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School of History, College of Arts

University of Glasgow

The Spatial Cosmology of the Stalin Cult

Ritual, Myth and Metanarrative

Jack Anderson

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Abstract: This paper will focus on Stalin's use of Soviet space throughout the 1930s and the relationship this had with the developing Stalin cult. In the thirties, Stalin had consolidated power and from as early as 1929 the Stalin cult was beginning to emerge. However, the cult was more than merely an embodiment of the state's totalitarian nature. It was built on, and sustained by, a complex metanarrative which drew heavily on ritual, mythology and history. By looking at the relationship between the development of the Stalin cult and development of this spatial metanarrative, this paper will focus on the production and projection of the cult onto the Soviet topos, creating what Eric Naiman has termed a "virtual landscape". In this transient topography Stalin's cultivation of spatial mythology was essential in the configuration and authentication of the cult. The Stalin cult of the thirties defined, and was in turn itself defined, by two main spaces: Moscow and the Arctic (centre and periphery). By deconstructing the spatial metanarrative attached to these two spaces, this paper will analyse how Stalin used space to facilitate a mental environment that expedited the development of his cult.

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Introduction

The plot of Lev Kuleshov's 1941 children's film *The Siberians* is relatively simple: two boys and one girl from the peripheral settlement of Turukhanskii, the place where Stalin escaped exile, dream of going to Moscow to meet him. To fulfil this dream they must undertake a rather peculiar mission. On Christmas Eve, an old hunter tells the children the remarkable story of Stalin's escape, a feat whereby he overcame the perilous topography of Mother Russia. The hunter also tells them that during his escape from exile Stalin lost his pipe. Learning this the two boys decide to track down the pipe and deliver it to Moscow, setting the scene for their rite of passage. However, in a magical dream it is the girl rather than the boys who first communicates with Stalin. As the narrative goes on, dream and reality converge; after meeting with the two boys Stalin becomes conscious of the girl's 'reality'. On their return the boys are standing underneath a portrait of Stalin, telling the girl of their meeting when Stalin's hand extends from the painting inviting the girl to Moscow. Thus, as the film comes to an end the children's lives have metamorphosed into a realised dream. *The Siberians,* as with most of the Stalinist cultural products, was a repository of state myth. Thematically composed to the tune of the Kremlin, Kuleshov's 1941 film followed the prototypical plot of cultural Stalinism, depositing its two key tenets: juxtaposed space (centre/periphery) and rite of passage.[1] In the film the children are innately drawn towards the apex of Soviet space, Moscow. In their real and surreal voyages across the Soviet topography the children undergo an ideological rite of passage by seeking proximity to Stalin. This narrative schema combined with the effacement of reality characterises the 1930s representation of the Stalinist landscape.

Kuleshov's film was one of many 'cult products', these products did not arise *ex nihilo*. Behind these products, whether they be a portrait, play, film or song, were the people and institutions that carefully crafted the cultic metanarrative: as Clifford Geertz wrote, "majesty is made, not born".[2] There was a plethora of cult products, each of which can be periodically associated with different temporal manifestations of the Stalin cult. This paper will focus on the 1930s and the relationship between the development of the Stalin cult and development of a spatial metanarrative, the scope of which will focus on the production and projection of the cult onto the Soviet topos, creating what Eric Naiman has termed a "virtual landscape".[3]

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[1] Lev Kuleshov, *The Siberians*, 1941.

[2] Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays In Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic, 1983), 124.

[3] Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman, ed, *The Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space* (London: University of Washington Press, 2003), xii.

In this transient topography, Stalin's cultivation of spatial mythology was essential in the configuration and authentication of the cult. The spatial poetics of the cult were hinged between the juxtaposed paradigm of centre and periphery. This dialectic tension was used to sacralise the Soviet topography through the condensation of time and space into a singular point – Moscow. At the apex of this singular point was Stalin - the purveyor of Soviet space – around whom a narrative of proximity was formed. This paper will analyse the creation of this sacred space and the concomitant narratives of passage that were attached to it, arguing that these played a key role in the facilitation of the Stalin cult.

Literature Review

On 21 December 1929, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin turned fifty years old. Often cited as a keystone moment in the annals of Stalinism, his fiftieth birthday saw the inauguration of the Stalin cult. Over the next 23 years, the ubiquity of the cult would come to dominate the mental universe of the Soviet Union.[4] Since the cults inception, it has been used as one of the foremost pieces of evidence to condemn the depravity of Stalinism. Historians such a Norman Naimark and Robert Conquest have approached the cult somewhat monolithically seeing it mainly as a manifestation of the Terror. In this light the Stalin cult has come to embody the Soviet Union's totalitarian legacy.[5] However, this perspective has been symptomatic of the disjuncture between the description and analysis of the cult, with the historical narrative using the cult to describe the structural violence of Stalinism without necessarily analysing it.[6] Whilst I do not look to detract from the viewpoint of the cult as an oppressive tool of totalitarianism, I do strive to explore the cult through a different optic.

Revisionists such as Shelia Fitzpatrick have broadened the lens of the study looking both inside and outside the terror for answers. In her seminal work, *Cultural Revolution in Russia*, Fitzpatrick along with other contributors such as Moshe Lewin and Gail Lapidus break down the basic dichotomy between state and society which is found in the general totalitarian model. In trying to paint a portrait of the emerging new social species, *Homo Sovieticus*, Fitzpatrick gives us daily Stalinism *in facto*. She argues that the "Cultural Revolution" of the Soviet society in the early 1930s was a process that although took directive from central authority, was also self-sustaining.[7] The result of which was a wider look at the role of the

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[4] Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 1.
[5] See Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Norman Naimark, *Stalin's Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[6] Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, 1.
[7] Shelia Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Revolution in Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

Stalinist mythology in the formation of social identity.[8] This historiographical shift away from the wholly totalitarian narrative was a revision that unveiled a much more complex relationship between state and society. Many revisionists since have used this foundation to argue that one of the crowning accomplishments of the state was the creation of social structures that consolidated and sustained the emerging system.[9] For example, works such as Jochen Hellbeck's *Revolution on My Mind*, use diaries of Soviet citizen to demonstrate how Stalinism actively shaped their social identities.[10] In works like Hellbeck's, it is possible to see how individual citizens absorbed the directives of Stalinism and actively attempted to recreate themselves, thus conveying just how complex the relationship between the society and state actually was.

Where the historiography has gone on to analyse the cult, there has been a rich and probing analysis. Historians such as Katerina Clark, and more recently Jan Plamper have looked to analyse the cultural production of the Stalin cult. These works have been invaluable in pushing for a new comprehensive understanding in this area of study, focusing on the cult's genesis, functions, products and more recently production. By deconstructing the aesthetic and semantic elements of the cult, Clark and Plamper explore the cult's complex metanarrative which dominated the Soviet cultural sphere.[11] The majority of this scholarship focuses almost exclusively on the art and ideology of Soviet Space in the 1930s, a period that saw Stalin and particularly Moscow in the zenith of time.[12] Crucially, the 1930s bore one of the key cultural facilitators of the Stalin cult, socialist realism, a stylistic movement which would come to assign hierarchy and meaning to both real and imagined Soviet space.

However, not until recently has Western historiography looked to *seriously* engage with socialist realism as a means of understanding the Stalin cult. As Katerina Clark pointed out in the preface of her milestone work, *The Soviet Novel: Ritual as History*: "Soviet Socialist Realism is virtually a taboo topic in the Western Slavic scholarship".[13] She argues that the reason for such derision is a collective judgement that is again more preoccupied with

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[8] See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[9] See Stephen Kotin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Graeme Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[10] See Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[11] See Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*; Katerina, Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); idem, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981).

[12] Karl, Schlögel, *Moscow 1937* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 45.

[13] Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, ix.

description rather than evaluation, with socialist realism being virtually self-evident. In the academic world most socialist realist works are felt to be intellectually suspect, political revolution leading to cultural devolution.[14] This has unsurprisingly resulted in very few Western works on what was one of the mainstream cultural movements of Soviet Union. Instead, Western scholarship has focused more on works from the dissident fringes. Clark's work has been instrumental in readjusting the optic through which we look socialist realism, rather than try to compare the likes of Ostrovskii to Dickens, the historian should adopt a methodology that evaluates the works in their institutional context. In doing so, Clark looked at it as a repository of state myth and argued that it was one of the key proponents of a cultural landscape that aimed to blur the lines between reality and fiction.

Following on from this there has been an increasing number of academics from many disciplines who have used socialist realism as a vessel into the 1930s. Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman's work *The Landscape of Stalinism* is a key example of how far the study of cultural Stalinism has come. From backgrounds of history, art, literary studies, and philosophy, the contributors give a wide-ranging analysis of the relationship between Stalinism, space and culture. Primarily concerned with production rather than the consumption of the Stalinist ideology, the volume of essays seeks to conceptualise the spatial dimension of cultural Stalinism, and in parts the Stalin cult. As Eric Naiman describes, the volume "deals with the ideology's attempt to climb into another dimension".[15] In many cases the contributors look to exhibit this in various ways using different methodological and stylistic devices, however, they share a thematic arch focusing on the semanticisation and saturation of space with meaning. Stalinist space is a battleground; Boris Groys in his chapter speaks of the struggle for the "symbolic occupation" of time and space.[16] A key aspect of this battle was the sacralisation of space, a theme innovated by Katerina Clark this looks at just how crucial the cultural sphere was as a medium for coding space with the profane – a key theme of the Stalin cult.

One of the most interesting areas that this notion is explored in is Soviet cinema. Experts in this field such as Oksana Bulgakowa and Emma Widdis have both honed in on the 1930's as the time when the potential of the film's capacity to produce a mass narrative was realised. Cinema, Lenin said, was the "most important of all the arts" – a visionary new means of communicating with an illiterate populace.[17] The film industry is perhaps best where we see

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman, ed, *The Landscape of Stalinism*, xiii.

[16] Boris Groys, "The Art of Totality" in Ibid, 97.

