherited” the “glory” of these “heroes”. These role models were united as one; as Gagarin described, their faces were “so vastly different, but alike in their manliness.”¹⁶⁸ The hero, like the ‘real man’, was firmly situated in the gallery of the collective. The military also reinforced Gagarin’s appreciation for the ‘comradely mutual assistance’ of the collective: “We gained a conception of a modern air battle as a group battle, one in which every

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 44.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 51-2.

airman must support his comrade and where the decisive factor is the collective will to win.”¹⁶⁹

As a boy during the war, Gagarin met two Soviet pilots who made an emergency landing near his village in September 1941. The experience sparked Iurii’s ambition to become a fighter pilot; the smell of petrol and the gleaming medals on the pilot’s chest fascinated him. One of the pilots, amazingly, nearly twenty years later recognized Iurii’s photograph after *Vostok* and wrote to Gagarin in a letter, “I even then believed that that boy by the name of Iura would grow up to be a pilot.”¹⁷⁰ Iurii’s brother Valentin wrote that, “I now think that of all the people who helped Iura step by step to travel the steep road to space. . . . special credit should go to the two heroic pilots”.¹⁷¹ Not only these two, all the Soviet pilots that Iurii described in his autobiography shared the glory of his heroic space flight.

Still, glory was not the property of the few, and aviators were not the only heroes that Iurii sought to emulate. Everywhere he looked – in “any number of *Pravda*” for instance – there was proof that “our people are daily, literally daily, accomplishing great feats of labor”.¹⁷² Gagarin’s biography celebrated dozens of national heroes, and those who delivered speeches in the cosmonaut’s honor followed suit. As one scientist declared at a celebratory press conference:

The Soviet space pilot embodies the bravery of Alexander Matrosov, the valor of Dzhilil, the fortitude of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, and the iron will of a man brought up by Lenin’s great Party.¹⁷³

The rocket scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky was “very dear” to Gagarin.¹⁷⁴ Although his pioneering contributions to theoretical space flights were developed in Tsarist times, Tsiolkovsky was held up as an example of Soviet achievements; at the very least, the propaganda would mention that he “also lived in the Soviet Union.”¹⁷⁵ Gagarin’s biggest hero, not surprisingly, was Lenin, whose “excellence in every subject” not only

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹⁷⁰ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 36.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 36.

¹⁷² Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 53.

¹⁷³ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

¹⁷⁴ *Pravda*, April 14, 1961, 1.

¹⁷⁵ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

inspired Gagarin to study widely and with diligence, but also defined what true heroism meant:¹⁷⁶

During my time at the vocational school we argued a lot about heroism. We spoke of the difference between certain exploits. There are those, we said, that demand an immediate decision, a choice between life and death . . . But we showed greater liking for those exploits about which the people said: "His whole life was one great exploit!" meaning that a man had devoted his entire lifetime to one great purpose and had struggled to that end without wavering or retreating. The finest example of this was the life of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.¹⁷⁷

According to his autobiography, Gagarin found heroism in the common people. His teachers – whose lessons reflected the as yet unwritten moral code – and fellow students inspired him to work harder 'for the good of society'. He remembered them driven by a "thirst for knowledge, by an urge to bring the greatest possible benefit to their country."¹⁷⁸ Komsomol members who had displayed "miracles of heroism in the front line of socialist construction" inspired Gagarin to not shy away from hard work. Instead, their heroism led him to resolve that he would go "wherever it was hard".¹⁷⁹ Everywhere Gagarin went, he saw in others their 'devotion', 'high sense of public duty' and 'concern . . . for the public wealth'. The 'immortal hero' learnt everything he knew about heroism from the greatness of others.

The Revolution and the Great Patriotic War were not only cited to forge a link with Gagarin's heroism, the propaganda maintained that the entire USSR had proven heroic in the eyes of the world. As Gagarin wrote, "Many other peoples have learned to struggle heroically from the example of the Soviet people."¹⁸⁰ The Communist Revolution in China was portrayed as an act of heroism inspired by the Soviet people. Gagarin commented on the Chinese Revolution writing, "Here you are, here's proof for you that one strong character can give rise to another."¹⁸¹ The 'proof' given on an international

¹⁷⁶ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 17.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 23-24.

¹⁷⁸ An overseeing officer taught Gagarin once, that "A real airman must possess four qualities – a warm heart, a cool mind, strong hands and a clear conscience". Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 82. See also: 17 & 27.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 75.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

scale implied the link between past heroes and future heroes, but also between individual heroes and collective heroes.

Another essential metaphor that drew a connection between the hero and the collective was that of the family. Gagarin's family showed him through their own example the value of conscientious labor. While Gagarin's parents were credited for raising the hero, in descriptions of them the aspects of their characters that conformed to the moral code were duly stressed. The family's 'mutual respect in the family, and concern for the upbringing of children' thus served as a role model for parents to raise future Soviet heroes:

In the Gagarin family constant ticking-offs and the endless "do's" and "don't's" which become unbearable and drive one irresistibly to do the opposite, were just not on. The children were trusted and they valued that greatly.¹⁸²

Gagarin's father Alexei was a poor peasant who became a reputed "master of all trades" through his own industriousness.¹⁸³ Iurii's biographers repeatedly pointed out that Alexei was a largely self-educated man, and they remembered him primarily for building his own furniture. After the war, Alexei also dismantled the family home in Klushino, transported it to Gzhatsk and rebuilt it there with the assistance of his family.¹⁸⁴ Positive, productive, self-reliant, and generous, Gagarin's father – Alexei Ivanovich – allegedly never struck his children and was "always talking with them and teaching them something."¹⁸⁵ He taught and trusted.

His children were in turn expected to learn and be trustworthy. The correct behavior for children to display towards their parents was reinforced. It was remarked that Iurii, for instance, never kept any secrets from his parents.¹⁸⁶ This openness was mirrored in Iurii's other family – the Soviet military – when he remembered: "We lived as a friendly, well-knit family . . . We knew everything about each other, nobody hiding

¹⁸² Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 34.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸⁴ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 16.

¹⁸⁵ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 34.

¹⁸⁶ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 62.

anything from his comrades. When a letter arrived, it was for everybody.”¹⁸⁷ There was “little room for secrecy” in a state that scorned the “anti-social” tendencies brought about by “bourgeois housing”.¹⁸⁸ This significance attributed to ‘trust’ highlighted a struggle between the new and the old then taking place in post-war – and perhaps more significantly post-Stalin – Soviet society. As historian John Gooding described the political atmosphere that attempted to transform the nation’s morality: “Whereas Stalin’s state had been unremittingly suspicious, Khrushchev’s acted as if it trusted its citizens and took their loyalty for granted.”¹⁸⁹

Amidst the call for fundamental moral changes it was still imperative that children learn from their parents. This had been complicated by the fact that what the parents had been taught to believe under Stalin was in the process of being officially revised. At the same time as trusting their children it was necessary to instill in them – like Gagarin’s parents did – the ‘honesty and truthfulness, moral purity, modesty, and unpretentiousness in social and private life’ prescribed in the moral code. When his first solo flight was reported in the newspaper, Iurii’s mother wrote to him, “We are proud of you, my son . . . But don’t you get a swelled head”.¹⁹⁰ In the biographical narratives of Gagarin, his parents not only raised the heroic child, they also exemplified parental perfection by their promotions of the tenets that later became central to the moral code.

The propaganda resolutions maintained that the importance of moral self-regulation was increasing as society approached communism. The Gagarin family provided an example of a ‘soft’ method of social control, much like the post-Stalin reinvigoration of ‘ideological and cultural education’. These descriptions of Gagarin’s family thus reflected the relaxation of coercive terror after Stalin’s death in exchange for intensified moral instruction.

During the war, the Gagarin family members were also guided by their “love of the socialist motherland” to be “uncompromising” in their attitudes towards “injustice” and “enemies of communism”. Their patriotism aroused by the Nazi occupation of Klushino between October 1941 and March 1943, Iurii’s parents’ behavior positively

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 79.

¹⁸⁸ John Gooding, *Socialism in Russia: Lenin and his Legacy, 1890-1991* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 165.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 150.

¹⁹⁰ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 47.

contributed to the boy's heroic development. Alexei was "cruelly beaten up for refusing to go to work" by a German "bully and thug".¹⁹¹ A German soldier slashed Iurii's mother, Anna Timofeyevna, in the leg with the scythe she had been using "to chase away a German horse which was trampling down the rye."¹⁹² Another German once hung Iurii's brother Boris by a scarf from a tree.¹⁹³ Another story related how Anna had been struck with grief when two of her children were sent to work in Germany. Iurii's father intervened to warn her not to neglect her other sons. The moral of these stories was threefold: be courageous, patriotic, and do not grieve for too long.

They bore their misfortune bravely, and never showed even a trace of servility or obsequiousness towards the enemy. [...] During the war, to do good meant only one thing: to be loyal to one's country. This the Gagarins cultivated in their children.¹⁹⁴

It is hardly surprising that images of the new Soviet woman in the Gagarin propaganda most frequently occurred within these depictions of the hero's family. The woman's role as nurturing mother was clearly highlighted in portrayals of the women in Iurii's life. Even Iurii's sister Zoya was portrayed nurturing the infant cosmonaut, demonstrating how she had learned – even at the age of seven – the nature of her responsibilities within the family.¹⁹⁵ His mother was – like her husband – knowledgeable and productive despite her lack of proper schooling; Iurii's biographers made special note of how vigorously she read, how hard she worked, and how peacefully she slept.¹⁹⁶ Obukhova portrayed Anna as a kind of hero of motherhood when she:

noticed how young children, when they first see Anna Timofeyevna, are by some unfailing instinct immediately attracted to her, And she, always so calm in her dealings with people, so welcoming, lights up in the presence of children with an even greater inner glow. Then maternal patience shines from her grey-blue eyes and her voice takes on a singing tone and becomes so caressing that any two-year old prankster or obstinate little imp demonstrating his independence on this earth by bellowing, immediately

¹⁹¹ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 36.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 11.

¹⁹⁴ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 36.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

quietens down and runs to her for protection and sympathy.¹⁹⁷

In Red Square Khrushchev congratulated Gagarin's wife, Valentina Ivanovna, for "her will power and her understanding of Soviet patriotism" and called her a "fine" and "true Soviet woman".¹⁹⁸ In his laudatory speech it was revealed that Valentina's praiseworthy act had been to courageously realize the "tremendous importance" of Iurii's mission and not attempt to dissuade him out of fear for his personal safety. Gagarin's biographers were slightly better at articulating Valentina's contributions to society; they at least made note of her attending medical school. The new Soviet woman was imagined and defined as an embodiment of maternal patience and care, and modeled to inspire all women in Soviet lands. She was self-reliant and resourceful, able to provide for her family with her own hands. Still, she knew her place, and would not interfere with the prerogatives of the state. The new woman would ultimately entrust family members in her care to the state whose higher calling towards "great victories" overrode her instincts to nurture and protect.

Gagarin's biographers curiously overlooked Iurii's paternal ancestry while at the same time giving much consideration to the family of his maternal grandfather, Timofei Matveyev. For instance, the Matveyev house was given pride of place as Iurii's "second home" while he attended a trade school attached to an agricultural machinery factory in Lyubertsi on Moscow's outskirts.¹⁹⁹ Gagarin's paternal grandfather, on the other hand, was not even mentioned by name. Little detail or description was given of Savely Ivanovich Gagarin, the uncle who originally took Iurii in, "advised", and assisted him to enroll in the vocational school.²⁰⁰ This bias towards the Matveyev line most likely was a result of Timofei's involvement with the revolutionary Putilov Works in Petrograd. Even though Iurii never met his grandfather, this association with the Revolution nonetheless inspired Gagarin and figured proudly in his memory. Further embellishing Gagarin's revolutionary ancestry, Iurii's biographers focused on Maria – the Matveyev's eldest daughter – who as a sixteen-year-old had joined the Red Guard in Petersburg, and once, after her dedication to the Revolution had distinguished her from her peers, had even

¹⁹⁷ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 35.

¹⁹⁸ *Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

¹⁹⁹ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 43.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

shaken Lenin's hand.²⁰¹ The Matveyev family – praised for “never lagging behind the general movement”²⁰² of the times – reinforced Iurii's connection with the Revolution and the forward thrust of socialist progress that it represented.

The family's virtues also provided insight into the Soviet state's system of values. It was from “the Matveyev line” that Iurii learnt his “most essential and most valuable virtue. . . . that of being tactful and considerate.”²⁰³ A note of ‘comradely mutual assistance’ can be discerned here. Matveyev, as a “master of his trade”, was portrayed as a proud proletarian.²⁰⁴ His literacy, unusual for the times, was repeatedly mentioned; it was said that he highly valued the few books that the family had. Obukhova noted how the word ‘literate’ on Matveyev's work-record card earned the document its proud place on display in the Gagarin Memorial Museum.²⁰⁵ The self-educated Matveyev provided another example of conscientious labor for the good of society, as well as a model of how to self-regulate one's moral education.

This metaphor of the family also applied to the myth of the nation. The propagandists characterized Soviet society as one big happy family, and Gagarin its honorary and proud son. With the country personified as the “Motherland”²⁰⁶, Khrushchev, with his “tremendous fatherly concern”,²⁰⁷ was the family's patriarch. The Party and government, with their “loving human concern [...] towards ordinary people” were also portrayed as the hero's parents.²⁰⁸ Gagarin assured the audience at Red Square that “at every stage of my life [...] I always felt the concern of the Party whose son I am.”²⁰⁹ The discourse of family was used to metaphorically ascribe the nation with the unity of the household, and to delineate that the natural hierarchical order of the family also applied to the society and the state.

The propaganda also made clear which family was more important: that of the state. Gagarin's “greatest joy” upon returning to earth was his telephone conversation

²⁰¹ Ibid., 43.

²⁰² Ibid., 44.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 33.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 35.

²⁰⁶ *Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2. & April 16, 1961, 2.

²⁰⁷ *Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 1.

²⁰⁸ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

²⁰⁹ *Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 1.

with Khrushchev and Brezhnev shortly after the flight on April 12.²¹⁰ On the phone Khrushchev and Gagarin stressed their partnership: “You and I, together with our whole people, shall celebrate”.²¹¹ Khrushchev then asked Gagarin whether he was married, had any children, and if his parents were still alive. They were not yet on intimate terms. Nevertheless, Khrushchev offered Gagarin a “big hug” in the telegram he sent that day. When they met – for the first time – at the celebration in Moscow, Gagarin embraced Khrushchev first, before his own family.²¹²

One of the key words for Gagarin’s biographers was ‘modest’, the implications of this description had many facets. On one hand, the frequent references to Iurii’s modesty helped to indicate that he was not averse to hard labor, but rather that he knew it was his duty to perform for the common good. The hero-myth of Gagarin was made more effective as propaganda by accenting his ordinariness, modesty and commitment to communism. As Gagarin described himself in the press:

I am an ordinary Soviet person. I was born [...] to the family of a collective farmer. [...] I have no princes in my genealogy. My parents were poor peasants before the Revolution. The elder generation of my family [...] were also poor peasants and there were never any princes in our family.²¹³

Gagarin’s modesty also illustrated that the hero understood his place within the collective, that “he had a clear idea of the extent of his own contribution and the true dimensions of contributions made by a great many other people to the project that brought him unheard-of fame.”²¹⁴ Gagarin was thus more proud to be a part of the Soviet collective than to be singled out for his achievements.

Humility also meant accepting life’s adversities. One of his childhood friends remembered his times with Iurii during the war: “We were hungry and life was hard. . . . But we were happy all the same!”²¹⁵ Gagarin’s older brother Valentin also noted that, as a

²¹⁰ *Pravda*, April 14, 1961, 3.

²¹¹ *Pravda*, April 13, 1961, 2.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 1.

²¹⁴ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 32.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

child, Iurii very rarely cried.²¹⁶ The association of images such as this with Gagarin's heroism extolled the virtue of being the master of one's discontent.

Modesty also made Gagarin not desire more than his share and led him to properly care for whatever he did have. He was often described as being meticulously frugal with material items. For instance, it was described how he carefully looked after his "smart set" of school clothes, changing into older clothes immediately upon return from school. When the weather allowed it, he would go barefoot to keep his shoes from wearing out. Iurii was conscientiously economical; he would write on old newspapers or strips of old wallpaper and would practice arithmetic with used cartridges instead of wooden chips.²¹⁷ These anecdotes made Gagarin an illustration of the concern for the 'preservation of public wealth' that the moral code had called for.

Just after *Vostok 1*, Gagarin expressed his deep, almost spiritual commitment to hard work when he outlined his plans for the future, which were to "devote [his] life . . . mind and . . . soul to the new science now concentrating on conquering outer space."²¹⁸ He also displayed his commitment to the collective when he "reported to the Party and the government" his readiness to carry out any new task assigned to him, while offering to step aside to allow other pilots to share in the honor.²¹⁹ Rather than relish in the glory of his newly acquired stature as an "immortal hero", Gagarin took pains to remain down to earth. He expressed this in his professed belief that he had merely founded a new profession, and voiced his promise to be an "active cosmonaut and not a museum piece."²²⁰ He continued to be busy in his career, taking a great interest in the new *Soyuz* line of spacecraft, remaining active in his training, and eventually becoming the standby cosmonaut for the inaugural *Soyuz* launch. As one of his biographers' wrote, "For those who had known him before the flight, he remained the same."²²¹ Gagarin's biographers thus stressed that it was his work ethic that made him modest and kept him from being spoiled by fame.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 33.

²¹⁷ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 15.

²¹⁸ *Pravda*, April 14, 1961, 3.

²¹⁹ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

²²⁰ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 12.

²²¹ Ibid., 13.

The particular emphasis on his humility firmly reinforced the notion that Gagarin was a member of the socialist collective. In spite of his teachers' recommendations that Gagarin was "specially gifted" and should finish secondary school, he was determined to join the ranks of the working class and enroll at the Lyubertsy vocational school.²²² At the trade school, Iurii was remembered for "zealously studying the foundry business" and was said to have enjoyed the regimentation of alternating days of attending classes and performing industrial labor.²²³ As one of his biographers put it, "Every other day they turned into the working class".²²⁴ Here again, Iurii's work ethic was described as extraordinary, but also presented in a way that connected him to the common people. Gagarin remembered "always" going "proudly to work"; and each day just increased his pride.²²⁵

While Gagarin was generally depicted as a sort of Stakhanovite, in his studies and with his work habits, his propagandists were careful not to distance the hero too far from the ordinariness of membership in the collective. In particular, the narration of Gagarin's development towards becoming a "space-pilot" explicitly linked him to the proletariat.

Gagarin's positive attitude reflected his acceptance of his place within the social order and his faith that the policies set out by his government were just and right. In this way, repeated descriptions of Gagarin as a merry person – and the explanation that it was his happy demeanor that had distinguished him from the other cosmonauts and led to his heroic ascendance – communicate that the road to success is in subordination to authority of the state. Gagarin's enthusiasm, for life, family, or work, was thus translated in a way intended to inspire collective enthusiasm for socialism.

The propaganda highlighted Gagarin's involvement with the Party and other communist or patriotic organs. Khrushchev elaborated, for instance, that as a child Gagarin "participated actively in public life and was an active Komsomol member. He is a Communist, a member of the great Party of Lenin!"²²⁶ The "greatest, most vivid event" of Gagarin's life prior to the flight was not his marriage or the birth of either of his two

²²² Ibid., 41.

²²³ Ibid., 43.

²²⁴ Ibid., 42.

²²⁵ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 24.

²²⁶ *Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2..

daughters (the second in March 1961), it was his admission to the Party in the summer of 1960.²²⁷

Gagarin's biographers strove to portray the cosmonaut as deeply patriotic and naturally endowed with the morality defined in the Party Program. As one writer described, "another of Gagarin's qualities was his humanity. . . . He was affectionate. . . . He was merry. Helped others. Believed in love and friendship."²²⁸ Iurii's sportsmanship was remarkable too: a fellow student remembered Iurii giving one of his ski poles to a rival in a race who had broken his. Iurii, of course, still won.²²⁹ Remembrances from old friends and colleagues pepper the various biographies of Gagarin with illustrations of the well-developed socialist morality of his character.

The "crossroads" in Gagarin's life came when he became qualified as a foundry technician.²³⁰ Wishing to enjoy 'fraternal solidarity with the working people' Gagarin seriously considered following his comrades to work in the construction projects in the Donbas or Magnitogorsk. Right around then, however, Iurii's flight instructor allowed him to make his first solo flight, and the event was photographed and appeared on the front page of the Saratov Komsomol paper *Zaria molodezhi* (Young Dawn), in an article entitled "A Day at the Airfield".²³¹ Although he recalled feeling "awkward" for being singled out from his comrades, his confidence was strengthened, and he made the decision to pursue becoming a fighter pilot and enrolled at the Pilots' School in Orenburg.²³² The 'crossroads' story rolled many aspects of Gagarin's biography into one: his ordinariness, modesty, appreciation for labor, and, significantly, his willingness to take direction from superior authorities.

The unity of Gagarin, the Party, the government, and the people was emphasized in accounts of the cosmonaut and his heroic feat. Gagarin recalled that during his descent he sang to himself, "The country hears, the country knows."²³³ He "felt no loneliness, of course" knowing that the "entire Soviet people", Party and government would aid him

²²⁷ *Pravda*, April 14, 1961, 3.

²²⁸ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 32.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²³² Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 47.

²³³ *Pravda*, April 14, 1961, 3.

should he experience any difficulties.²³⁴ He “dedicated” his flight, and “carried it out in the name of” the country, people, Party and the “Leninist Central Committee.”²³⁵ Before the flight he only felt “happy” and “proud”.²³⁶ Gagarin’s “love” for the Party, “Soviet motherland” and “heroic working people”, he said, “inspired” him and “gave [him] the strength” to accomplish the flight.²³⁷ His bravery was thus grounded in the mutual devotion he felt between himself and his society, and his heroism made possible by collective effort.

Iurii Gagarin’s characterization as an extraordinarily enthusiastic worker and a modest and sparing citizen is perhaps best described as exemplary. As an ordinary citizen Gagarin could best perform as a role model, and as a happy hard-worker he helped to define what the state wished to hold up as the norm. These descriptions of Gagarin’s character maintain the paradox of situating him firmly within his place as someone “like everyone else” while at the same time establishing how he distinguished himself to be chosen as a suitable first cosmonaut.

Gagarin was imaged to embody everyone’s dreams and shown to have succeeded through everyone’s deeds. The exemplary behavior of the entire Soviet people had strengthened Gagarin’s resolve to develop a tireless and selfless work ethic. All sectors of society, as well as the officially sanctioned historical figures, contributed to Gagarin’s heroic and moral education. Heroes of labor, war, and aviation; Gagarin’s family, workers, teachers, and fellow students; and most of all Lenin and the Communist Party, shaped the hero and shared in his glory. All the heroism of the Soviet Union was channeled into Gagarin, yet he was downplayed as ordinary. The efforts of the “builders of communism” since the Revolution were thus given credit for making it possible to conquer nature and achieve mankind’s “bold dreams”. The entire collective thus paved the road to the stars.