[17] Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2003), 13.

the juncture between art and politics: directors' discretion was subject to the state. Widdis argues that out of all the vast machinery in the Soviet cultural system, film was where one can see the new ideas of Soviet space "projected onto the vast, shared screen of popular imagination".[18] Stalin and the Bolsheviks enlisted modern technology in their attempt to create a new space and a new idea of Sovietness. The emerging Soviet identity was tied up in the complex cultural mythology of space – a space which was gravitated around the holy trinity of Stalin, the Kremlin and Moscow. Widdis, much like Clark, stresses that the real and imagined notions of Soviet territory that coexisted in the cultural field were by no means merely just centrally produced propaganda.[19] What is important when understanding the achievements of the Soviet propaganda machine "is to appreciate the creative power of the cultural imagery and the extent to which visions of utopia were a real, creative force in the construction of society".[20]

Following on from the recent multidisciplinary approaches to the cultural study of 1930s, this work will look hone in on the cultural narrative and its specific relationship with the facilitation and consolidation of the Stalin cult. Where much of the previous study has addressed this question at a broader societal level, I will look to highlight and analyse the parallels between the cultural narrative and the role it played in creating the Stalin cult. This work will take heed from Clark and Plamper's research and look to develop their hypothesis through a focused analysis on the spatial dimensions of the cult in the 1930s. In doing so, this paper will hope to demonstrate that through the aesthetic uses of space Stalin was able to build his cult around the relationship between centre and periphery. Despite there already being some excellent discourse on the conceptual space of Stalinism, I feel that these have not convincingly asserted the link between the 1930s spatial narratives and the facilitation of the Stalin cult. One of the key themes which I will address in my work is the ideological *Bildungsroman*. The political rite of passage was a tenet of the Bolshevik creed, internally there was a drive to be 'party minded' and externally there was a desire to be within the proximity of power. In the 1930s the Soviet Union underwent a radical metamorphosis; Stalin's image saturated space and a complex system of symbols rearranged the hierarchy of Soviet space itself. The new structure of Soviet space had an emerging narrative of rituals, initiations and revelations. In my work I will compare the cultural representations of these transitory moments and journeys with the real-life incidents they paralleled. The result would be the creation of a spatial metanarrative that would actively undermine the boundaries

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[18] Ibid, 3.
[19] Ibid, 12.
[20] Ibid.

between reality and fiction, and in doing so facilitate a social temperament wherein such a cult could prosper.

Surprisingly, theory from social anthropology has never really been incorporated into the study of the Stalin cult in the 1930s, despite it being rich with themes that invite cross-disciplinary research. I feel that much of the discourse on rituals and the rite of passage which is found in these fields of study would provide an interesting new window into the Soviet 1930s. Victor Turner's famous work *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* looks at the role of collective ritual as a dramatic phenomenon which attempts to bring life under control and assign identity, thus being a force that belongs to the structuring side of the cultural/historical process.[21] The rite of passage narrative found in the Stalin cult, one which was filled with performance, ceremonies and rituals must then be analysed from this perspective. Anthropologist Sally Moore explains the importance of this study, "Rituals do much more than mirror existing social arrangements and existing model of thought. They can act to reorganise them or even create them".[22] By applying a new theory to the cultural landscape of Stalinism and its myriad of meanings, it is possible to see the importance of these narratives and events in shaping collective identity and generating the historical process.

In the developing cosmos of Stalinism, these rites of passage laid the semantic foundation of Soviet space. In the thirties, the Stalin cult defined and was in turn, itself defined by two main spaces: Moscow and the Arctic. Whilst much of the literature that deals with the Stalin cult or Stalinist space in general, inevitably engages with Moscow as a space, there have been a few excellent studies such as Karl Schlögel tour-de-force *Moscow 1937* which have revolutionised how Soviet space is understood. Schlögel's work engages with Moscow as vast unfolding synchronous site of history, and in doing so Stalinism emerges as a dynamic force that simultaneously attempted to order and destabilise space as a system of meaning. Schlögel's work combines the multi-disciplinary nature of works such as Dobrenko and Clark with an emphasis on historical veracity which is found in Soviet scholars such as Conquest and Fitzpatrick, the result is a stereoscopic all-round view of the chief site of Stalinist space. The framework for Stalinism to be deconstructed in terms of territoriality was broadened by Widdis's aforementioned research, in particular *Visions of a New Land*. This looked at Stalinist cinema and how space was mapped, defined and semanticised. In this work, Stalinism is explored through the spatial binary of centre and the periphery.

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[21] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969).
[22] Barbara G. Myerhoff and Sally. Moore, ed, *Secular Ritual* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum & Company, 1977), 5.

Although neither Schlögel's nor Widdis's work look specifically at the Stalin cult, they both expand the spatial framework through which the Stalinist system of meaning can be analysed.

Whilst the work of Schlögel and Widdis add to the canon of literature on Stalin's Moscow in the thirties, in terms of literature on the periphery, and in this case the Arctic, there has not been as much historical interest. This emerges as somewhat peculiar given that the Soviet Union was – and Russia still is – obsessed with the Arctic. From the 1920s, the Bolsheviks went to extreme efforts to explore and incorporate the Arctic into the new Soviet space. Under Stalin in the thirties, this perennial campaign reached its zenith. In spite of capturing the Soviet imagination and functioning as one of the key myth-making spaces in the Stalinist topos, its importance has largely been side-lined. Historiographically overshadowed by discourse on Moscow, Stalin and the purges, Stalin's Arctic is usually found in passing reference or in a small section spread across a few pages. When this does occur, Pier Horensma points out that they confine themselves "to the history of exploration, taking little notice of the political circumstances".[23] However, when viewed in the spatial framework of Stalinism, and crucially the Stalin cult, the Arctic emerges as a remarkable example of how space was mythologised in the 1930s. Despite being in the extreme periphery, the Arctic was one of the best examples of Stalinist super-centralising spatial. Its icy dunes became a mirror whereby Stalin could mould his image; inseminating the landscape with the same networks of meaning as the centre. Of the focused studies on the region in the period, John McCannon's excellent *Red Arctic* treats the space with the rigour of analysis that it deserves.[24] By tracking the development of the region through its expeditions individuals, and institutions, McCannon shows how the regions political, social, cultural and economic existence was intimately linked with its developing mythology back in the Moscow. What emerges is a clear picture of the complex symbolic relationship between centre and periphery. Taking heed from McCannon, I aim to show how the Stalin cult depended on the Arctic metanarrative and how the individuals, expeditions and institutions of the Red Arctic effected and were affected by Stalinism.

Methodology

In setting out to *synthesize* a vast body of sources I have drawn extensively from a diverse field of disciplines. Whilst being foundationally underpinned by historical principles, from the works conception it has been clear that for an original and synchronous study to be

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[23] Pier Horsenma, *The Soviet Arctic (*Routledge: London and New York, 1991) 3.
[24] John McCannon, *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union, 1932-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

undertaken that a multi-disciplinary approach would be best suited. Stemming concomitantly from the oeuvre of the revisionists, history is no longer *History* with a capital H. Therefore, whilst a study of the Stalin cult will be unavoidably about Stalin, such works are no longer academically bound to the big names, big events, big headlines and big conclusions. It is crucial that Stalin is continually deconstructed, diffused and discovered through as many optics as possible. In doing so, the landscape of Stalinism at once emerges and remerges as a synchronous history of objects, spaces, symbols and meanings. As the scope for study broadens the notion of a *histoire totale* is what should appropriately be strived for, even if it is never fully attainable. In Karl Schlögel's *Moscow 1937*, he compounds this notion arguing that this period cannot be comprehended through singular approaches. Rather, there was a "simultaneity" of disparate trends and phenomena, different accounts and objects that provide different perspectives on the same moment, and they should all be considered.[25]

Space permitting, this thesis will incorporate Schlögel's analytical framework and supplement the account of the Stalin cult in the 1930s. This will be done by tapering my scope of study specifically around the spatial narrative of the Stalin cult, whilst simultaneously broadening my methodological framework. In doing so, I will show the semantic importance of the spatial dimensions of the Stalin cult, how Stalinist space was produced, and its function. This will be undertaken by a dynamic, diverse approach using theory and sources from areas such as cinema, anthropology, architecture, literature, media, and biography. Whilst markedly eclectic, no singular methodology has not been applied with such rigor to please an ardent structuralist. This is because to understand the complexity of Stalinist space, it is essential to deconstruct the different components of the space itself and look at their symbiotic relationship. In this synchronous approach the Stalin cult emerges as an inherently spatial production, configured around a series of juxtaposed paradigms: centre and periphery, old and new, chosen and not chosen. These dialectics can be seen as the structuring force of cultural Stalinism, concurrently ordering everything from photographs to architecture. Yet, on the other hand these dialectics embody the sequence of destruction and creation as a constant unstable cycle – both ordering and disordering the topography of Stalinism.

Here, the multi-disciplinary nature of my approach has helped me move between these different perspectives and sources allowing me to show the complex nature of the Stalin cult and its relationship with space. For example, in Chapter One, the centralisation of Stalin's

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[25] Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, 3.

image and the construction of Moscow as a sacred centre are examined. Throughout the chapter different visual sources such as photographs, paintings and architecture designs are analysed. Indeed, as Jan Plamper argues the "Stalin cult was an overwhelmingly visual phenomenon, tailored to a population whose mental universe was shaped primarily by images".[26] Therefore in Chapter One, the aestheticisation of the Stalin cult and its symbiosis with Moscow as the developing *axis mundi* is traced primarily using a visual methodology. By drawing from a broad pool of sources, the chapter explores how Soviet space was saturated with images of Stalin, particularly with the emerging canon of stock photographs. These representations followed a series of tropes which were hinged around placing Stalin at the top of the visual hierarchy. For example, I use a photograph of Stalin meeting with Otto Schmidt and his crew after the Chelyuskin expedition. In this photograph, Stalin's importance is visually marked using a series of representational tropes. This photograph was also chosen as it also ties in with the themes of the other chapters with Stalin aligning himself with the Arctic myth and its heroes. Later in Chapter One, I use Aleksandr Gerasimov's painting, *Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin*, to demonstrate how the visual hierarchy of representations of Stalin functioned in the high arts. If the photograph with Schmidt is a window on to *Pravda* and the pictorial evolution of the cult, then Gerasimov's painting "lends itself to a hermeneutics of a (indeed, *the*) socialist realist leader portrait."[27] Therefore, these two, very different visual sources can be analysed together in terms of visual canon of Stalin's image and aesthetic process that achieved this, but also separately to understand how the specific medium reacted to this process. In other places, the spatial poetics of the Stalin cult manifested themselves in more nuanced ways, such as the rhetoric around the building of the Moscow metro or the plans to build the Palace of the Soviets.

One of the central tenets in the 'overwhelmingly visual' cosmos of the Stalin cult was cinema. Not only was it an extremely effective apparatus due to its ability to circumvent the problems implied by illiteracy, but it was seen as a "means of creating a new relationship between Soviet man and woman and the physical world".[28] As socialist realism took over the arts in the thirties, cinema, arguably, became the sphere of culture where the Stalinist system of myth-making and meaning functioned best. By deconstructing and analysing these filmic sources within their own systems of meaning and their own generic conventions, and by also seeing how they matched up with 'reality', I will trace the intersection of the real and imaginary geographies of Stalinism. For example, in Chapter Two, the spatial

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[26] Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, xv
[27] Ibid, 223.
[28] Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, 13.

metanarrative will be explored in the context of the Stakhanovite movement. By juxtaposing cultural manifestations of this such as Aleksandrov's film *The Radiant Path* with real life accounts from their Kremlin ceremonies and Stakhanovite conferences, the synergic fusion of fact and fiction which facilitated the Stalin cult will be explored. *The Radiant Path* was chosen as it was one of the crowning examples of the socialist realist cinema and, in particularly, because the way Aleksandrov reconfigures Stakhanovism excellently shows how reality was reimagined according to this narrative. This ability to marry sources from different disciplines makes the nature of my study inherently useful. Through showing how these sources interact, the spatial metanarrative which underpinned the cult appears as a synchronous structuring force. It is possible to read the landscape of Stalinism as a highly complex, connected system of objects, spaces, people and myths. Therefore, my methodological framework is concerned with not only how reality is ordered by culture, but also how culture is ordered by reality (or a *perceived* reality).

Whilst I will not be able to explain all aspects of my extensive methodology in this section, I will briefly highlight one more type of source which proved to be invaluable in latter stages of this work. In Chapter Three, where the territorial emphasis of my analysis switches to the Arctic, I drew heavily from several non-fiction accounts such as Brontman's *On Top of the World* and Smolka's *Forty Thousand Against the Arctic*. Although the authors each come from different contexts – Smolka, a British journalist; Brontman, a *Pravda* journalist – their accounts both use socialist realist lexicon and they both define their geography relative to Stalin and the centre. Their rhetoric mirrored the centralised discourse on the conquest, or perhaps more fittingly, Stalinisation of the extreme periphery. This shows just how transcendent the cultural and psychological landscape of the Stalin cult was. The spatial metanarrative and all its components were superimposed on space, and this was reflected in the icy dunes of the Arctic landscape. Along with these non-fiction accounts, media and memoir sources will be used to show how Stalin recreated the mental topography of the centre in the Arctic *tabula rasa*.

Another theme worth noting in this thesis is the terror and its relationship with space. I will show how the terror was incorporated into the spatial metanarrative of the Stalin cult, and in doing so will hope to provide a synthesised account of the cultural space of Stalinism and the political realities of its production. Despite the increasing volume of interdisciplinary studies on cultural Stalinism and the cultural aspect of cult, this is something which tends to be seen as incompatible to the theoretical convenience of many scholars, as Clark notes in her introduction to *Moscow, The Fourth Rome*, "I seek to tell the cultural history of the 1930s

without dwelling on the purges".[29] Where my study eschews the temptation of omitting the role of the purges in shaping the cultural landscape of Stalinism, admittedly it does not attempt to look at the terror with the same depth of analysis as other components of the spatial narrative. The reasons for this are twofold: firstly, and perhaps most obviously, the time constraints and spatial limitations which are inherent to the nature of my research. Secondly, the aim of the study is not to mediate some middle ground between those who study the cult as a purely terror-based phenomenon and those who look at the cult through a cultural lens. The work is mainly in the vein of the latter; however, it is imperative to incorporate the broader perspective of the terror into my research and show how it too can be defined through the lexicon of the cultural apparatus. For example, in section 2.4 the spatial mythology of the sacred centre is examined through the Third Rome myth and Stalin's rehabilitation of historic figures. The theoretical scope of my analysis looks at sources such as films, history textbooks and memoirs. However, rather than focus on these sources from a purely terror or cultural perspective, the section uses sources such as Eisenstein's film *Ivan the Terrible* (1940) to show the synergic relationship between mythology and the terror. By looking at how the terror was shaped and imagined in the cultural sphere, it shows how the Stalin cult used the spatial metanarrative as a means of justification through historical contingency.

Outline

This thesis will proceed as follows. Chapter One will explore the construction of Moscow as the Soviet Union's sacred centre and how this process was connected to the building of the Stalin Cult. Section 1.1 will briefly contextualise the structural foundation of the Bolshevik power dynamic, suggesting that a culture of veneration was already manifested within the party before the revolution. In section 1.2, the emergence of the visual Stalin cult will be analysed through looking at the centralisation of Stalin's image in public and private Soviet space. Section 1.3 will focus on the spatial purification of Moscow through the 1935 *General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow*. This will look at the planned metamorphosis of the cityscape through structures like the Moscow Metro and the Palace of Soviets and how Stalin utilised the narratives that were connected with them.

Chapter Two will then look at how cultural mediums were advocated by the ideological *Bildungsroman*: a narrative that depicted the journey to Moscow as a highly sacral rite of passage, wherein one could gain a higher state of consciousness through spatial proximity

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[29] Clark, *Moscow, Fourth Rome*, 6.

to the Soviet Union's spatial trinity: Moscow, the Kremlin and Stalin. Section 2.1 will contextualise the landscape of Stalinism by discussing the theory surrounding the dynamics of Soviet Union's physical and mental space and how its spatial make-up was conductive to the development of this narrative. Section 2.2 will analyse the socialist realism in relation to the spatial metanarrative of Stalinism, this will be done through decoding the dialectic structure was the foundation of the movement. Section 2.3 will study the emergence of the Stakhanovites as representing a qualitative change in human anthropology and the Stalinist ordering of reality. After analysing the 'real' Stakhanovite movement, I will then use Aleksandrov's Stakhanovite fairy tale, *The Radiant Path*, as a comparative socialist realist case study. In the final part of this chapter, Section 2.4, the revival of the Third Rome myth and the historical rehabilitation – and subsequent Stalinisation – of Ivan the Terrible will be explored. This section will look at how Stalin altered elements of history to justify the terror in the context of a historically 'progressive' spatial metanarrative, of which, he was the inheritor.

In Chapter Three, I will explore how this inward spatial motion was then reversed outward in an attempt to remake nature in the image of the centre This will be explored through the Soviet's most extreme periphery – the Arctic. Section 3.1 will map how the reorientation of social temperament from logical to mystical elicited the start of a fantastical thought climate; the arena for this thought to turn into action was the Arctic. In section 3.2, the concept of the Arctic frontier is analysed, focusing on Stalin's spatial conquest to create a 'Red Arctic'. In section 3.3, the paradigm of the Arctic hero will be explored. Through their ritualised passages through Soviet space, they gained a special relationship with Stalin, one which had cultic implications for both parties. Finally, section 3.4 will explore how the purges impacted the periphery and the implications this had, not only for the developing Arctic myth and its figureheads, but also for Stalin himself.

Chapter One: The Sacred Centre

1.1 Big Ideas: Soso and the Seminary

> Move tirelessly
> Do not hang your head
> Scatter the mist of the clouds
> The Lord's Providence is great.
> Gently smile at the earth
> Stretched out beneath you;
> Sing a lullaby to the glacier
> Strung down from the heavens.
> Know for certain that once
> Struck down to the ground, an oppressed man
> Strives again to reach the pure mountain,
> When exalted by hope.
>
>   – *To the Moon*, Soselo (Joseph Stalin)

On the precipice of the twentieth century, tucked away in the mountainous South Georgian topography, tears streamed down the face of Keke Dzhugasvili. It was the summer of 1895, Keke, bloated with sorrow and pride was bidding farewell to her son. Her exceptionally astute little 'Soso' was about to embark on his path to priesthood, he had won a scholarship to study at Tiflis Theological Seminary, the best religious educational institute in the Southern Empire. As this aspiring young priest-poet set off from the small colourful town of Gori, it seemed that against all the odds Keke's dream for her son to become a bishop was set to become a reality. She was the happiest mother in the world.[30] However, the tale that was to unfold was to be drastically different from her idealised *Bildungsroman*. "No secular school," wrote Filipp Makharazde, "produced as many atheists as the Tiflis Seminary".[31] It was in this setting that young Soso was exposed to the actions and ideas that irrecoverably formed his character; the setting that made him Stalin. In this juxtaposed environment religion and Marxism fought for the minds of these young men. From the off it seems that the trajectory of Soso's path was to be in the purist of the latter. Marxism had captured the temperament of this young man and would go on to shape his future.

However, in the legacy he would leave it is possible to see the remnants of the Tiflis Seminary's paradoxical atmosphere imprinted on the USSR. Stalin and the Bolsheviks may have been Marxists, but the poetics of power were deeply rooted in the pseudo-religious state they built. In their physical and mental organising of space, they created a power

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[30] Simon Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (New York: Phoenix Publishing, 2007), 51.
[31] Ibid.

network based around pseudo-religious veneration of sites and people. This was by the holy trinity of Moscow, the Kremlin and Stalin. In all spheres of society, the channels of power gravitated in concentric circles around Moscow: the centralised apex of influence. Within the realms of Moscow, the centralised spatial configuration became more intra-sacral with the Kremlin being the last physical intermediary before Stalin. This set up Stalin as the dominant power purveyor within the sacralised centre of Moscow. In this chapter I will I will examine the creation of myth surrounding the Soviet centre and how Stalin placed himself at its very core. In the first section I will trace the Stalin centrality cult, focusing on his placement in the centre. In the second section, I will look at how the centre was constructed and Stalin's role as Moscow's moderniser.

1.2. 'Happy Birthday, Comrade Stalin': The Centralisation of Stalin's Image

> I opened the door and saw a portrait. Then the portrait started walking towards me… Just imagine! Stalin himself had walked down the corridor of a communal flat.
> – *Life and Fate*, Vasilii Grossman

On the 21st of December 1929 the cult was inaugurated when Stalin turned fifty years old. The cult burst on to the scene in the state's premier newspaper *Pravda*. This newspaper would not only launch the cult, but over the next 23 years it was to become its primary medium. In the special eight-page edition of *Pravda* on the 21 December Stalin was lauded by fellow Bolsheviks and established literary figures for his different accomplishments as party leader, with articles such as Ordzhonikidze's *A Staunch Stalin* and Demian Bedny's Poem *I am Certain*.[32] In James Heizer diachronic analysis of the 117 birthday greetings in *Pravda*, he highlights that there were 201 cases of language that referred to him as "leader". The most frequent of these terms was *rukovoditel'*, terminology which indicated that Stalin was performing his capacity as a leader (76 out of 201 times), and *vozhd'*, a term loaded with sacral connotations such as prophetic leader and charismatic hero.[33] If compared to the lexicon of language that party members associated with Stalin in the mid-1920s, with words such as *khoziain* (boss) generally being the operative phrase, it is possible to trace the elevation of language.[34] These three terms alone form something of a linguistic Jacobs ladder, the semantic difference between *khozyain*, *rukovoditel'* and *vozhd'* reflects the changing attitudes as Stalin took power. The overwhelmingly verbal introduction of the cult gives us

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[32] Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, 35.
[33] James Lee Heizer, "The Cult of Stalin, 1929-1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 1977), 58.
[34] Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power* (New York: W.W Norton & Company), 148.

a glimpse into the orchestrated dynamics behind it. Although what was to ensue would be a visual extravaganza, this is still nonetheless a crucial moment in the public placement of Stalin.