²³⁴Ibid., 1.

²³⁵*Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 1.

²³⁶*Pravda*, April 14, 1961, 1.

²³⁷*Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 1.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROAD TO THE STARS

This chapter analyzes the dialectical–materialist conception of history and Marxist world-view as it was represented in the Gagarin propaganda. First, it examines the ‘broad sweep’ of history that was presented in the Gagarin propaganda – from mankind’s earliest beginnings to Gagarin’s flight – and shows how certain aspects of Soviet history were linked to Gagarin’s success and presented as the foundation for his heroism. Secondly, this chapter addresses the bifurcated world-view that arose from the dialectical-materialist view of clashing capitalist and socialist ideologies expressed in the Gagarin propaganda. Finally, this chapter examines the role that the Gagarin propaganda played in revising historical narratives about the Stalin period. In doing so, the correlation between the Gagarin propaganda and the resolutions outlined above will be strengthened with further examples.

One of the primary tasks of propaganda was to instill in the masses what the Party described as a:

scientific world outlook . . . on the basis of marxism-leninism, an integral and harmonious system of philosophical, economic, and socio-political views. The party calls for the education of the population as a whole in the spirit of scientific communism and strives to ensure that all working people fully understand the course and perspective of world development . . . ²³⁸

The ‘course of world development’ – in other words ‘history’ – was to conform to the historical-materialist conceptions of Marx and Lenin. As the resolutions on propaganda had also made clear, ‘science’ meant specifically “dialectical-materialism, the only scientific method of cognition”.²³⁹ Often expanded to be “dialectical and historical-materialism”, the concept was given the authority of the “science of the most general laws of development of nature, science, and human thinking.”²⁴⁰

Gagarin’s biography was not constructed within a theoretical framework that sought *objectivity* or *truth*. These concepts are slippery enough when used in western

²³⁸ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 246.

²³⁹ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 253.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

historiographical discourse, but in Soviet historiography, they meant something entirely different. In Soviet historiographical philosophy, 'objectivism' and 'escapism' were anti-communist, and partisanship was "the highest expression of historical truth".²⁴¹ Partisanship not only allowed Soviet propagandists to revise historical narratives to suit their purposes, it required the manipulation of historical details to reflect Party interests.

To the Party, world history needed to portray the inevitability of communism as a dialectic response to the crisis brought on by the failures of capitalism and imperialism.²⁴² History was not 'correct' without appropriate attention given to a 'proper' class analysis. On one level, the requirement to express "the change in the balance of forces in favor of socialism" encouraged Soviet historians to give credit for innovations and inventions to Russian nationals. Gagarin reminded his readers, for instance, how the world's first balloonist had allegedly been a Russian peasant.²⁴³ More significantly though, this enforced revisionism meant elaborating the theoretical arrival of a new era, linking it to other heroic new eras and discarding difficult old ones.

Gagarin and *Vostok* were cast as symbols of technological advancement. Khrushchev's regime inherited a long tradition of using technology to validate socialism and state authority, connect the vast region and strengthen state control. The legitimizing power of technology, not fully taken advantage of before the Revolution, had been seized upon early and energetically by the new Bolshevik state. From *proletkult* (proletarian culture) images of factories, the electrification campaign, tractor-machine stations, hydro-electric dams, and other examples – both successes and failures – the Soviet state had long learned and practiced the art of celebrating technological development. In addition, as John McCannon pointed out, the Soviet elite believed that their nation's progress depended on winning the "struggle with the elements" (*bor'ba so stikhiem*).²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works*, 56-57.

²⁴² "The investigation of problems of world history and contemporary world development must disclose the law-governed process of mankind's advance towards communism, the change in the balance of forces in favor of socialism, the aggravation of the general crisis of capitalism, the break-up of the colonial system of imperialism and its consequences, and the upsurge of the national liberation movement of peoples." Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 254.

²⁴³ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 83.

²⁴⁴ McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 83.

The significance of the 'new era' prompted Soviet propagandists to use the technological theme to reach deep into human history for metaphors of evolution. As they did so, they stressed the revolutionary aspects of technological breakthroughs. One Soviet scientist compared the flight to the "creation of the first symbols of writing, [...] the first steam engines, [...] the first circumnavigation of the globe" as a:

milestone marking man's ascent to a new level and the assertion of the force of progress and creation. [...] The old waged a stubborn fight against the new, and the more revolutionary the event blazing the trail into the future, the fiercer was the opposition of the past.²⁴⁵

An April 25 *Pravda* article stated that "From the time of the first stone axe, man has now risen to a height which has enabled him to launch the first space flight."²⁴⁶ The long rise of man was accomplished with technological innovations such as the axe, or the factories, bridges and other industrial projects celebrated daily in photographs in *Pravda*. Equating technology with the elevation of man, *Vostok* became a powerful metaphor for a society rising to new heights.

The propaganda made clear that the success of the flight was to be considered a consequence of the Soviet Union's revolutionary history. One speaker at the press conference at the Scientists' Club reminded the "representatives of the Western press" that "Today no one supports" the opinion of "some people abroad" that *Vostok* had been an "isolated" achievement. Instead, he continued, it was "clear to all" that the mission was a "natural stage" in the development of socialist science.²⁴⁷ Gagarin's flight was repeatedly linked to the Revolution. Calling the flight an "embodiment and graphic expression of [...] the conditions created by the October Revolution", Khrushchev highlighted this routine evocation of history in his Red Square speech:

Now, when Soviet science and technology have demonstrated the highest achievement of scientific and technical progress, we cannot help looking back to the history of our country.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵*Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 1.

²⁴⁶*Pravda*, April 25, 1961, 1.

²⁴⁷*Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

²⁴⁸*Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

Vostok offered a rich and positive occasion for celebrating the triumphs of Soviet technology. Soviet propagandists seized the opportunity to reinforce that socialism, beating with the heart of humanity, was winning the race to the future. As a stunning technological achievement the flight was propagandized as a sign that the Soviet Union was fast becoming the most advanced society on Earth. The dialectical-material narrative was reinforced by frequent pronouncements that the new technology displayed by *Vostok* signaled the arrival of a “new era in the development of mankind”.²⁴⁹ Supposedly Gagarin had changed the world by proving to the USSR’s detractors that Soviet socialism was viable and legitimate. After all, mankind had the Communist Party to thank for the “new space era in history”.²⁵⁰

A Statement and Appeal that was widely published throughout the Soviet press on 13 April, 1961, to celebrate the flight reinforced the idea that “Tsarist Russia with its backwardness could not even dream” of competing on the international stage.²⁵¹ The Revolution was thus invoked as an essential turning point leading to the triumph in space. Gagarin himself linked the new era with the other essential historical turning points in Soviet historiography when he compared newspapers at the time of *Sputnik* to the “thrilling editions” published during the Revolution and the war.²⁵²

Gagarin’s autobiography – covering the years 1934 to 1961 – was an important tool for propagandists to invoke history. His rise through village, town, and region, to eventually reach Moscow and become a Hero of the Soviet Union, exemplified the dialectical-materialist narrative mode. The geographies of Gagarin’s life provided particularly resonant metaphors to link the hero with the greater collective. Near the town of Gzhatsk in the Smolensk Region, Klushino – the village where Iurii was born in 1934 – was in the “heartland of Russia.”²⁵³ The Gagarin propaganda linked the region with the patriotically charged symbols of the October Revolution and the Patriotic War of 1812

²⁴⁹Ibid., 3.

²⁵⁰*Pravda*, April 25, 1961, 4.

²⁵¹*Pravda*, April 13, 1961, 1.

²⁵² Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 69.

²⁵³ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 17.

“in which the Russian Army under Kutuzov defeated Napoleon.”²⁵⁴ Biographies of Gagarin typically featured prominently placed photographs of war monuments in the Smolensk district.

The century after Napoleon’s Russian campaign brought a time of relative stagnation, poverty and “the petty tyranny of masters and overseers” to Gzhatsk.²⁵⁵ Then Pyotr Alexeyev, the town’s own “worker revolutionary”, issued “angry prophecies” and became “particularly dear to the Soviet people.”²⁵⁶ Even though the Revolution transformed Gzhatsk, it “remained a small, not very conspicuous toiler-town, never dreaming of loud fame, it [was] at one with the whole people”.²⁵⁷ Golovanov even suggested that people should have felt a “deep, though perhaps not quite conscious satisfaction” that this modest little town produced such a hero as Iurii Gagarin; “there was, all the same, a kind of, shall we say, fairness about it.”²⁵⁸ By 1934, Iurii was born onto a *kolkhoz* (collective farm).²⁵⁹ Compelled to attend school in Moscow, Gagarin was told by his mother, “All right. You can go. Nobody ever came to any harm in Moscow.”²⁶⁰ History was reduced to its essential, dialectical-material components: the crisis of capitalism superseded by the inevitable arrival of a social system – delivered by benevolent Moscow – more attuned to the needs of the masses. The masses responded gratefully with modesty and conscientious toil.

The 1968 rechristening of Gzhatsk to ‘Gagarin’ symbolically rewarded the town for its perseverance under Tsarist rule and later commitment to Soviet progress. As the journalist Iurii Apenchenko wrote about the myth of the town’s character and the symbolic charge of the new name:

For seven and a half centuries the ocean of history washed over the quiet village as if it were no more than a speck of sand. . . . Storm upon storm pounded over the village in that time. And it not only held firm, but came back with all the

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 18.

²⁵⁹ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 6.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 21.

best that its land had preserved and multiplied, the land known now and forever as the land of Gagarin.²⁶¹

The front line of the war came to Gagarin's village in 1941, when he was only seven-years-old and about to begin school. The future cosmonaut's formative years would thus be narrated through the lens of a martial society facing the intense hardships brought on by an imperialist enemy. As his brother Valentin remembered, Iurii was visibly affected by the war, "There was almost nothing left of his usual merriness and playfulness."²⁶² The adverse experiences did not overwhelm the future hero; Iurii dealt with the trials and tribulations of wartime existence productively and optimistically. Gagarin remembered that – without textbooks – the students had learned to read from an Infantry Training Manual²⁶³ and learnt geography from watching the frontline advancing westward on his school's maps.²⁶⁴ The war thus shaped the hero, teaching him to be modest in his material needs and inspiring in him an 'uncompromising attitude to the enemies of communism, peace, and the freedom of nations'.

The war aroused Gagarin's 'devotion to communism' and contoured his morality. As Valentin also recalled, "the traits of Iura's, or more precisely, of the character of the future pilot and cosmonaut Iurii Gagarin. . . . all developed at about that time, during the war."²⁶⁵ The war stimulated Gagarin's sympathies for the "small and the weak".²⁶⁶ It was said that the future cosmonaut spent the war collecting produce from the family's cellar and garden, and handing it out to the war's refugees as they passed by the Gagarin's porch. Iurii would even pull "starving children" out of the crowds of refugees and bring them home.²⁶⁷

His patriotic 'love for the socialist motherland' was elevated by the Nazi occupation of his village. He defied the "new order" by making his own exercise books out of paper bags that he collected behind the backs of the German authorities. Gagarin allegedly committed countless acts of bravery as a boy, and once even "got some"

²⁶¹ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 18.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁶³ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 16.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 36.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

German soldiers. By strewing broken glass on the road, Iurii caused the German vehicles to be stalled in their retreat, allowing the Soviet soldiers in pursuit to engage the enemy.²⁶⁸ Gagarin's capacity for 'humane relations', and the 'uncompromising attitude to the enemies of communism' displayed by these anecdotes would later be explicitly called for in the Party Program's moral code.