After a notable absence from *Pravda*, Stalin remerged in mid-1933 as the immobile centre of the Soviet Union with an unrelenting centrality cult dominating the cultural narrative. It now seemed that all forms of culture from high to low were preoccupied with placing Stalin in the centre. Before his pictorial representation was confined primarily to the 'Stalin portrait', there had to be way for him to be distinguished in photos. Therefore, in order to elevate Stalin's image above those who were in his pictorial proximity an array of visual strategies was used. In these varying techniques the principal goal was to subliminally reinforce Stalin's centrality; this was achieved through a combination of subtle characteristics that set him apart from his colleagues. A visual canon of Stalin's image was created with a specific criterion; his spatial placement, physical size, colour of clothing and the direction of his gaze. In each pictorial representation these features were tailored to make Stalin distinct from those around him. For example, on 6 June 1934 the cover of *Pravda* showed a photograph of Stalin and his party members with Otto Schmidt, leader of the famous Arctic expedition ship Chelyuskin (Figure. 1).[35] In this photograph, Stalin dressed in a white uniform, occupies the centre staring directly into the lens. On the other hand, all of the other seven people in the photograph are all wearing black with their gaze fixed outside of the camera. Jan Plamper argues that it is likely Stalin's white uniform was retouched, or even an entirely different photograph glued on, as his body shape looks very unnatural.[36]

This retouched photograph was one of the 68 visual depictions of Stalin that year. This number had increased by 57 when compared to the 11 representations of Stalin in 1929. The visual trajectory of his depictions in *Pravda* continued to surge throughout the 1930's, reaching an all-time high in 1939 with 142 pictorial representations.[37] Although these figures are indicative of the increasing emphasis on the placement of Stalin's image into the centre of Soviet media, they perhaps fail to give an insight into the consumption of his image. On a micro level: who were the consumers of his image? How was it consumed? Were they receptive?

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[35] See cover of *Pravda*, No. 154, 06 June 1934. Pravda Digital Archive https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/21737805 [Accessed 11 November 2016].
[36] Ibid.
[37] All figures taken from Graph App.1 in Ibid, 228.

Figure 1. Pravda cover, *Stalin with Otto Schmidt and the Chelyuskin Crew*, 06 June 1934.

A potential window into the individual's daily transaction with Stalin's image may be the 'red corner' – an answer to the 'icon corner' – this spatial construct was the meeting point of the macro and micro.[38] The merging of public and private space through personal iconography had a long-standing history in the Russian household. Originating in the practices of the Orthodox Church this was a process that was shrouded in mysticism and was one of many notable religious appropriations made by the Bolsheviks.[39] The secularisation of such a practice after Lenin's death in 1924 did not remove the quasi-religious overtones, instead it positioned Lenin and Stalin as natural heirs to this spiritual lineage. Through the dissemination of Stalinist iconography, the red corner became a strange material portal throughout the 1930s, one whereby Stalin's image radiated from the centre, occupying Soviet personal space. In his book, *Magnetic Mountain*, Stephen Kotkin describes the construction of Magnitogorsk, a new industrial city in the southern Ural.[40] Every living barracks in this newly built city contained a red corner, in which, according to John Scott

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[38] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain,* 180.

[39] Victoria Bonnell*, Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters Under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 148.

[40] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 180.

typically hung, "the barrack[s] wall newspaper, two udarnik [shock worker] banners, [and] pictures of Lenin, Stalin and Voroshilov".[41] The red corner was more than a showcase, it was a site of mobilization where one was encouraged to discuss and engage in party ideology, in many respects echoing the *kruzhok* system. However, the transition between belief systems in these veneration sites was not always straightforward. One Soviet mechanic recollected: "Once my elder brother there [sic] who was a member of the Communist Party was visiting at home and he told my mother about this [that Stalin's picture was to be hung]: he told her that she should replace the picture of God in her icon with that of Stalin."[42] Accounts like this give an insight into the logistics of Stalin's image and how it diffused from the larger edifice of the state to the everyday citizen. The placement of Stalin in the home reconfigured the spatial temperament of the Soviet domestic life. This icon corner became a centralising space, one which was politically and geographically referential to Stalin and Moscow.

It is perhaps difficult to fathom from today's perspective the cultic effect of such a singular, saturated space. However, these accounts from Soviet citizens go a long way in helping one comprehend the profound psychological implications of the visual Stalin cult, one of which came from Sergei Kavtradze, an Old Bolshevik, who often told the following story. In 1940 after he had been released from the Gulag, Stalin and Beria accompanied him to his old apartment in Moscow. When they knocked on the door of his now occupied flat a woman answered. Upon seeing Stalin, she staggered back and fainted, however, Beria managed to catch her thereby stopping her from falling. He proceeded to then shake her hand and ask her what it was that had frightened her. The woman then told Beria that "I thought that a portrait of Stalin was moving towards me".[43] Stories like this show how Stalin's portrait manifested itself into the subjective conscious of its audience. For many the cult of Stalin and all the mythical cleavage that came with it was tied up, not in the man, but in the portrait.

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[41] John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1942), 40.

[42] Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. Schedule A, Vol. 19, Case 358, 1951, p 15. (interviewer J.O., type A4). Male, 25, Great Russian, Mechanic. Widener Library, Harvard University. [online] Available at: http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:955638?n=15 [Accessed 12 November 2016].

[43] Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, xiii.

1.3. A Vision of the Future: Constructing the Centre

Convinced that every innovation in the city influences the sky's pattern, before taking any decisions they calculate the risks for and advantages for themselves and for the city and for all worlds.

– *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino

By the latter half of the 1930's the cult had become more legitimatised. In this period the aesthetic narrative of the centrality myth can best be analysed in Stalinist high culture. Perhaps of all the works that exhibit the classic trademarks Stalinist spatial organisation, the one that illustrates it best is the most famous, Aleksandr Gerasimov's 1938 *Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin* (Fig. 1). This painting was the culmination of the 1930's Stalinist spatial narrative, marrying the three sacred pillars of the centre; Stalin, the Kremlin and Moscow. The visual arrangement of the painting sequentially depicts these three pillars in order of consecration. The viewers gaze is firstly drawn to Stalin and Voroshilov pacing the inner Kremlin, then to the Kremlin Tower and finally to the Moscow backdrop. The space is composed in a spherical style with concentric circles grouping around Stalin, the centre.

Moreover, Mikhail Iampol'skii taking heed from the observations in Walter Benjamin's *Moscow Diary*, has drawn attention to the absence of anthropomorphic monuments inside the Kremlin. He argues that the powerful aesthetic positioning of Stalin, who is firmly planted as the immobile centre with his motionless footing, was an attempt to monumentalise Stalin inside the Kremlin on a meta-level.[44] The modesty of Stalin in his simple grey overcoat is directly contrasted to Voroshilov, who is highly decorated with insignia to represent his high martial post. The compositional outcome of this is that Stalin appears calm and comfortable in the centre, his habitual environment.[45] Stalin's penetrating gaze into the distance, the USSR's glorious future, is mirrored in the linear composition of the painting's geography.[46] The motion of the work follows Stalin's eye line and is reflected in the transformative Moscow skyline. To the left three cupolas of a Russian Orthodox church are receding out of the picture, old Russia has been overcome. In the more immediate background it is possible to see Stalin's spatial purification of Moscow through the House of Government and the newly built stone bridge (located across the river to the far right).

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[44] Mikhail Yampolsky, "In the Shadow of Monuments: Note on Iconoclasm and the Time" in *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-Century Russia*, ed. Nancy Condee (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 93.

[45] Plamper, *The Stalin Cult*, 98.

[46] Mathew Cullerne Brown, "Aleksandr Gerasimov" in Art of the Soviets: Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture in a One-Party State, 1917-1992, ed. Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor (London: Manchester University Press, 1993), 131.

This purification was according to the *General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow* in 1935. This plan was emblematic of the 1930's attitude towards Moscow, one which seen it as a place of architectural fantasy and a reach for the future. As the centre of the Soviet

Figure 2. Aleksandr Gerasimov, Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin, 1938.[47]

cosmos Moscow had to be remade to suit this new role. Lazar Kaganovich, the commissar in charge of the city's reconstruction, acknowledged this task, Moscow was to become a space "worthy of the country, and worthy of the proletariat".[48]

The *General Plan* did not appear out of thin air; it was the product of a collective effort of many committees over a number of years. The planned metamorphosis of the cityscape was to echo the historical, radical structure of Moscow, with its emphasis on a central point: a utopian node or omphalos.[49] The city centre was to become a public space, one which advocated the collective ideology of the state. These central spaces were a facade – pertaining no real purpose – they were spaces of aesthetic performance. An example of this performative, emblematic organising of the centre can be seen in the plans for the Palace of

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[47] Aleksandr Gerasimov, *Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin*, 1938.
http://www.tretyakovgallery.ru/en/collection/_show/image/_id/2207 [accessed 25 January 2016]
[48] Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, 166.
[49] Ibid, 167.

Soviets (Fig. 2). This neoclassical statue of Lenin, planned to be the tallest building in the world at the time, was to be the centrepiece of the city.[50]

The Palace of Soviets can be seen as the inauguration of a period of architectural reverie, it occasioned one of the century's greatest architectural competitions in which luminaires from the Soviet Union and abroad took part. When it was chosen in 1933 as competition winner, Boris Iofan's monolithic Stalinist structure was an emblem of the radical realigning of the architectural principles. Sona Stephan Hoisington in her study of the Palace of Soviets argues that its architectural evolution encapsulates the changing socio-cultural models of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. By looking at the rudiments of the plan in 1931, it is possible to see "what started out as a practical complex of interrelated structures – public spaces for demonstrations, a library and assembly halls… rapidly transformed into a symbol of Soviet might, a sacred temple, a temple to the revolution and to its deity, Lenin".[51] The initial site for the Palace of Soviets was to be a market area known as *Okhotnyi riad* – chosen because it was adjacent to the Red Square and for its practical advantages: it was compact, contained structures that were easy to remove, thus making it a location where the project could be realistically completed by 1934.[52] However, in early June 1931, with almost no notice or preparation, the Construction Council decided to relocate the project to a more prominent site. The new location was to be one mile along the Moscow River from the Kremlin – the then (and now restored) – Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. This decision is crucial in illuminating the trajectory of the changing Soviet mental landscape for a number of reasons. Firstly, this was a departure from the logical positivism that dominated the 1920s; the 1930s saw an inversion of these principles as the power of reason was muffled by the promise of splendour. The organisational negligence in the process can be seen in the absence of studies carried out prior to moving site: practicality, feasibility and viability seemed to be afterthoughts. Archival materials attest to this – M. V. Kruikov, the Directorate of Construction – was still trying to acquire detailed information about the site more than six weeks after the decision was made. Secondly, the space was obviously selected for its political symbolism. The Cathedral of Christ the Saviour was the personification of old Moscow, its dual lineage with the two great edifices of pre-revolution Russia – the monarchy and the church – made it a highly charged focal point in the cityscape. The demolition of

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Sona Stephan Hoisington, "Even Higher": The Evolution of the Project for the Palace of Soviets", *Slavic Review*, Vol.62, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), 42.

[52] Ibid, 45.

such a sacrosanct structure was a dramatic aesthetic performance, the use of dynamite made the destruction a graphic spectacle; Stalin's Moscow was coming.
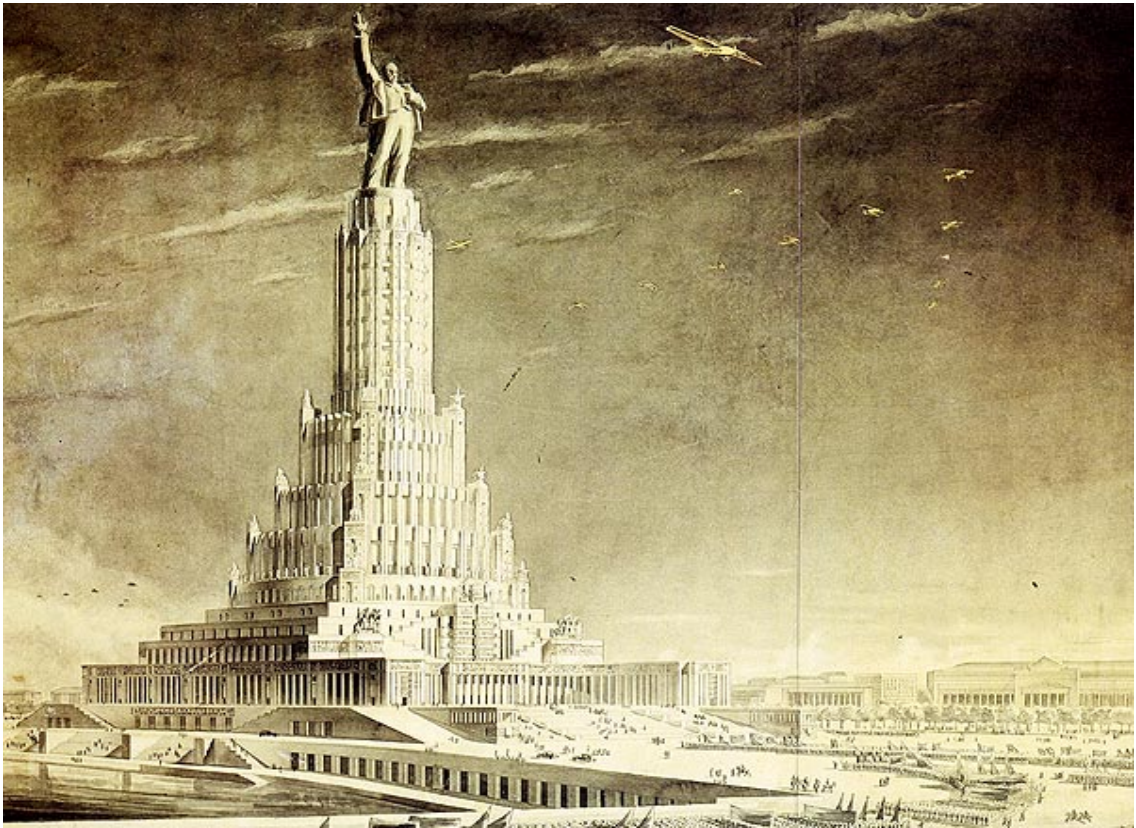

Figure 3. B. M Iofan, V. A Schuko, and V.G. Gel'freikh, *The Palace of Soviets*, 1934.[53]

In the aftermath of the demolition it became apparent that a great vacuum had been left. The sudden removal of such a consecrated, concentrated site of meaning invoked a sense of spatial anxiety. This was a physical sense of loss on a grand scale and from this moment on I would argue that the designs for the Palace of Soviets were consciously aimed at spatial reconciliation. However, the Construction Council now faced a dilemma: the majority of the designs it had chosen in the Open Competition were functional, abstract, anti-monumental buildings. The designs lacked anything "Soviet": the international language of the modernist forms was a huge juxtaposition to the historical nature of the demolished Christ the Saviour. An example of this style can be seen in Le Corbusier's famous 1931 submission (Fig. 4). The design reflected the original stipulations; however, its configuration fell short in a climate where modernism was losing ground. Ultimately, in a closed competition a select number of architects were given a brief which lay out stylistic directives, these emphasised

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[53] B. M Iofan, V. A Schuko, and V.G. Gel'freikh, *Drawing of the final design for the Palace of Soviets*, 1934. Published in *Pravda*, 20 February 1934. See *Pravda*, No. 50, 20 February 1934, 2. Pravda Digital Archive. https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/21738351 (accessed 29 January 2016)

height and hierarchy. Unsurprisingly, at the same time Aleksei Tolstoi published an article about the project in *Izvestiia*, the title of which 'In Search of Monumentality'.[54] After Iofan's design was chosen in 1933, the evolution of the projects planning entered into the realms of architectural decadence. The proportions of the edifice continued to grow with the prominence of Lenin as the structural stasis becoming increasingly pronounced. At 415 - meters high the statue was to be taller than the Empire State building, the proposed 100- meter statue of Lenin would embody the conceptual function of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, gazing out from the centre into the Soviet periphery.
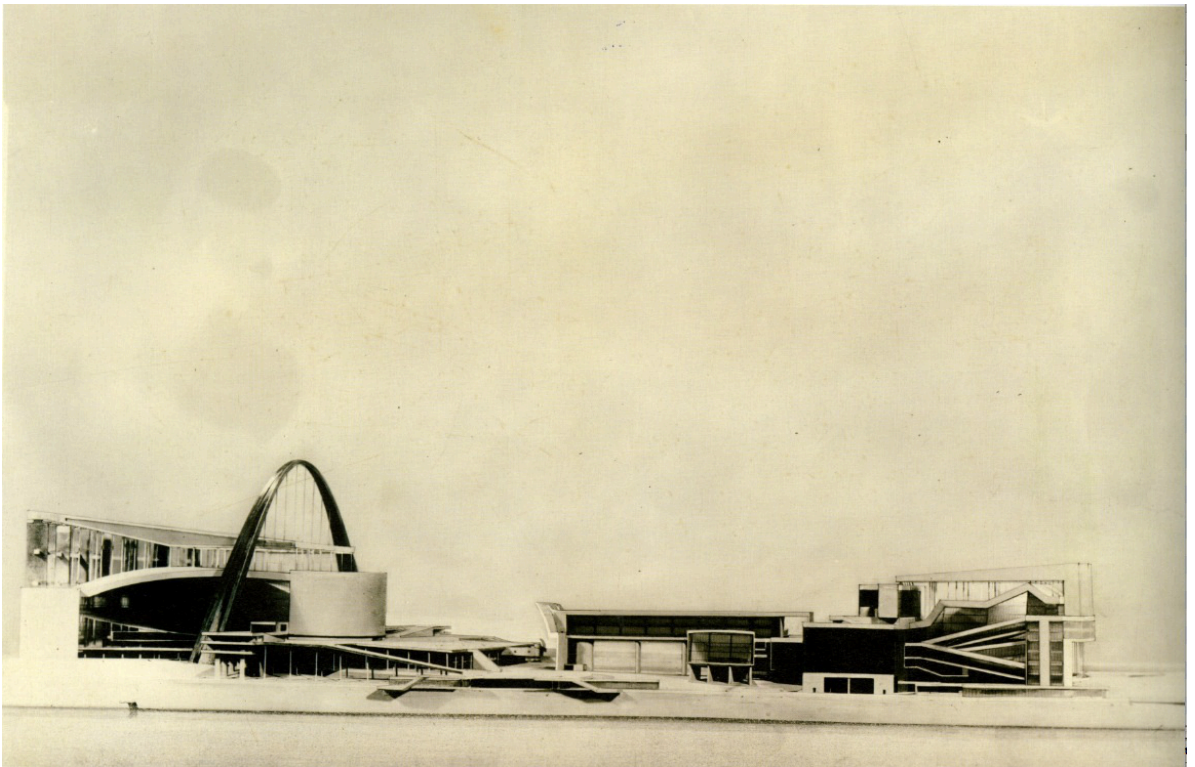
Figure 4. Le Corbusier, Palais des Soviets, 1930.

Although never built, the story of the Palace of Soviets took on an official genesis myth: Stalin overseeing the project, not only chose the site, but also declared that the huge statue of Lenin should crown the totem.[55] Now established, the myth was perpetuated through a plethora of sketches, models, films and articles. This was to such an extent that, despite never being built, the Palace of Soviets was one of the icons of the decade. Sheila Fitzpatrick correctly points out, its "image was more familiar than most actual buildings".[56] When it comes to trying to understand the psychological landscape of the Stalinist era, there is

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[54] See *Izvestiia,* No. 57, February 27, 1932. Izvestiia Digital Archive
https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/25500365 [Accessed 03 March 2017]
[55] Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy,* 126-129.
[56] Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism,* 70.

perhaps no better anecdote than the Palace of Soviets. Through the propagation of images, the myth of the Palace of Soviets became a conceived virtual reality. Propaganda films such as Lidiia Stepanova's *Dvorets Sovetov: Kino-Ocherk* (Palace of Soviets: A Film Essay), gave the impression that the Palace of Soviets already dominated the Moscow landscape.[57] The deliberate blurring of the present and future and illusion and truth, were key characteristics of the emerging Stalinist myth canon. Such is the paradoxical nature of the period, that the new capital of socialisms crowning centrepiece existed only in notion. This reflected in the following statement by Stalin:

> What is most important to the dialectical method is not that which is stable at present but is already beginning to die, but rather that which is emerging and developing, even if at present it does not appear stable, since for the dialectic method only that which is emerging and developing cannot be overcome.[58]