From an early age, Gagarin was enthusiastic about joining the military. He remembered his excitement when his trade school gave him his "first ever uniform", which made him look "almost like an officer".²⁶⁹ When he later enrolled in the Pilots' School, he "could hardly stop [him]self from squinting" at his gleaming epaulettes, "so proud and happy that [he] was now part of that big family, the Soviet Army."²⁷⁰ He romanticized how he was drawn to the Armed Forces while making it clear that the path to heroism is through obedience to the state:

I liked the discipline and I liked the uniform . . . Article 132 of the Constitution of our country, which says that military service is the honourable duty of citizens of the Soviet Union, called me persistently to the Armed Forces.²⁷¹

Taking his oath of allegiance, Gagarin was extremely proud to affirm his patriotism. The day that he was sworn in, with Lenin's "penetrating eyes" looking down on him from a print on the wall, was a day, Gagarin wrote, "I shall remember as long as I live."²⁷² The military taught Iurii the value of obedience, and showed him the road to the stars. He remembered the military regulations fondly, "for any misdemeanor there was punishment, for zeal there was citation, and for valour there were awards."²⁷³ Gagarin also learned from his instructors the proper gratitude towards his elders, and thus learned how to properly wage the struggle between the new and the old. His teachers "insisted that we develop constructively the experience that had been accumulated by our Air Force."²⁷⁴ Gagarin described how the burden of responsibility, passed on from more experienced

²⁶⁸ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 11-12.

²⁶⁹ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 42.

²⁷⁰ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 54.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

predecessors, only made the boys “anxious to study harder”.²⁷⁵ The way to heroism had thus been paved by Gagarin’s tutelage in the military. There, he learned to respect and learn from the heroes that came before him, and the authorities above him.

The day that Gagarin graduated from the Pilots’ School was also memorable for him. Despite the fact that he was also married that day, it was the “graduation exercises” that Iurii later recalled by saying “the occasion is one of second birth.”²⁷⁶ That day, 7 November, 1957, was also the Fortieth Anniversary of the October Revolution. At their wedding, the young couple turned on the radio to hear Khrushchev announcing that *Sputnik 2* was in space. Iurii recalled that Khrushchev, through the radio, “came to our wedding” inspiring the wedding guests to drink a toast to the Party, the people, and Soviet government.²⁷⁷ Even Gagarin’s memories of his wedding day served to link him with the Party and the Revolution in a single defining moment on the trail to heroism. Biographical narratives of Gagarin thus retold Soviet history as heroic, accentuating the greatness of characters and overlooking those who were less than heroic.

Dialectical-materialist history also argued that the material conditions of life were improving under socialism. As Gagarin’s mother would say to the children: “What lucky kids you are, we had it harder when we were your age.”²⁷⁸ The war could explain the hardships in society – and perhaps downplay the privations that had been generated by the socialist experiment – while at the same time remind the populace that day-to-day existence once was worse. In part, this concern with privations reflected a society still adjusting to the devastation wrought by the war – and the traumatic collectivization and industrialization campaigns – but it was also easier to visualize a progression towards communism by viewing society through a narrative of relative improvements.

Gagarin’s biographers infused the war with specific and recurring associations, revealing particular interpretations of the war that reflected the ideological concerns of the Party during Khrushchev’s regime. As an example, consider one of Khrushchev’s significant programs aimed at improving living standards after the devastation of the war: a massive campaign begun in 1955 to increase housing. In the next ten years this

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 70.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 74.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 7.

campaign would expand the Soviet Union's total floor space from 25 to 62.4 million square meters.²⁷⁹ This campaign was implemented to address what had become one of the most pressing issues for Soviet citizens, and the Gagarin propaganda reminded citizens of the campaign's efficacy.

Gagarin, who described himself as someone "used to living in collectives, in hostels"²⁸⁰, enjoyed the regimentation of the "organized life" in his room that slept fifteen at the vocational school.²⁸¹ Iurii distinguished himself from his fellow members of the Saratov flying club because he was never bothered by cramped living conditions.²⁸² Seen in this light, the repetitively occurring references to Gagarin living in cramped conditions in the aftermath of the war were a reminder of the positive effects that current policies were designed to have upon the common experience.

While many of the post-war hardships were now becoming a thing of the past, it was nonetheless still important to address the appropriate attitude with which to approach life's adversities. Gagarin for instance, wrote that "we knew that a man gets to know his worth in overcoming difficulties."²⁸³ Implicit in narratives of Gagarin's hardships, his acceptance of them, and the gradual betterment of them, was a tacit message to trust that the leadership of the Party and Khrushchev in particular were looking out for the interests of the common person, and that their wise steerage of the state would ultimately bring positive results. In the meantime, accepting these hardships with a smile was the heroic thing to do.

One of the major themes of the Gagarin narratives rendered the cosmonaut as a peaceful ambassador of goodwill. In his biographies, depictions of Gagarin's natural skill as a peacemaker bordered on messianic. As his mother recalled:

. . . he was the family favorite for his calm and ever happy mien, for his ability, when still a teenager and young man, to smooth over with a word or a peaceable smile any

²⁷⁹ Mark Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism*, 293.

²⁸⁰ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 45.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁸³ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 44.

tensions in a conversation that threatened to grow into a quarrel.²⁸⁴

Iurii's father, Alexei Ivanovich noted that:

The Gagarins are a merry group. That is also why we have the surname that we do. We know how to laugh. "Gagar": that is our local word for "laugh". The person who makes others merry has the whole world to support him.²⁸⁵

Even though his brother often broke Iurii's model planes, Iurii "rarely got angry with him. With enviable persistence he would either repair old ones, or build himself new models."²⁸⁶ His mother also remembered that not only was he "merry" and "rarely got angry and did not like quarrels", he even "reconciled everyone with his jokes and laughter".²⁸⁷ Iurii's schoolteacher remembered him as a gentle character who looked after the smallest most "easily hurt" child in the class.²⁸⁸ The character created by Gagarin's biographers was not only charming and likable; he also possessed an uncanny ability to soothe discontent, and resolve combative situations.

The Gagarin propaganda strove to portray the Soviet Union as the champion of 'fraternal solidarity with the working people of all countries, and with all peoples', and as the leader of the international socialist movement. The Soviet press favored photos of Gagarin's smile. One often-reproduced picture shows the smiling cosmonaut – in his military uniform – holding a white dove. A cartoon in the 28 April, 1961, issue of *Pravda* framed a simple sketch of Gagarin's face with the body of a dove. Gagarin the peacemaker gave a face to Khrushchev's foreign policy innovation: the concept of "peaceful coexistence" first presented at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party in 1956.

Peaceful coexistence conformed to the dialectical-materialist world-view, which bifurcated the world into two opposing camps. As the 1960 resolution "On the Tasks of Party Propaganda under Present Conditions" made clear, "the peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems in no way weakens the ideological struggle."²⁸⁹ Tolerating peaceful coexistence in cultural or ideological spheres would be anti-

²⁸⁴ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 34.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 33.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 40.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 33.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 40.

²⁸⁹ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 140.

communist.²⁹⁰ The 1961 Party Program specified the opposing camps as ‘capitalist’ and ‘communist’ and highlighted the importance of propaganda in waging the struggle.²⁹¹ Peaceful coexistence made propaganda more vital an instrument in the struggle for global dominance. Strong propaganda operations spreading the mantra of peaceful coexistence, it was hoped, would help communist parties in other nations to gain political support and power without resorting to violence.²⁹² As historian Harold Lasswell argued, the purpose of Soviet propaganda was “to economize the material cost of world dominance.”²⁹³ Frederick Barghoorn elaborated that the threat of nuclear war led the Soviets to prefer to use “persuasion rather than force” to promote socialism globally.²⁹⁴

Soviet statements loudly trumpeted the international significance of *Vostok* and used the success to boost Soviet prestige. The flight was frequently presented in universal terms as an achievement for all of humanity. As one speaker said to Gagarin at the Scientists’ Club, “You have shown all mankind an example of courage, valor and heroism in the service of mankind!”²⁹⁵ As a visible and positive “service” to “all mankind” it was implied that the flight would generate goodwill. There were further, more implicit messages to be read from these characterizations of the Soviet’s benign benevolence. Having realized “an achievement of all mankind”, the Soviet Union placed itself in the privileged position of acting upon the will of all of humanity.²⁹⁶

Statements like these highlighted the propaganda significance of being the first to ‘conquer’ outer space. To be first meant to be leading, and Soviet propagandists

²⁹⁰ As Khrushchev made clear in a 8 March, 1963 speech: “We should like our principles to be understood well by all, and especially by those who would foist on us peaceful coexistence in the sphere of ideology.... He who preaches peaceful coexistence in ideology is objectively slithering into the positions of anti-communism. The enemies of communism would like to see us ideologically disarmed. And they are trying to achieve this insidious purpose of theirs through propaganda of the peaceful coexistence of ideologies, the “Trojan horse” which they would be happy to sneak in to us.” Nikita S. Khrushchev, *The Great Mission of Literature and Art*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 187-188.

²⁹¹ The 1961 Party Program of the CPSU stated that: “The peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems does not imply an easing of the ideological struggle. The Communist Party will go on exposing the anti-popular, reactionary nature of capitalism and all attempts to paint bright pictures of the capitalist system. The party will steadfastly propagate the great advantages of socialism and communism over the declining capitalist system.” Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 249.

²⁹² Benn, *Persuasion and Soviet Politics*, 135.

²⁹³ Harold D. Lasswell, “The Strategy of Soviet Propaganda,” in Wilbur Schramm, ed., *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, (Urbana, Ill., 1954), 538. 7.

²⁹⁴ Barghoorn, Frederick C. *Soviet Foreign Propaganda*, 7-8.

²⁹⁵ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 1.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

employed the early space missions to portray the Soviet Union as a potential global leader. The Gagarin propaganda, in which heavy reliance on phrases such as “all of humanity” and “all mankind” extended the concept of the collective to the international community, thus contributed significantly to the Soviet campaign to promote international communism.

The *Vostok* propaganda claimed that Soviet leadership of all of humanity was justified by the state’s socialist system. The authority to represent – and rule – the masses derived from the leadership of the Communist Party. The communists were depicted as representatives of the downtrodden bulk of humanity, the defenders of social justice and the main thrust of technological progress. These arguments implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – stated that beyond these “communist heavens” lay “capitalist hells”.²⁹⁷ Khrushchev attributed Gagarin’s flight to “the genius of a free people”²⁹⁸ and contrasted the Soviet Union with countries “where the rich freely exploit those who lack bread and call that the ‘free world’.”²⁹⁹ Soviet propagandists offered *Vostok* as “proof” of the superiority of socialist ideology. The idea was most ‘informally’ revealed in the following telephone conversation between Khrushchev and Gagarin on 12 April, 1961:

Khrushchev: Let the whole world see what our country is capable of.

Gagarin: Let all countries catch up with us now!

Khrushchev: You are quite right: let the capitalist countries catch up with our country.³⁰⁰

The propaganda revealed a society in a precarious position professing the virtues of cooperation, while embroiled in competition on the international stage. The paramount importance of Gagarin’s ‘great victory’ was that it would dispel notions that the Soviet Union lagged behind the United States and other more industrially-developed nations of the west. Gagarin’s successful mission was, it was hoped, proof to the world of Soviet superiority. The Gagarin propaganda prophesized a future in which the USSR surpassed the United States as the superior society on earth, whose socialist ideology would be a

²⁹⁷Stites, Richard. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 171-172.