However, this was not the case with all projects, as radical as some elements of the plans for the "capital worthy of the proletarian state", much of it was out of necessity.[59] The infrastructure of Moscow was in bad need of modernizing, and this task was taken up all at once, in one great push. Even before the creation of Stalin's definitive *General Plan* the structural creases of the cityscape were beginning to be ironed out. For example, with the construction of the Moscow-Volga Canal, beginning in 1931, the Bolsheviks managed to fix the "error of nature" that had left the capital "deprived of a powerful water artery".[60] This resurrection saw Moscow become the infrastructural heart of the USSR again. Although the spatial restructuring of Moscow would look to maintain much of the city's historical continuity, it was primarily concerned with the recodification of the urban texture. In an attempt to 'Stalinize' the city's system of symbols, the Bolsheviks obliterated sites of cultural vestige, or reinvented them to align with the developing Soviet schema.[61] This was achieved through the renaming of streets and squares, or by demolishing places that were too strongly associated with the old regime; one example can be seen in replacement of the tsarist emblems on the Kremlin towers with backlit red stars. Furthermore, in the mass demolition: the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, the Sukharev Tower, Kazan Cathedral and the Red Gates (to name a few) all made way for the new Moscow.[62] The result of which was,

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[57] Hoisington, "Even Higher", 65.
[58] Groys, *Total Art,* 51.
[59] Gill, Symbols and Legitimacy, 129.
[60] Hoisington, "Even Higher", 169.
[61] Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, 45.
[62] Timothy, Colton, *Moscow: Governing the Socialist Metropolis* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1995), 266-268.

as Graeme Gill points out in his study of Soviet symbols, that "Moscow [was] turned into a gigantic site for the presentation of the regime's symbol".[63]

One of the tenets of Stalin's modernising master narrative was the Moscow Metro. In the discourse of the metro, the totality of language saw the recodification of the old Moscow termed out in military metaphor: "we simply do not build the metropolitan, we fought for the victory of our first Soviet metropolitan".[64] The construction was a direct rehabilitation of tainted space. Kaganovich saw the metro as a war against the pre-revolutionary, old regime geology of Moscow.[65] As Mikhail Ryklin points out, in the Stalinist *modus operandi* "to build, was above all, to do battle".[66] The language that was used to term the building of the Metro, would be mobilized again, not only in military campaigns, but in the declaration of war against nature (see chapter 3). The rhetoric works twofold: it sacralises the achievements of the new Moscow, whilst simultaneously defaming the old. Like the Palace of Soviets, the metro became fetishised in the cultural sphere. Writers refused to let the Metro simply be a place, juxtaposed with a stream of criticism of Western metros in cities such as New York and Paris, the Moscow Metro was a sacred dimension.

The conceptual premise of the structure was symptomatic of Stalin's spatial designs for the sacred centre. One of the paramount features of the Metro was the emphasis on illusionist lightning in each station. The theme was of an unspecific palatial space, a sunlit palace in an unknown scene: a utopia. Each station was to have a unique design, but all were to be lit by "the same light of progressive, victorious socialism".[67] The light of the Metro took on a fabled significance as the radiance of the centre, like the dominant trend of the 1930s the present and the future was merged through a sort of narrative folklore. In a children's story taken from the book, *Ready! Stories and Poems of the Metro*, an old peasant man visits Moscow to see his daughter who is working on the Metro. As he enters the metro the celestial lightning throws him into a state of confusion, thinking that he has entered the Tsar's palace he instinctively removes his hat. His daughter explains to him that this extraordinary place was built by the people: "We built them ourselves, we did the digging and we put up the palaces". Upon hearing this, the old man is overwhelmed by an epiphany of ideology, this encounter here at the centre has helped him see the principles of the new ideology. After

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[63] Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy*, 14.
[64] Mikhail Ryklin, "The Best in the World": The Discourse of the Moscow Metro in the 1930s in *The Landscape of Stalinism,* 263.
[65]Ryklin, "Best in the world", 263
[66]Ibid.
[67] ibid, 275.

deciding that this is a utopia he cannot leave, the old man then decides to move to Moscow and ride the underground every day.[68]

The Moscow Metro, the opening of which was the apogee of the city's metamorphosis, was much more than a transportation system. It was a site of national myth, an invitation and a symbol for those all over the Soviet Union come to the progressive capital of the world and marvel at the power of socialism. The Metro was one of the principal symbols of the new Stalinist culture with its dazzling aesthetic it provided the centre with a mythical microcosm of the new socialist order. These structures of new Moscow worked as new sites of memory, spaces wherein Stalin could actively legitimise his power by attaching himself to the city's developing spatial legacy. Of course, it was Stalin and Kaganovich who became known as the chief architects of the collective project. The first stop on the Metro line was named after Kaganovich (which may have been due to Stalin's peculiar and often sporadic use of modesty), and Stalin appeared on the front cover of the published *General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow*. Moreover, after Stalin's address at the opening of the L.M Kaganovich Metro in 1935, despite his attempts to emphasise the role of the worker in the construction, the hall was still filled with the cry: "Hurrah for beloved Stalin!".[69]

As the architect and overseer of such a momentous vision for a city, Stalin in many regards can be seen as taking up the lineage of Russia's most loved Tsar, Peter the Great. In collective memory, both of these men are strongly embedded into the fabric of their respective cities, Moscow and St Petersburg. Both Stalin and Peter the Great shared a singular vision for their cityscapes: to place them in the zenith of time. These two were the state-builders of Russia, the modernisers of space. Surprisingly, despite a relic of the old regime, Peter the Great was prosaically used as a propaganda icon throughout the 1930's. As a hero from the distant past, he was the vessel through which some sense of historical legitimacy could be maintained.[70] In 1937, under Stalin's guidance, Vladimir Petrov's and Aleksei Tolstoi's film *Peter the First* was released in theatres across the USSR. Audiences were shocked at the positive transformation of the Russian imperial past into a historical epic. Tolstoi, who may have felt the need to justify the subject matter, noted in an interview: "Iosif Vissarionovich [Stalin] went over our plans very attentively, approved them and gave us direction". Outlining these directions, he added that Stalin had told him "The boyars' dark

[68] ibid, 265.

[69] See J. V Stalin, Address to the Solemn Meeting on the Opening of the L. M. Kaganovich Metro, 14 May 1935 in *Pravda* taken from Marxists Internet Archive
https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1935/05/14.htm

[70] David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2002), 57.

uncultured Rus', with their backward technology… would have fallen to invaders. A revolution was necessary…in order to lift Russia up to the level of the cultured European countries".[71] It is apparent that Stalin was trying to establish historical continuity between Peter's circumstances and his own; this statement is reflective of the state-building rhetoric of the 1930's. However, in Stalin's vision the spatial axis of the USSR had to be reoriented away from the *fringe* territory of St Petersburg and back to the old centre, Moscow. Stalin looked to move away from the window opened to the West created by Peter, instead constructing a Soviet-centric space, with Moscow as its *axis mundi*.

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[71] Ibid.

Chapter Two: All Roads Lead to Moscow

2.1. Ritual, Space and Power: The Semanticisation of the Soviet Topos

Space is fundamental in any exercise of power.

– Michel Foucault

In his attempt to transform Moscow into a 'Fourth Rome', Stalin sought out to reconfigure the physical and mental vastness of the Russian landscape.[72] Due to the spatiotemporal otherness of the Russian topography, the creation of a highly charged sacred centre was a way of focalising the boundless open space. If approached through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptual chronotope, it becomes apparent that in Soviet civilisation the chronos (time) is consistently swallowed up by the topos (space).[73] The boundless impenetrability of Soviet space extended into the realms of time, with pre-industrialised Russia and areas of the Soviet periphery being frozen in the historical moment. This peculiarity sees Russian space regulate a temporal imbalance which further separates the periphery from the centre. The infinite vastness of the dispersive landscape stands in stark contrast to the dynamics of centralisation on which the Stalinist regime is built. This opposition becomes particularly evident in the case of the dense urban environment, in which this maximisation of space can be interpreted as an active reaction to the otherwise overwhelming extension of the surrounding space. As Mikhail Epstein has written, "Closeness in Russia is a metaphysical fact, standing in direct contradiction to the nation's physical properties".[74] He describes this as being the chief paradox of Russian space, one that is epitomised in the remarkable interrelationship between rarefaction and condensation.[75]

Stalinist space, both physically and mentally, dramatically tapped into the mythology of the Russian topos. The spatial juxtaposition of absence and presence was semantically developed in various cultural channels in the 1930s. Through the homogenisation of the arts, the socialist realist principles – the Bolshevik style par excellence – formed a master plot on which nearly all narratives, particularly in literature and film, was based on. As Peter Kenez writes, "a socialist realist novel is always a *Bildungsroman,* that is, it is about the acquisition of consciousness".[76] In many of the novels and films, this rite of passage to acquire

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[72] Katerina, Clark, *Fourth Rome,* 5.
[73] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (London: University of Texas Press, 1981).
[74] Mikhail Epstein, "Russo-Soviet Topoi" in *The Landscape of Stalinism*, 280.
[75] Ibid, 279.
[76] Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (London: I.B. & Co Ltd, 2006).

consciousness was a manifestly spatial transaction. Through a journey from periphery to centre, the protagonist(s) can be seen as resolving the temporal imbalance of the Russo-Soviet space as they are stepping into Moscow, a city in the zenith of time. This Bolshevik didactic was not only confined to the realms of fiction, indeed it was analogous to a series of spatial rites of passage that were forming a real life metanarrative. The Stakhanovites and their Kremlin rituals, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, provide an excellent example of this. In their trips to Moscow, they are beckoned to the centre by Stalin to undergo their ideological *Bildungsroman*.