²⁹⁸*Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

²⁹⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰⁰*Pravda*, April 13, 1961, 2.

role model for lesser nations. Soviet media concurred that *Vostok* “embodied [...] the vast power of socialism”.³⁰¹ Khrushchev agreed that the flight was “another triumph of Lenin’s ideas, confirmation of the correctness of the Marxist-Leninist teaching.”³⁰² Gagarin suggested that socialism’s interstellar victory was inevitable saying that he was “sure” that “trips around the earth will be organized by trade unions.”³⁰³ The sophistication of the Soviet propaganda apparatus allowed the state to delineate the limits of discourse and bombard the public with similar messages from various voices.

The message enthused not only about the *merits* of the socialist system, but its *supremacy* over the alternatives – primarily capitalism. In doing so, they echoed Khrushchev, who warned in his speeches that the “tremendous historic importance” of the Seven-Year Plan was that it would allow the Soviets to “surpass the economic level of [...] the United States of America, and multiply our superiority in [...] science and technology.”³⁰⁴ This optimistic assessment of the regime’s historical trajectory concluded that socialism had fostered the most progressive – though not the richest – society on earth. Khrushchev foretold of the Soviet Union “surging ahead” just as they had now “surged ahead into outer space.”³⁰⁵ Although willing to concede their – albeit temporary – economic inferiority, the Soviet Union clearly wanted themselves recognized as the global leaders in science and technology, as well as the society with the most progressive political system. In an anecdote from his autobiography, Gagarin interpreted the writings of the American test-pilot Jimmy Collins to his colleagues at the flying club:

“Collins,” I said, “was the victim of some sort of fatal isolation . . . They all have dollars on the brain . . . Earn money, at no matter what cost . . . “. “Iurii’s right,” Martyanov supported me, “Capitalist reality compelled the author to gamble with death, the test pilot was liable to lose his life at any moment in the aviation company’s profit race.” Could there be anything like that in our country, where solicitude for man comes first, we asked ourselves... the Soviet test pilot could never feel himself isolated when

³⁰¹Ibid., 1.

³⁰²*Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

³⁰³*Pravda*, April 14, 1961, 3. Soviet trade unions administered recreation tours and other tourist programs.

³⁰⁴*Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

³⁰⁵Ibid.

he had behind him the Communist Party and the creative labor of our whole nation.³⁰⁶

Khrushchev most symbolically revealed his desire to usurp the American global leadership position when he hijacked the American cultural icon Christopher Columbus. In his Red Square speech Khrushchev pondered:

If the name of Columbus, who crossed the Atlantic Ocean and discovered America, has lived on through the ages, what can be said about our wonderful hero, Comrade Gagarin, [...] His name will be immortal in the history of mankind.³⁰⁷

At the Scientists' Club, another speaker echoed the epithet "Columbus of outer space".³⁰⁸ A curious metaphor, it spoke volumes of the Soviet Union's cold war competition with the United States for influence, a contest in which the space race was seen as politically significant.

Aspects of the propaganda directed outwards to the international community were used to buttress Soviet foreign policy objectives, including disarmament and decolonization. Code words such as "peaceful intentions" reflected Khrushchev's routine calls in the international arena for disarmament, a message directed at the United States. 13 April, 1961, saw a *Statement and Appeal* announcing Gagarin's successful flight published in every Soviet newspaper. A call for "general and complete disarmament under strict international control"³⁰⁹ in the statement echoed the proposal that Khrushchev had sent to "the heads of all the world's governments"³¹⁰ on 3 June, 1960. A speaker at the press conference at the Scientists' Club parroted the request.³¹¹ Reporters later asked Gagarin if his flight confirmed his political convictions, specifically "the idea expressed by [him] that it is necessary to achieve total and controlled disarmament". Gagarin simply answered that the previous speaker had already given the "complete answer to this

³⁰⁶ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 48.

³⁰⁷ *Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

³⁰⁸ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 1.

³⁰⁹ *Pravda*, April 13, 1961, 1.

³¹⁰ Sergei N. Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev and the Creation of a Superpower* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 404.

³¹¹ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

question.”³¹² The reporters complied in framing the discourse, assisting Gagarin and the other speakers to voice the regime’s current political platform.

As important as disarmament in Khrushchev’s dealings with the United Nations was the issue of decolonization. The recent tribulations of Marxist-leaning leaders in Ghana and Guinea signified to Khrushchev that “the almost forgotten dream of world revolution was reborn.”³¹³ The Soviet lead in the space race, he stated, had removed all obstacles to the “noble aspirations” towards the “great goal” of communism, that “will be a great boon to humanity, the pinnacle of its development.”³¹⁴ Again, other speakers took up their leader’s argument. Fyodorov condemned the:

disorder there still is on our earth. Is it not a disgrace to mankind that people are still starving in some areas of our planet? This is a bitter reproach to those who ravaged and ruthlessly exploited and in some places to this day continue to exploit countries which are backward in their development. As he was flying over Africa, Comrade Gagarin saw the Congo where only recently Lumumba, the valiant champion of the happiness of the Congolese people, was heinously murdered.³¹⁵

Lumumba’s assassination had been a bitter disappointment for Khrushchev who had supported him in a protracted post-colonial conflict. The Congo issue had also intensified US-Soviet tensions within the U.N., as Khrushchev had become irritated that the U.N. force there was 80 per cent American and excluded Soviet participation.

Scholars have duly noted that Soviet propagandists in the 1960s – and later – were typically focused on the theme of US aggressiveness and militarism. The propaganda of the Gagarin celebrations did not diverge from this tendency. The United States and its supporters loom large as the principal target of the propaganda message. As such, Soviet propagandizing of this early space ‘victory’ constitutes a significant public statement of the Soviet state’s preoccupation with their Cold War adversary.

³¹²“Soviet scientists ask that all of you, representatives of the press, and especially representatives of the Western press, [...] bring home to all the people on earth, the solemn appeal of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet government to the whole world - the appeal to all people, irrespective of race or nationality, color, religious creed or social status, to spare no effort in securing a lasting peace [...] this is general and complete disarmament under strict international control.” *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

³¹³Sergei Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev and the Creation of a Superpower*, 404.

³¹⁴*Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

³¹⁵*Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

Routine declarations of the Soviet Union's peaceful intentions in outer space, contrasted with warnings portraying the United States as intent on militarizing space, can be viewed as part of the soft approach to win favor among the other nations. As Khrushchev professed in Red Square, "We are internationalists [...] ready to share freely [...] with all who are ready to live with us in peace and friendship."³¹⁶ Those who were not ready would be excluded from sharing the spoils of the conquest of outer space. Soviet interests in cooperation were based largely in soliciting allies, to build a sphere of influence against the United States. Soviet calls for multilateralism still privileged the communist bloc, and pitted it against the "imperial" nations opposed to socialism.

While the Gagarin propaganda returned repeatedly to assurances that the Soviet Union was entering space as the protector of global security, alongside these statements of peaceful internationalism were messages directed to foment anti-American sentiment. Peaceful intentions aside, Khrushchev did not resist the opportunity to antagonize the Americans, calling the "none too clever people in the country on the other side of the ocean [...] such nearsighted and hidebound people."³¹⁷ Others took potshots at American plans for a manned space flight: "Flight along a ballistic trajectory, which is not, in fact, a space flight, [...] is designed primarily for publicity".³¹⁸

American aggression was a basic theme that even Gagarin would reiterate. One reporter commented to Iurii that some American descendants of the Gagarin Princes were claiming to be his relatives. Gagarin simply debunked them as "idle [...] self-styled relatives".³¹⁹ Asked to comment on the American space program, Gagarin immediately spoke of:

the peaceful use of outer space, of peaceful competition. Of course we shall be glad of the success of the American astronauts when they travel up. There is room for all in outer space. But that area should be used for peaceful purposes, not for military aims.³²⁰

³¹⁶*Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

³¹⁷*Ibid.*

³¹⁸*Pravda*, April 25, 1961, 1.

³¹⁹*Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 1.

³²⁰*Pravda*, April 14, 1961, 3.

Gagarin recalled in his autobiography how “the freedom loving Korean people were defending their country against the hordes of the world’s biggest capitalist country – the United States of America.”³²¹ Fully elaborated, peaceful coexistence thus called for disarmament and decolonization, courted international alliances (‘friendship between peoples’) and instilled ‘pride in the toilers’. The peaceful varnish also disguised Soviet militarism as defensiveness against “imperialist war-mongers”.

Marxism-Leninism – boiled down by Soviet ideologues into dialectical-materialism and historical-materialism – was also used to legitimize the party’s sole right to interpret history. As the resolution “On the Tasks of Party Propaganda under Present Conditions” maintained, one of propaganda’s objectives was “to show that the theoretical propositions of Marxism-Leninism are indissolubly connected with the historical creativity of the popular masses”.³²² Historian Nancy Condee related how before 1956, Khrushchev was vehemently opposed to “varnishing” reality by presenting it in an idealistic or elevated way. After consolidating power, however, Khrushchev was firmer in his defense of the Party’s jurisdiction over the truth. Speaking about the creators of optimistic and idealized depictions of reality post-1956 Soviet culture – of which the Gagarin propaganda was a prime example – Khrushchev had this to say: “Why should they be called ‘varnishers’? They are not ‘varnishers’, but champions of the new, of the cause of our Party and our people, who are advancing to communism with firm step.”³²³ Because it was such a momentous occasion in human history to put a man into space, Gagarin’s flight gave the Party an ideal opportunity to elaborate their interpretation of history.

Historical-materialism thus delineated the content of Soviet histories of their nation and their world, situating Gagarin and *Vostok* within a centuries-old ideological struggle. The historical theory also supported the revision of recent Soviet history. Specifically, the Gagarin propaganda presented a significantly revised version of the official narrative of the Stalin era. Even though Gagarin spent the first 19 years of his life

³²¹ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 31.

³²² Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 150.

³²³ Nikita Khrushchev, *The Great Mission*, 70.

under Stalin, the only mention of the dictator's existence in Iurii's autobiography was when the battle at Stalingrad was discussed. Even here, the editor noted that the city is "now the city of Volgograd."³²⁴ Furthermore, by not crediting Stalin's Five Year Plans for the heightened level of industrial developments in the USSR, Soviet mythologies of progress were recast in a new light. Gagarin's autobiography thus 'unswervingly' expressed the major political development that was taking place in 1961 – the continuing process of de-Stalinization that would culminate in October 1961 when the Party resolved to remove Stalin's corpse from the Red Square mausoleum.

Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's "deviations" from Marxist-Leninist principles not only symbolized the culmination of his own rise to power; it also created a crisis of lineage for himself and the rest of Stalin's successors. Even though Khrushchev claimed in his Secret Speech that it was "impermissible and foreign to the spirit of Marxism-Leninism to elevate one person, to transform him into a superman possessing supernatural characteristics, akin to those of a god," he essentially kept the cult intact, merely changing the object of worship from Stalin to Lenin.³²⁵

The "new era" concept, already routinely applied in Soviet propaganda to describe the Revolution, was now, in April 1961, freely ascribed to the present. In another sense, the jubilation surrounding the Gagarin celebrations was also being rechanneled to "look back" on 1917 in order to further the legitimacy of the Revolution. For Khrushchev, and the Soviet Union for that matter, still lived in the shadow of Stalin. Khrushchev, under whom "de-Stalinization" coexisted with "non-liberalization"³²⁶, was willing to reevaluate the road toward communism but was strictly against divergence from it – he was a committed Communist. In other words, in this most recent "new era [that] has been opened by [...] a country of victorious socialism" Stalinism would be left behind.³²⁷ While Moscow's political elite sought to distance themselves from Stalin's crimes, they needed to reestablish the source of their authority to a point before his time. After all, it was Stalin who had put them into positions of power, and they had each benefited from his brutal repressions.

³²⁴ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 13.

³²⁵ Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 27.

³²⁶ Benn, *Persuasion and Soviet Politics*, 134.