In order to fully understand these rites of passage and rituals, I feel that is important to incorporate theory from social anthropology. As theorists from Van Gennep to Myerhoff have pointed out, rituals are structuring mechanisms which dramatically attempt to assign meaning both individually and collectively.[77] In the process, not only does ritual propagate cultural ideas, it also shapes them: "Rituals personalize abstract cultural meanings and turn them into comprehensible narratives".[78] The primary function of socialist realism and the master plot can be understood through this anthropological optic, as the repository of state myth it was used to encode the cultural landscape with a meaningful, standardised narrative. The climax of this plot, whether that be in fiction or reality, was a transformation which encompassed the acquisition of 'consciousness'. The vast body of literature on ritual identifies the transformational element of the process as a universal component of the act.[79] This stage of the ritual process is a described as the liminal stage, where the 'liminaires' are betwixt between two states of being; they have already been detached from their old places in society, yet they have not completed the transition and cannot re-aggregate. In this liminal dimension the ritual subject is a paradox, being *both* this *and* that, the experience of occupying this threshold – which is removed from time and space – is akin to a metaphysical transcendence.[80]

Moscow, the Kremlin, and more specifically Stalin, were the sites for these passage rituals in the 1930s. These transitions can be seen in several episodes, I will focus on two specific instances: the aforementioned Kremlin rituals, and the Soviet aviators (who will be addressed in Chapter Three). Using the theoretical framework outlined in this section, this chapter will look at the interrelationship between space, ritual and power and their connection to the narrative of the Stalin cult. Section 2.2 will analyse socialist realism in

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[77] See Gennep, *Rites of Passage;* Myerhoff and Moore*, ed, Secular Ritual*.
[78] Clark*, Soviet Novel*, 9.
[79] See Gennep, *Rites of Passage*; Myerhoff and Moore, ed, *Secular Ritual*; Turner, *Ritual Process*.
[80] Victor Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality" in *Secular Ritual*, 37.

relation to the spatial metanarrative of Stalinism, this will be done through decoding the dialectic structure that made up the 'prototypical plot' of socialist realism. Section 2.3 will study the emergence of the Stakhanovites as representing a "*qualitative* change in human anthropology" and the Stalinist ordering of reality.[81] After analysing the 'real' Stakhanovite movement, I will then use Aleksandrov's Stakhanovite fairy tale, *The Radiant Path,* as a comparative case study of socialist realism *par excellence,* demonstrating the complex crossover between reality and fiction. In the final part of this chapter, Section 2.4, the revival of the Third Rome myth and the historical rehabilitation – and subsequent Stalinisation – of Ivan the Terrible will be explored. Ultimately, analysing the thirties through this myth-based metanarrative demonstrates how the synergic marriage of fact and fiction, past and present, and centre and periphery, can facilitate a unique mental landscape; the emergence of which concomitantly expedited the Stalin cult.

2.2 'To Moscow!': Socialist Realism, Cinema and the Spatial Metanarrative

Moscow will abide to where we tell it to
The real Moscow is wherever we put it!
That is – in Moscow.

– Moscow and Muscovites, Dmitry Prigov

The writing of socialist realist literature in the 1930's was a process safeguarded by a specific set of aesthetico-political principles. This was superintended by the Writers' Union which was formed in 1932 on the initiative of the Central Committee of the Communist Party after disbanding a number of other literary organizations: RAPP, Proletkult, and VOAPP. The Writers' Union oversaw the monopolisation of socialist realism as the literary style *par excellence*. This was based around a list of archetypal canonised novels that formed the skeleton of the movement, containing classics such as Gorky's *Mother* and N. Ostrovsky's *How the Steel was Tempered*. Given its final form at The First Congress of the Writers' Union in 1934, the method was subsequently applied to on the art sphere.[82] Underpinned by the Marxist-Leninist theory of dialectical and historical materialism, socialist realism symbolically recapitulated the stages of historical progress outlined in the theory. Using this as a subtext, the basis of what Katerina Clark calls the "master" or

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[81] Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 120.
[82] Boris Groys, The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic, Dictatorship, and Beyond (London: Verso Publications, 2011), 38.

"prototypical" plot was formed.[83] This was structured around a series of temporal, spatial and ontological dialectics: centre and periphery, conscious and unconscious, past and present or high and low.[84] Stalinism positioned itself as the mediator between these extremes, functioning as a paradox resolver and purveyor of the mythical order of things. As a result of these dialectic resolutions the principal theme of the socialist realist/Stalinist narrative became *transitionality*.

Stalinist culture declared itself the historical *telos* toward which all of human history was inevitably moving.[85] In this motional framework an interesting bifurcation of Stalinism's temporal outlook can be seen. As Keith Livers points out, the "image of 'socialism achieved' portrayed the present as a limpid mirror of the soon-to-be-realised utopian future", juxtaposed, "the culture's revolutionary cores hesitation to declare history's transformative project at an end".[86] Stuck between these two narratives, Stalinism in the 1930s can be seen as occupying a space outside of normal historical time. Similarly, socialist realism did not see itself as conforming to categories of historical temporality, it regarded historical time as ended and thus occupied no specific place in it. According to the principles of Marxist-Leninist theory, it depicted history as an arena of dialectic struggle between the active, demiurgic forces which were working towards building a better world and the passive, contemplative forces which did not believe in or desire change.

Thus, the spatiotemporal reality of the 1930s was depicted as a state of liminality: neither *here* nor *there*. Having detached itself from the past, it occupied a peculiar zone on the intersection of the present and the future. In this liminal stage new paradigms emerged which represented a dramatic restructuring of reality from horizontal to vertical. In this new framework, a revaluation of basic ideals saw the citizens being encouraged to look "not alongside, their brothers, but upward to the fathers".[87] In doing so, an idealised rhetoric which verged on mysticism dominated the 1930s. Moreover, the dialectic nature of socialist realism guaranteed that, in the cultural sphere, this change in axis was organised around a series of motifs that had been established by the Writers' Union and, of course, been overseen by Stalin: the final filter and nodal centre.[88]

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[83] For a full analysis of this plot see Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 159-177; 255-256.
[84] Clark, *St Petersburg,* 138.
[85] Keith Livers, *Constructing the Stalinist Body: Fictional Representations of Corporeality in the Stalinist 1930s* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 10.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 136
[88] Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 135.

One of the principal dialectics of the Stalinist metanarrative was the spatial ontology of periphery and centre. Many excellent examples of this can be found in Soviet cinema. Although it had its origins in literature (as discussed above), socialist realist methodology reached its optimal means of conveying ideology in Soviet cinema. In a widely illiterate population the visual primacy of the image was an effective means of political persuasion.[89] Socialist realism ensured that the spatial semantics of Stalinism were the key agents in producing meaning in films. As Anna Katsnelson points out: "genre emerges as a determinant of meaning and hence functions as an agent of overarching strategy to control the audience's reaction by providing the context in which that film must be interpreted".[90] An example of this controlled reaction can be best seen in the Soviet mass song of the 1930s, a medium which combined Soviet folklore with comic cinema. Inasmuch as any musical is hyperconscious of the 'catchiness' of its content, the potentialities for retransmission are manifestly pronounced in a total culture which is actively looking to broadcast their ideological doxa through cultural products. The melodic insemination of the spatial metanarrative can be found in the "Song of the Volga" taken from Grigori Aleksandrov's 19 38 *Volga-Volga*:

> We are moving both the mountains and the rivers,
> The time of fairy tales has come to life,
> And along the Volga, free forever,
> The boats are sailing to Moscow.

Here, the enchanted lyrics invoke a notion that Moscow, Russia's true centre has awoken. The Volga is anatomised as a great network of veins through which the blood is pumped out from its heart, Moscow. The song "Our Moscow" describes how when one is away from this focal point they continually pine to return, "everywhere we are in our hearts united faraway Moscow" as "We are all in our hearts Muscovites".[91] This was part of the collection of "songs not about one's own love", these universalised the personal feelings of love and happiness through the collective paradigm of Moscow.[92] Cinema was used to modernise the Russian folk song, the lyrical composition of these mass produced songs tapped into the spatial mythology contained in Russia folklore. With their subtle ideological undertones, they subliminally invite you to the centre, signalling a profound change in the spiritual

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[89]Jamie Miller, *Soviet Cinema: Politics and Persuasion Under Stalin* (I.B Tauris: New York, 2010), 10-14.

[90] Anna Wexler Katsnelson, "The Tramp in a Skirt: Laboring the Radiant Path." *Slavic Review* 70, no. 2 (2011): 256-78.

[91] Hans Güther, "Broad is My Motherland": The Mother Archetype and Space in The Soviet Mass Song" in *The Landscape of Stalinism*, 81.

[92] Ibid.

atmosphere.[93] By placing Moscow within the framework of the folkloric pagan body of myth, its role as the nucleus of Russia was historically authenticated. This notion is reflected in Ivan Pyr'ev's 1941 film, *The Swineherd and the Shepherd*. In Pyr'ev's film, a Stakhanovite swineherd receives a trip to Moscow and the Agricultural Exhibit as reward for her record-breaking labour. There, in "the heart of the Soviet land", she meets her future husband – a shepherd from the Caucasus who is also a glorified labourer.[94] However, their encounter is not governed by chance, as one mass song puts it "As the rivers meet in the sea, / So do people meet in Moscow".[95] Moscow's mythical centrality was reinforced by a thematic portrayal of the capital as a place of spontaneity and occurrence. From the centre a message of proximity was transmitted out into the periphery, pursuit of physical proximity to Moscow, the Kremlin and Stalin was a rite of passage. Visiting Moscow one might find love, become a man (or *woman*), or even meet Stalin. Ultimately, the idea elucidates that the closer to the ideological centre one was, the more they were likely to be raised to a higher level of consciousness.

With his aesthetico-political coup of the arts complete, Stalin now had control over the Soviet Union's virtual, as well as myth its real landscape. Boris Groys points that: "it is of course irrelevant to object here that Voroshilov or Kaganovich or Stalin himself were not experts on art, for they were in reality creating the only permitted work of art – socialism – and they were moreover the only critics of their own work".[96] As the real life authors of the socialism, Stalin and his circle were specialists of the only poetics necessary – the demiurgic building of the socialist utopia – they had the same legitimacy to give directives on the aesthetic composition of a painting as they did to the production of steel. From this perspective, it becomes clear why writers, artists and film producers were allowed access to the nucleus of Stalinist body politic. Their privileged access was a concomitant condition of capturing 'the typical', which they were then expected to echo in their work. Thus, the artists were given a glimpse at how Stalin and the party leadership actively formed reality, and by being afforded this opportunity, they themselves became incumbent in the (re)production of this reality. Gerasimov when speaking about the production of Stalin and Voroshilov in the Kremlin, spoke about having "the high honour of being at Comrade Stalin's several times".[97] Another later example can be found in V.M. Petrov – the director of *The Battle of Stalingrad*

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[93] Ibid, 83.
[94] Ibid, 89.
[95] Güther, "Broad is My Motherland, 89.
[96] Groys, *Total Art,* 35.
[97] Plamper, *Stalin Cult,* 102.