³²⁷ *Pravda*, April 13, 1961, 1.

Scholars have noted how the Khrushchev regime generally placed greater emphasis on Leninist concepts such as mass-mobilization as an attempt to reinvigorate socialist enthusiasm among the population. The abandonment of mass terror led Soviet leadership to renegotiate the relationship between the state and society, and to develop new ways to mobilize support for the regime's policies. Khrushchev's political reforms encouraged popular participation at the lower levels while attempting to minimize the role of the state. They encouraged membership in lower-level organizations such as the Komsomol, and local Soviets. Whatever quasi-democratic elements there were within these reforms were mitigated, however, by an expansion of the interventionist role of the Party. Party membership was enlarged from 6.8 million in 1952 to 11.8 million in 1965.³²⁸ Gagarin was one of these millions.

This was a reversal of trends under Stalin, who had ended the policy of recruitment favoring workers and peasants. Stalin's dictatorship had also minimized the Party's role in the post-war period, a situation reflected by the fact that no Party Congresses were held between 1939 and 1952. Stalin effectively ruled through the organs of the state, as opposed to those of the party.

Under Khrushchev, Party Congresses met more frequently— in 1956, '59, and '61. They manufactured loyalty within the Party's ranks by replacing party secretaries in two major steps, first between 1953 and '56, and then again in 1960-61. On the one hand, this reflected a reinvigoration of Leninism and a movement away from certain Stalinist models of social control – most notably the organ responsible for coercion of the populace through mass terror, the NKVD. Mass mobilization also provided a balancing force against Khrushchev's rivals, many of whom were conservatively Stalinist in their leanings.

The Gagarin propaganda clearly indicated that 'new' was to take its cues from the authority of Lenin; the cult of the new was thus also a cult of Lenin. For Khrushchev, the "struggle between the new and the old" was entangled in this crisis of lineage.³²⁹ Khrushchev, for his political survival, needed to recreate the state's image; it was vital to

³²⁸ A similar swelling of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 125 full members in 1952 to 175 in 1961 also took place. Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism*, 284.

³²⁹ Condee, "Cultural Codes of the Thaw", , 165.

steer away from Stalinism. Nancy Condee explored the implications for Soviet culture of Khrushchev's obsession with the "father-and-sons problem".³³⁰ As Condee described it, Khrushchev, whose Secret Speech marked "the innocence of the uncle in the sins of the father" and "a lateral shift in the dynastic pattern", strove to be Stalin's "successor" but not his "heir".³³¹

The Gagarin propaganda reinforced Khrushchev's regular invocation of the "struggle between the new and the old, and the inevitable victory of the new".³³² The usage of the term 'new' implied that the present held the highest authority; newness thus legitimized changes in the general line since the Stalin era, including revisions of historical narratives of the Stalin era. The twelfth of April, 1961, the propaganda said, marked the beginning of a 'new era'. Narratives of *Vostok* further claimed that the last turning point in history that could claim such newness had been the October Revolution. What is more, the first man in space would not have been possible if it were not for the advent of socialism in Russia.

The cult of the new reflected many of the broader themes of the political life in the post-Stalin USSR. The 'new era' further distanced the contemporary moment from the harsh brutalities of the Stalin era, the Great Patriotic War, the collectivization drive, the Civil War, and so on backwards into the era of Tsarist stagnancy and oppression, and beyond. The 'new era' celebrated the positive achievements of modernization that had been accomplished through the wisdom and the labor of the elders. Hardships in the past had been suffered for a reason, and it was now time to push forward towards the construction of communist society. The old era was finished and it was time to move on.

³³⁰ Khrushchev wrote that: "In our time there is no father-and-sons problem in the form in which it existed in the days of Turgenev. For we live in an entirely different period in history, a period that has its own pattern of human relationships." Nikita Khrushchev, *The Great Mission*, 153.

³³¹ Condee, "Cultural Codes of the Thaw", , 163 & 168.

³³² Nikita Khrushchev, *The Great Mission*, 74.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE MOLDING OF THE RISING GENERATION

The announcement of the arrival of a new era did more than just link the spring of 1961 with the fall of 1917 – and surreptitiously link Khrushchev with Lenin – it provided encouragement for Soviet citizens to look towards the future instead of the past. The ambitious production targets set by the Seven Year Plan and the bold plan to remodel the moral fabric of society required such forward thinking. The future preoccupied the Soviet elite. Biographical narratives of Gagarin were essentially a story of youth; they focused on the cosmonaut's formative years to tell the story of a model citizen who embraced the new, and believed in the brightness of the future. This chapter explores how the Gagarin propaganda projected itself towards youth, instructing them to adopt a scientific-atheistic world-view and enthusiastically engage in increasing production in order to construct the 'material basis of communism'.

The constructivist claims of Marxist-Leninism necessitated providing proof of the regime's progress, both in general terms – such as progressive technology – but more specifically, in terms of progress towards the lofty goal of creating communism. Engels borrowed the term Socialism to describe Marx's idea of the "lower" phase of Communism – a kind of transitional period between capitalism and communism.

Lenin's innovation had been his argument that the mechanisms of a state committed to communism's construction could direct this transitional period – rather than waiting for it to unfold through the processes that Marx predicted would naturally occur. Once in power, the Bolsheviks needed to illustrate their successful accomplishment of various stages of this transition period in order to legitimate their rule. It was necessary, then, that they incessantly create and recreate a climate and impression of progress. Considering that the brutalities of Stalinism also provided a powerful impetus for reform, it is clear how necessary it was for Khrushchev to resurrect the cult of the new.

To historian Nancy Condee, Khrushchev separated the old from the new at 1956.³³³ As she elaborated, the struggle would not result in the vanquishing of one side

³³³ As Khrushchev would later look back on 1956: "We must . . . discard all that is old and rusty, equip ourselves with new and better weapons, and clear the road of all obstructions, all that is dead and useless.

but instead prescribed a generational relationship in which ideological and cultural education through propaganda played an important role.³³⁴ The Party Program declared that “historic social gains” had made possible “greater opportunities for *educating a new man, who will harmoniously combine spiritual wealth, moral purity, and a perfect physique.*”³³⁵ While the new Program reviewed recent progress in “socialist education”, it nonetheless noted that vestiges of capitalist thinking still lingered in Soviet society and called upon propaganda to correct this shortcoming.³³⁶

This attention to the education of the new by the old manifested itself in the Gagarin propaganda in many ways. In particular, the autobiography of Gagarin – essentially the story of a youth – reflected what the Party Program had directed: “Special importance is attached by the party to the molding of the rising generation.”³³⁷ Gagarin’s status as a hero most importantly implied that he was a role model. Press about him, and especially biographies of him, were often specifically directed towards Soviet youth. Major publications on Gagarin, for instance, included *Est’ plamia!* (There is a Flame!) and *Malen’kiye rasskazi o bol’shom kosmose* (Little Stories about the Big Cosmos) both published by Molodaia Gvardia Publishing House (Young Guard) and *Vizhu zemlyu...* (I See the Earth...) published by Detskaia Literatura (Children’s Literature).³³⁸

Gagarin’s autobiography depicted the future cosmonaut’s excellence as a youth in school. Just like his hero Lenin, Gagarin was a teacher’s dream-come-true. As one of his biographers reported, “All Gagarin’s teachers affirm that he always did equally well in every subject.”³³⁹ His tutor specifically praised Iurii’s “studiousness” when he wrote that

In the life of our Soviet state, the period after Stalin’s death was just such a period. . . . We did so to get rid of unhealthy and dangerous practices of the past.” Nikita Khrushchev *The Great Mission*, 167.

³³⁴ Condee, “Cultural Codes of the Thaw”, 167.

³³⁵ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 248.

³³⁶ The Party Program stated that: “Soviet society has made great progress in the socialist education of the masses, in the moulding of active builders of socialism. But even after the socialist system had triumphed there persist in the minds and behavior of people survivals of capitalism, which hampers the progress of society.” Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 245.

³³⁷ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 246.

³³⁸ *Malen’kiye rasskazi o bol’shom kosmose*, Moscow: Molodaia Gvardia, 1962.

Iurii Gagarin, *Vizhu zemliu*, Moscow: Detskaia Literatura, 1968.

Iurii Gagarin, *Est’ plamia! Stat’i, rechi, pis’mu, interv’yu*, Moscow: 1968.

³³⁹ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 42.

Iurii was “one of our best students.”³⁴⁰ Former classmates also remembered Iurii excelling at school.³⁴¹ His biographers portrayed Iurii as a precocious boy whose “thirst for knowledge. . . . illuminated his face, and people noticed it.”³⁴² As a charming role model, Gagarin could hopefully inspire children to apply themselves to their schoolwork.

Gagarin’s wide-range of interests as a child was described in such a way as to allow people – and, perhaps, children especially – reading such works to relate to the hero. His teachers “were astonished at the multiplicity of his interests. . . . [he] took part in literary debates and math competitions, willingly helped those who had trouble keeping up, was secretary of the Labor Reserves, a voluntary sports society, and was also the Komsomol organizer of the foundry section.”³⁴³ As a boy he not only made many model airplanes “which really flew”³⁴⁴ but also kept a diary of nature observations and collected stones, flowers and grasses.³⁴⁵ As a Young Pioneer, Gagarin played in a brass band and took part in amateur theatrical performances.³⁴⁶ His instructor at the Air Force School remembered Iurii not only as an “inveterate sportsman. . . . He also sang in the choir and could dance.”³⁴⁷ Gagarin’s diverse pastimes let the younger generations see a bit of themselves in the hero while his enthusiasm for public youth organizations would perhaps rub off on them.

Gagarin’s happiness fulfilled another requirement set forth by the Party Program, namely that:

Soviet literature and art, imbued with optimism and dynamic communist ideas, are great factors in ideological education and cultivate in Soviet people the qualities of builders of a new world. They must be a source of joy and inspiration to millions of people, express their will, their sentiments and ideas, enrich them ideologically and educate them morally.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 43.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 39.

³⁴² Ibid., 31.

³⁴³ Ibid., 43.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 40.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 17.

³⁴⁷ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 46.

³⁴⁸ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 256.

Regularly reemphasizing that Gagarin was a “Soviet man” further signified that Gagarin’s happiness derived from his pride in being a citizen of a socialist state, and therefore from his enthusiasm for socialism. His biographers portrayed Gagarin, even as a child, as extremely conscientious about his public duty to work for the sake of society’s common benefit. One of his school friends recalled how he and Iurii were once, as boys, playing an exciting game together when Iurii suddenly exclaimed, “Halt. It’s time for homework.”³⁴⁹ The anecdote illustrated how “He seemed to have a sense of duty and responsibility in his very blood.”³⁵⁰

Gagarin’s ‘communist devotion’ was highlighted as a lifelong unswerving faith in a socialist future. As Golvanov specified, “Gagarin was a son of the people. In all his actions he stuck to the moral principles of Soviet society and was a convinced Leninist, believing that the path charted by Lenin was the surest and his principles the most just.”³⁵¹ Gagarin’s biographers described the cosmonaut as riding a “wave of technological, social and general progress” and provided Gagarin’s education as one of many examples of this.³⁵² Invoking this metaphor of a “wave” of progress reflected a dialectical-material tendency to view history teleologically. Associating *Vostok I* with this ‘forward march’ of history situated the event within a revolutionary moment between the old and the new, and was an impulse of historical-materialism. Similar assumptions informed the descriptions of Iurii’s intellect as more than just naturally inquisitive but also “goal-oriented.”³⁵³

It was important to point out though that Iurii’s work ethic was not simply naturally acquired, but instead that he had developed this quality through the application of his own will towards his goals. Goals implied duties; everything one did, even in leisure, was purposeful. As an established hero Gagarin would write proudly of the goal-oriented Soviet youth: “Determination in the achievement of a set goal is one of the distinguishing features of our young people.”³⁵⁴

³⁴⁹ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 34.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 17.

³⁵² Ibid., 18-19.

³⁵³ Ibid., 40.

³⁵⁴ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 54.

Although frequent reference was made to Gagarin's less than average stature, he clearly made an appropriate effort to perfect his physique. Iurii's gym teacher remembered that others found it hard to keep pace with him athletically.³⁵⁵ Golovanov also related how Gagarin taught his younger cousins how to box.³⁵⁶ Still Gagarin did not enjoy relax purposelessly. As he wrote, "Sport is made for man and not man for sport."³⁵⁷ Gagarin's goal-oriented philosophy paid off when he was selected as the first cosmonaut, and the system had found a place where his small stature was truly perfect for the job.

The basic outline that specified what the Party wished to 'mould the rising generation' to be was laid out in the moral code of the Third Party Program. Gagarin made explicit reference to the 1961 moral code while discussing his own education in his autobiography. "Comradely mutual assistance was the general rule at the technical school."³⁵⁸ Gagarin remembered his school days: "I spent all my time with the other lads, helping them with their physics and mathematics."³⁵⁹ Gagarin's generosity, selfless labor, high sense of public duty, and predilection for 'comradely mutual assistance' perfectly illustrated the 'moral purity' and 'spiritual wealth' that the Program called for.

Embedded in his animated and affectionate personality, were implications of Gagarin's faith and enthusiasm for the values of his society – his 'communist devotion'. Gagarin's exuberance for life derived from his patriotism and loyalty to his nation, which he was joyful to serve. He was portrayed through the tribulations of World War II, its aftermath, and the rigorous trials of cosmonaut training and selection, as someone whose unerring faith in the positive possibilities of the future strengthened him and inspired others. While diligently applying himself to achieving his goals Gagarin was rarely ever known to complain. His 'spiritual wealth' thus earned the respect of others as Gagarin eased their fears in the face of difficulties.

Gagarin was unshakably confident that his government embodied his own hopes and wishes. As the young man's interest in outer space rose, he "knew that the government was sparing no funds for the exploration of space, and I thought that

³⁵⁵ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 42.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁵⁷ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 26.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of specialists in various fields were working selflessly on the solution of the greatest aim mankind had ever set itself."³⁶⁰ The selfless efforts of others inspired Gagarin's 'moral purity', based upon principles of modesty and labor for the good of society.

Another way in which Khrushchev turned his back on Stalinist methods – and thus invoked a new era – was his reinstigation of an Anti-Religious Campaign in 1959. While Stalin had relaxed religious persecution during World War II, propagandists in the late 1950s were increasingly called upon to instill the masses with 'scientific atheism'. Persecution of the church and the religious faithful increased dramatically. Churches were closed or converted for other purposes, such as storage or as garages. A new Criminal Code in 1961 criminalized religious activities and prohibited parents and priests from providing religious instruction to minors.

Images of Lenin, the October Revolution, and symbols of space, technology and science were increasingly held up as an alternative to religious beliefs – what historian Richard Stites called "a new social cement".³⁶¹ The ideology to replace religion was to be the 'science' of Marxism-Leninism. As *Pravda* proclaimed shortly after *Vostok*, Soviet science owed its superiority to being "equipped with the teachings of dialectical-materialism."³⁶² Asked to explain the Soviet Union's lead in the space race, one of the scientists speaking at the Scientists' Club cited the "main reason" as:

. . . the possibility of organizing scientific-technical work in a socialist state with much greater expediency than in a society founded on private property.³⁶³

The emphasis on the supremacy of science over religion was thus merged with the rhetoric of communist theory to forge a new ideology. In its section on the elimination of capitalist behaviors, the Party Program provided a succinct correlation between the

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 84.

³⁶¹ Stites, Richard. *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society Since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 145.

³⁶² Interestingly, this aspect of Marxist philosophy is also used to assert that extraterrestrial life "definitely exists [...] that there exist a multiplicity of worlds in which the evolution of life, the supreme form of matter, is possible." *Pravda*, April 25, 1961, 1.

³⁶³ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

propagandizing of scientific achievements and the campaign against religious beliefs.³⁶⁴

The Gagarin propaganda obediently followed suit by carefully tailoring his image to embody the type of “New Man” that socialism had ostensibly created. As Lidia Obukhova related, even Iurii and his siblings’ names:

were not the names of the saints for the days they were born. The priest did not even want to christen Iurii, insisting that his name should be Georgi. “Well, as you like, father,” said Iurii’s mother firmly, because even though brought up, like many country people, to keep the rules of religion, she had the courage of her convictions. “We’ve already had him registered at the village Soviet as Iurii, and Iurii he will stay.”³⁶⁵

Gagarin professed a materialistic philosophy of life, saying that “We are children of the Earth. To it we owe our lives, warmth and the joy of existing.”³⁶⁶ Gagarin reminisced about how science excited him in school and pondered how as a child he could not have known that “it would fall to my lot to take part in a struggle against nature and that I would overcome that very gravity and break away from Mother Earth.”³⁶⁷ At school Gagarin also realized that he lived in a new and scientific era, “We realized that in our times, in the atom age, when everything depends on precise calculations, nothing could be done without mathematics.”³⁶⁸ As his mother proudly remembered, “He has sharpened his teeth on the granite of science.”³⁶⁹ Science was portrayed as an expression of the “will power” that Gagarin’s heroes had told him about. Gagarin described that in his first flight in an airplane, “All the parts of the machine became transmitters of my will”.³⁷⁰ The image of machine as an extension of man’s will, and as a replacement for

³⁶⁴ The Party Program said that: “The party uses ideological media to educate people in the spirit of a scientific materialist world conception, to overcome religious prejudices without insulting the sentiments of believers. It is necessary to conduct regularly broad atheistic propaganda on a scientific basis, to explain patiently the untenability of religious beliefs, which were engendered in the past when people were overawed by the elemental forces and social oppression and did not know the real causes of natural and social phenomena. This can be done by making use of achievements of modern science, which is steadily solving the mysteries of the universe and extending man’s power over nature, leaving no room for religious inventions about supernatural forces.” Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 249.

³⁶⁵ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 34.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁶⁷ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 19.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

religious faith was echoed in Iurii's remembrance of a lesson given to him from one of his Air Force Commanders:

All you need is precise navigation and faith in your instruments . . . In a fighter aircraft, you're not only king, you're God – pilot, navigator and gunner – the Holy Trinity.³⁷¹

As a revered icon of the scientific culture that Soviet authorities felt would lead to the intergalactic triumph of communism, Gagarin was portrayed as an icon of scientific atheism. A 30 April, 1961, *Krokodil* cartoon depicted Gagarin aboard a stylized *Vostok* soaring happily through a crowd of angels. While some angels fainted, others fled. One, whose chariot horses were clearly spooked, appeared to be losing his halo in the gust of wind caused by the rocket's fiery engine.³⁷²

One speaker at the Scientists' Club compared Gagarin's flight to the Greek myth of Icarus, to illustrate the long and universal "bold dream"³⁷³ of flight. Now, man's wings were "joined together by that strongest alloy, the laws of science".³⁷⁴ Only the scientific mind can engineer the "dreams" into reality. When asked at the Scientists' Club press conference whether he had brought "any mementos such as photos of [his] dear ones, or any talismans" on his voyage, Gagarin assured reporters that he did "not believe in any omens and talismans, and other such things."³⁷⁵ Upon his return to earth, German Titov, the second Soviet man in space, publicly shared his conclusion that having visited heaven and finding no God there, He must not exist. The following remark of a peasant from Kalinin *oblast'* recorded in the early 1960s seemed to support his claim:

[I] believe and [I] do not believe in God. For a long time I was religious, but now [I] do not know what to be [they] launched the sputnik– [they] did not find God.³⁷⁶

Frederick Barghoorn pointed out the ecclesiastical origin of the Latin word *propaganda* as he noted the "neo-religious" quality and "aggressive missionary spirit" of

³⁷¹ Ibid., 80.

³⁷² The *Krokodil* comic drawn by N. Semionov and reproduced in: Marie-Raymonde Delorme, *Krokodil: Anthologie des Textes et des Dessins Parus dans le Journal Satirique Soviétique* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1964), No page numbers were given.

³⁷³ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Lynne Viola, "The Peasant Nightmare: Visions of Apocalypse in the Soviet Countryside", in *The Journal of Modern History*, 62, 4 (Dec., 1990): 754.

Soviet propaganda.³⁷⁷ Martin Ebon agreed with Barghoorn's argument that the "utopian-realistic aspects of Soviet propaganda, . . . like the sacred tenets of any belief system, these aspects bolster the sense of righteousness of those who profess to believe in them. They also serve to rationalize the policies of the communist leadership."³⁷⁸ Nina Tumarkin noticed the close resemblance between early revolutionary propaganda and traditional images and icons. Tumarkin suggested that early propagandists might have deliberately subjugated iconic forms to the service of their goals, or perhaps the traditional forms were the only ones that the propagandists knew to express the profundity of the revolutionary spirit. A third possibility that Tumarkin posited was that the propagandists recognized that images cast in traditional forms would likely have resonance with the propaganda audience.³⁷⁹ This final – and most cynical – explanation, finds a parallel in the continuation of personality cults in the post-Stalin period.

The portraiture of Soviet posters was distinctly iconic. In the idealized air-brushed representations of hero figures Soviet propagandists effectively mimicked religious art. Just as Stalin's face had been, Gagarin's larger-than-life face was carried in a procession through the streets. The transposition of the cosmonaut into traditional and iconic images was repeated in 1981 to celebrate the twentieth year since *Vostok*. The full-color book *Syn Rossii* (Son of Russia) set the cosmonaut's story into verse accompanied by colorful and iconic images infused with religious references, a style traditionally reserved for folk tales.

Beyond this varnishing and repetition of Gagarin's image, propaganda about him clearly involved a continuation of Khrushchev's Anti-Religious Campaign; its recurrent discourse of science versus nature reflected the secular, material, and rational aspects of scientific-atheism. The space program owed its success to science and the massive propaganda campaign that followed clearly demanded that citizens give up old idols in exchange for new ones. Persistent references to the "conquest of outer space" reinforced

³⁷⁷ Ebon, *The Soviet Propaganda Machine*, 9-10.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 22.

the idea that man must “put the universe under his control.”³⁸⁰ This could best be achieved in a secular and scientific society.

The Party understood that science in general would contribute to expanding Soviet production capacity, and thus would improve economic conditions. As the Party Program made clear, “Application of science in production becomes a decisive factor of rapid growth of the productive forces of society.”³⁸¹ As for rockets in space, the Program hinted that space exploration was playing more of a propaganda role than anything else.³⁸² After devoting considerable verbiage to detailing specific areas envisioned for the development of the key areas of science, including mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and medicine, the Program had only this to say about the potential uses of outer space:

Artificial earth satellites and spaceships have, by enabling man to penetrate into outer space, provided great opportunities of discovering new natural phenomena and laws and of investigating the planets and the sun.³⁸³

Perhaps the Party had not come such a long way since Khrushchev and his colleagues had felt like “technological ignoramuses” when Korolev first showed them his prototype rocket. As Khrushchev remembered, he and his fellow members of the Presidium:

. . . gawked at what he showed us as if we were a bunch of sheep seeing a gate for the first time. When he showed us one of his rockets, we thought it looked like nothing but a huge cigar-shaped tube and we didn’t believe it could fly . . . We were like peasants in a marketplace. We walked around and around the rocket, touching it, tapping it to see if it was sturdy enough— we did everything but lick it to see how it tasted.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2. & 56.

³⁸¹ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 252.

³⁸² The Party Program concluded its discussion of “Ties between science and production” by stating: “It is a point of honor for Soviet scientists to consolidate the advance positions which Soviet science has won in major branches of knowledge and to take a leading place in world science in all key fields. Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 255.

³⁸³ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 253.

³⁸⁴ Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament*, trans and ed. Strobe Talbot, Boston: Little, Brown, 1974. 46.

The happy and hard-working image of Iurii Gagarin fit neatly into this context of messages calling for increased productivity. Iurii's enthusiasm for labor so filled him with joy that his depiction ultimately blurred the lines between work and leisure. Gagarin's biographers made sure to emphasize that the hero "even relaxed actively, energetically and purposefully, in the same way as he worked."³⁸⁵ As his brother Valentin remembered him, "both at play and at work. . . . he seemed not to know what tiredness was."³⁸⁶ Gagarin's indefatigable passion for work extended into his free time where he would apply himself just as vigorously to selflessly bettering society. The Party Program had foreseen greater efficiency in material production affording more leisure time for citizens. The Program ordered that, "People will increasingly devote their leisure to public pursuits, cultural intercourse, intellectual and physical development, scientific, technical, and artistic endeavor. Physical training and sports will become part and parcel of the everyday life of people."³⁸⁷

This conflation of work and leisure was mirrored in narratives of Gagarin's schooling. These also reflected reforms to the education system under Khrushchev even though Iurii received most of his education under Stalin. Khrushchev had abolished upper forms of secondary school forcing all 15-year-olds into production for two years, and requiring that students who wished to pursue higher education take up evening or correspondence classes to prepare themselves.³⁸⁸ Gagarin remembered, "Although I was at school, I wanted to learn more. I took books on technical subjects from the library, and was angry because there are only twenty-four hours in a day."³⁸⁹ In fact, Iurii's career in aviation began through just such an extracurricular activity when he attended an aviation class in the evenings while at the Saratov Industrial Technicum between 1952 and 1955. One fellow student in the aviation course remembered Iurii as a tireless worker, noting that Gagarin had been the only student who had the perseverance to complete the

³⁸⁵ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 31.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁸⁷ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 249.

³⁸⁸ Sandle, *A Short History of Soviet Socialism*, 294.

³⁸⁹ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 25.

program.³⁹⁰ The senior instructor at the Saratov flying club that Iurii joined – also an extracurricular activity – remembered Gagarin for his perfect attendance record.³⁹¹

As a student Gagarin also joined the school physics society and gave a talk on Tsiolkovsky. Dedicating his free time to reading science-fiction, and scientific non-fiction, Iurii was especially interested to read anything about rocket engineering “including its military uses”.³⁹² He studied Einstein’s theory of relativity, wanting to understand everything that man had discovered about outer space. Gagarin’s endless enthusiasm led him to pursue things with passion and a restless energy. Propaganda about him endeavored to express this as part of the foundations of his heroic character, and ultimately to use these aspects of his personality to explain how he came to be a much-decorated Hero of the Soviet Union.

When he had a break from school Gagarin and the other students would enthusiastically assist farmers with their harvest, and “would have only been too glad to go farther, to the new lands where millions of acres of virgin soil were being brought under the plow and huge fields of wheat were ripening.”³⁹³ With this remark Gagarin also expressed his enthusiasm for Khrushchev’s Virgin Lands agricultural campaign, begun in 1954.

Gagarin’s renown as a hard worker was offered to explain why he was selected to take the path of heroism. Golovanov concluded that, “Work was the solid framework to Gagarin’s heroism” and cited Maxim Gorky to further illustrate the connection between heroes and their labors.³⁹⁴ Gagarin’s biographers repeatedly emphasized the cosmonaut’s capability and enthusiasm for hard work. His brother Valentin agreed that Iurii was “Indefatigable, restless and very active, he seemed not to know what tiredness was. He could always find both the time and the desire to do anything.”³⁹⁵ One of the most often-reproduced photos of Iurii was an image of him working in a foundry while at the vocational school. Images like this revealed an attempt to draw Gagarin as an icon of

³⁹⁰ Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 44.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 45.

³⁹² Ibid., 41.

³⁹³ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 60.

³⁹⁴ Gorky wrote that: “All my life I have considered as true heroes only those people who love and know how to work”. Golovanov, *Our Gagarin*, 31.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 39.

labor that was mirrored in biographical anecdotes. In one example, his biographers described how he broke a thread wound around his flexing muscles, to the amazement of his cousins.³⁹⁶ In short, the image of Gagarin was carefully constructed in the mold of a hero of labor.

Sputnik 1 had shown Soviet authorities that feats in space would attract much attention internationally. Speakers celebrating Gagarin's flight thus consciously addressed a global public and their statements were specially tailored for mass audiences. The authority of science – like the concept of 'newness' and the attention on youth – was promoted to harness the productivity of the masses. Calling for "conscientious labor for the good of society" and "concern on the part of everyone for the preservation and growth of public wealth" the moral code was oriented towards increasing productivity.³⁹⁷ The "chief educational task" was to cultivate a "communist attitude" in which "Labor for the benefit of society is the sacred duty of all."³⁹⁸ Furthermore, propaganda's effectiveness was to be measured by 'concrete production results'.

The achievements in space were portrayed in such a way as to inspire ever more heroic feats. As Gagarin remembered he and his fellow students' reaction to *Sputnik*, "Every one of us tried to prove worthy of that historic event."³⁹⁹ These 'historic events' and 'heroic acts' were thus supplied as a scale for Soviet citizens to measure their worth by.

Vostok was not only meant to symbolize the fulfillment of dreams of the past. It was meant to stir bolder dreams and inspire the 'unswerving' courage necessary to succeed. Although the flight signified that "The present rate of scientific and technical progress is remarkable", *Pravda* predicted that "this rate will gain even further momentum."⁴⁰⁰ The height achieved by the flight was 'unprecedented', but the 'genius of the Soviet people' would rise ever higher. The Soviet lead in outer space suggested the inevitable, intergalactic triumph of communism. In the short term, however, as the 17

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 44.

³⁹⁷ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 248.

³⁹⁸ Hodnett, *Resolutions and Decisions*, 247.

³⁹⁹ Gagarin, *Road to the Stars*, 70.

⁴⁰⁰ *Pravda*, April 16, 1961, 2.

April *Pravda* headline and photo of two proud factory workers implied, the “Unprecedented Exploit of Mastering Outer Space Inspires Soviet People to New Working Victories” much closer to home.

CONCLUSION: IMMORTAL GAGARIN

Despite Soviet propagandists' arguments to the contrary, Iurii Gagarin *was* special, that is, at least once the Soviet state had deliberately underwritten his immortalization as a national hero. The literally tons of propaganda made in the cosmonaut's honor beg the question why so much effort was made in the first place. Evidently, the image of Iurii Gagarin served some purpose, and an important one at that. Why was it so important, so seemingly necessary, to channel so many resources into the creation and dissemination of Gagarin's image?

Soviet propagandists clearly understood that the hero, as the personification of an idea, could most successfully communicate the essence of that idea to a large audience. While it is useful to analyze the political and ideological ideas that were attached to Gagarin's myth, it is also important to recognize the significance of Gagarin's role in the *personification* of the Soviet myth. In the same way that a manned space flight personified outer space, Gagarin provided a 'face' for the regime and a mouthpiece for Party ideology. The elaboration and publication of Gagarin's character was necessary to embody and personify the achievements of the Soviet system.

It is vital that anyone interested in Gagarin should understand his biographies as Soviet propaganda. Narratives of the cosmonaut's life and propaganda directives of his era too faithfully match to be considered uncritically. Even authors such as Doran and Bizony, whose account makes the most ambitious Western attempt to differentiate between the 'truth' and the 'legend' of the cosmonaut, accepted unquestioningly the official portraits of Gagarin's early life. Examining major propaganda resolutions of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and comparing them to biographical narratives of Gagarin, the intimate connection between the two becomes quite apparent.

Some specialists in Soviet propaganda, such as Barghoorn or McCannon, recognized the mythical role assigned to Soviet cosmonauts. As yet, however, an in-depth study of cosmonaut hero-myths and their implications for late- and post-Soviet culture has not appeared. As perhaps the most visible positive Soviet symbols of the period, cosmonauts provided a powerful image for an era that, at least in terms of culture, might have truly seemed 'new'. But was it the cosmonauts themselves who made it so?

Historical analyses of changes in Soviet society through the late 1950s and early 1960s often label the period “post-Stalinist”. Indeed, one can frame the context of the construction of Gagarin’s image between significant de-Stalinizing moments in 1956 and 1961. Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s cult in 1956 was not put before the general public until the October 1961 XXII Congress, by which time the space heroes were firmly in the popular imagination. At this same Congress the Third Party Program and its moral code were adopted, and on 31 October a resolution was passed to remove Stalin’s sarcophagus from the Lenin Mausoleum. That same night his body was moved.

The early Soviet space age coincided with this significant transfer of power and the reorientation of post-Stalin society, in which Stalin’s death and the immense human losses of the Great Patriotic War produced what Condee noted as the “*bezotsovshchina*” (fatherlessness) of the post-war Sixties generation.⁴⁰¹ The ‘newness’ of the space era may in many ways have been a response to the final closure of the Stalin period. The cult of Gagarin is perhaps most relevant to these first steps towards de-Stalinization.

The post-Stalin Soviet Union was in a unique position historically to understand and potentially utilize the personality cult. Khrushchev’s political star rose under Stalin and was consolidated when Khrushchev denounced the dictator’s ‘cult of personality’. Once firmly in power Khrushchev understood that he needed to distance himself from the dictator’s crimes and image. For Khrushchev, the benefits of creating a hero figure outside of politics were perhaps quite apparent. It was important for Khrushchev to accentuate his own legitimacy, to forge a connection between his current regime and that of Lenin. Here, the cosmonaut served a useful purpose. Comparing Gagarin to “Lenin, the immortal leader of the working class and the Communist Party”, Khrushchev linked the victory in space with the victory of the Revolution— another “exploit unparalleled in history”.⁴⁰² As the paternal master of Gagarin’s ascendancy to immortality, Khrushchev could benefit by association.

In the end, it was Gagarin who came closest to sharing something of Lenin’s symbolic immortality. On 30 March, 1968 Gagarin’s body was interred in the Kremlin wall behind Lenin’s Mausoleum, a far more honored resting place than that granted both

⁴⁰¹ Condee, “Cultural Codes of the Thaw”, 165-166.

⁴⁰² *Pravda*, April 15, 1961, 2.

Khrushchev who was buried in Novodevichy Convent and Stalin who was laid under a concrete slab outside of the Kremlin. Gagarin also remained one of the few uncontested Soviet images of the post-Soviet era. One post-Communist writer has remarked that during perestroika:

. . . all the heroes of the previous years had been shattered to dust, the only remaining, real, tangible hero was Gagarin the first man in space, and a good guy whom both the elderly and the young trusted⁴⁰³

The 'immortality' of Gagarin's image makes a critique of the relationship between his representation and state prerogatives more vital. To the Party, *Vostok* was more than a technical and scientific achievement; it was an ideological victory which Gagarin's image was molded to reflect. Through his performance as a role model and mouthpiece for the state, the image of Gagarin that emerged was of an ideal citizen of an ideal state. The mortal Gagarin, we can only suppose, was far less than this ideal – and far more human.

⁴⁰³Yurchak, Alexei. "Gagarin and the Rave Kids: Transforming Power, Identity, and Aesthetics in Post-Soviet Nightlife", in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev* (London: Duke University Press, 1999), 94.

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