– statements which recount how Stalin's secretary, Aleksandr Poskryobyshev, allowed him into the inner sanctum of the Kremlin, Stalin's office:

> He summoned me to the Kremlin, when Comrade Stalin was not there. I was in Comrade Stalin's office and saw the entire setting of his life and work. These were very moving minutes, I had to memorize everything in this room, all the details. I could no longer observe for a long time or bother with questions. But I strained my whole memory to preserve all separate details.[98]

By giving the artists propinquity to the environment of the centre, the artists can be seen as having a meta-experience of the narrative that they are being summoned to produce. This pre-aesthetic experience of the ideological *Bildungsroman* sees the artist travel to the centre to gain an understanding of Stalin and the party, after which they are then able to participate in the cultural process of reflecting the reality they perceived. Therefore, the subject of artistic mimesis is, as Groys argues, "not external, visible reality, but the inner reality of the inner life of the artist, who possesses the ability to identify and fuse with the will of the party and Stalin… [and] of the reality that this will is striving to shape."[99] However, not all artists were as party orientated as people like Gerasimov, for prominent contemporaries such as Platonov, Zoshchenko and Akhmatova's "desire to be included in Stalin's quest for the fairy tale come true could neither be totally resisted not entirely embraced."[100]

2.3 *The Radiant Path* of Labour: Stakhanovism and the Kremlin Rituals

> We'll turn everything upside down and throw it out to the devil! We're going to break everything obsolete.
> —*The Radiant Path*, Grigori Aleksandrov

"We, contemporaries of the Five-Year Plans", wrote Viktor Shklovskii in his diary, "see how people alter, how peasants, for example, *change* [my italics]".[101] In the thirties, the Stalinist mantra of 'change' reverberated around the topos, however, human potential was stiffly bracketed within the omnipresent agent of ideological motivation. With the emergence of the Stakhanovite movement in 1935, a sustainable narrative of labour and mobility as a means of ideological elevation was established. Stakhanovism built on the practice of socialist competition and shock work which focused on the maximisation of

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[98] Ibid, 135.
[99] Groys, *Total Art,* 52.
[100] Livers, *Stalinist Body,* 14.
[101] Viktor Shlovskii, *Dnevnik* (Moscow, 1939), 119.

productivity, this was developed as a means of gaining moral (and material) incentives. [102] The heroification of prominent workers such as the eponymous Aleksei Stakhanov, saw a shift in focus away from the collective to the individual within the overarching heightened productivity campaign. Through this crucible labour emerged as *rites de passage*; a means of internal and external ideological mobility. The Stakhanovites were the embodiment of the Soviet mythology of labour, their work was portrayed as being unequivocally altruistic and part of a higher-order syntheses. Labour as a means of reconfiguration dominated Stalin's speech at the First All-union Conference of Stakhanovites in 1935: "These are new people, people of a special type… it [the Stakhanovite movement] contains the seed of the future rise in cultural and technical level".[103] For Stalin, the Stakhanovites' teleological harnessed labour represented an abstract resolution in the historical progress of Marxism-Leninism. Clark identified this as the dialectic of "Spontaneity" and "Consciousness", a paradigm which was one of the fundamental driving forces of the Leninist version of historical progress:

> Consciousness' is taken to mean actions that are controlled, disciplined, and guided by politically aware bodies. 'Spontaneity', on the other hand means actions are… sporadic, uncoordinated, self-centred… The ultimate stage… communism, is reached in a final synthesis…or ultimate revolution [that] will result in the triumph of 'consciousness.[104]

The rhetoric of Stalin's speech at the Conference of Stakhanovites was diligently geared around narrowing the historical agency of Leninist history on the *individual* human being. In this microcosmic historical drama, the individual has the ability to undergo a rite of passage by becoming an actor and stepping inside the motional process of history via ideologically conscious actions. They stood as an emblem not only in daring and achievement, but *in epistemology* also; among the excessive epithets generated for the Stakhanovite, "Prometheus unbound" precisely denotes this.[105] Stalin saw the 'unbound' Stakhanovite movement as "the beginnings of precisely such a rise in the cultural and technical level of the working class… which are essential for the transition from socialism

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[102] Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy,* 112.

[103] J. V. Stalin, *Labour in the Land of Socialism: Stakhanovites in Conference* (Moscow: Cooperative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the U. S. S. R., 1937), 15-18.

[104] Clark*, Soviet Novel*, 15.

[105] Katerina Clark, "Utopian Anthropology as a Context for Stalinist Literature" in Robert Conquest (ed), *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 187.

to communism and for the elimination of the distinction between mental and manual labour".[106]

Throughout the speech Stalin tributes the movement as occurring "somehow of itself, almost spontaneously, from below, without any pressure whatsoever".[107] By framing the phenomenon as such, Stalin separates the agency of the Stakhanovites from the extreme output pressures on the industry set by the centre. However, in this respect, the narrative of elevation was symbolised by five-year plans, unattainable demand and the heightened tensions between workers, engineers and managers. Emboldened by their new status as heroes of production, Stakhanovism gave workers a voice to air grievances. Feeling that the regime was on their side, but the local administrators were not, the tone and direction of their criticism was stringently aimed at their managers.[108] Seeing Stakhanovites such as Evdokiia Vinogradova bragging, "I used to earn, 180, 200, 270 rubles a month. But now, when I tend 144 looms, my earnings are as much as 600 rubles. Just see how much my wages have increased!", other workers felt aggrieved when their administrators did not have the resources to facilitate their 'status transition'.[109] This pressure on management was applied two-tier as the national leadership also deeply mistrusted them. In a sequence of articles such as "They are hindering us from working Stakhanovite fashion", managerial performance was highlighted as hindering the movement.[110] One such piece talks about the Kirov Factory director who "had all the opportunities, [and] everything necessary, to organize labour at the plant… but the director didn't succeed in doing this. He works the way he worked three years ago, when there was no Stakhanovite movement".[111] Stalin echoes these sentiments blaming "the old standards of output… our engineers, technical workers and business managers drew up certain standards of output adapted to the technological backwardness of our working men and women".[112] These 'old' and 'new' paradigms preoccupied Stalinist rhetoric in the thirties, in the context of the terror 'old' became a synonym for opponent. In an industrial context, this meant to be in opposition to the 'new' paradigm of Stakhanovism. With the Stakhanovites emerging as largely 'symbolic heroes' their antithesis came in the form of managers and engineers became the 'symbolic villains'. In Robert Thurston's analysis of the Harvard Project Survey of 2,718 'non-returnees' after the war, he points out

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[106] J.V. Stalin, *Labour in the Land,* 17-18.
[107] Ibid, 19.
[108] J. Arch Getty and Roberta Manning (eds), *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives,* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 147.
[109] E.V Vinogradova, *Labour in the Land,* 165.
[110] Ibid, 146.
[111] Ibid.
[112] J.V. Stalin, *Labour in the Land,* 22.

that "those in administrative responsibility were twice as likely as their non-administrative peers to report having being personally arrested".[113] To fill this vacuum of administrative positions during the terror, in many cases, Stakhanovites rose to replace those who had been arrested.[114] In this regard, the mantra of elevation through labour was given tangible ends, however, in the unremitting vacillation of the terror the inciters often became victims.

Notably, in 1935-37, as the terror began to become more prominent, the Stalin cult was supported by these new hero cults. These cult offshoots made for a mental topography of veneration and naturalised the Stalin cult as being 'from below', as Plamper points out: "Invariably these hero cults were in dialogue with the Stalin cult and entailed what one might call sacral-double charge".[115] In a visual analysis of Stalin's representations, Plamper has created a graph charting the number of depictions of Stalin 'alone', vs 'with others'. Interestingly, in 1936 with the inauguration of the terror, Stalin appears alone only 15 times and appears with others 62 times. This was one of the only years from 1929-1953 where such a large visual discrepancy occurs.[116] In 1936, Stalin's patronage to the Stakhanovites was a prominent visual trope; photomontages of Stalin depicted as the omnipresent overseer of the movement officially and aesthetically highlighting the teleological importance of labour (Fig. 4). Through these sub-cults the logic of Stalin's paradoxical cult of "immodest modesty" can be seen, with the "idea of being liked and likeable, of appealing to the masses and attracting them, while being different to them".[117]

As Futerfas's poster suggests, Stakhanovites, and especially Stakhanov himself, were depicted as devoted to Stalin. In the mid-thirties rhetoric of remarkable people, their feats bore witness to "a qualitative change in human anthropology" which was soon to inseminate the mental universe of the land.[118] Through their extraordinary labour, the Stakhanovites assumed a special place in the mythology of the Stalinist family as 'sons' – joined by other heroes such as mountain climbers, explorers and, above all, aviators – they were depicted as having a special relationship with prominent figures known as 'fathers'.[119] Father figures were usually represented by political luminaries like Stalin, or by leaders in their field like Maxim Gorky, they served as heuristic models for the sons to take impetus from. 'Sons' did

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[113] Robert Thurston, "The Stakhanovite movement: Background to the Great Terror in the factories" in *Stalinist Terror*, 158.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 41.
[116] For graph see Plamper, *Stalin Cult,* 231.
[117] Simoneeta Falasca-Zamponi, "The 'Culture' of Personality: Mussolini and the Cinematic Imagination," in *Personality Cults in Stalinism – Personenkulte im Stalinismus,* ed. Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck &Ruprecht unipress, 2004), 88.
[118] Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 120
[119] Ibid.

not, as one might expect, succeed their 'fathers'. They had no real political agency; instead, they served as figurative harbingers in the Stalinist metanarrative – a formulaic model for the population to emulate. Generally, 'fathers' were omnipresent, wise figures who had been through trials like their 'sons', who, on the other hand were depicted as being somewhat 'unhinged' and in need of close tutelage. Through this new familial network, the Stakhanovites were provided with modern apartments and awarded with prizes such as motorcycles, bicycles and gramophone players, the likes of which the rest of the Soviet public could only dream of owning.[120] In many cases, the Stakhanovites transition was consummated through an invitation to the centre, where they participated in a ritualised award ceremony receiving either the Red Banner of Labour or the Order of Lenin.[121]

For the Stakhanovites, these Kremlin rituals were much more than physical transactions to acknowledge their feats. These kairotic encounters were said to have been the *ex post facto* (after their feats), sources of the heroes' 'knowledge' or 'consciousness'.[122] In their trip to Moscow (and to a larger extent the Kremlin), the Stakhanovites were transitioning to a higher order of place. By passing through the sacral omphalos of the Kremlin, which, functioned as something of a Jacobs Ladder – connecting the physical world with the super terrestrial beings, Lenin and Stalin – the Stakhanovites are inchoately betwixt between two spatiotemporal realities. The situation the Stakhanovite finds himself in fits within the broader anthropological schema of the ritual and rite of passage. Arnold Gennep writes about the ephemeral effects this has on the individual: "Whoever passes from one to another finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain amount of time: he wavers between two worlds".[123] In this liminal state of being, Andrei Stakhanov reported that they "did not acknowledge time" during their meeting with Stalin.[124] This is because the meeting with Stalin was structured in a different temporal ordering separate from the normal rubric of reality. This is analogous to the "great time" that Mircea Eliade elucidates in his analysis of time and myth: "imitating the exemplary acts of a god or of a mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time".[125]

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[120] Anita Pisch, *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929–1953: Archetypes, Inventions, & Fabrications*. (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2016), 46.
[121] For such award to 140 heroes, See *Pravda,* 9 December 1935.
[122] Clark, *Soviet Novel,* 143.
[123] Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 18.
[124] Clark*, Soviet Novel*, 145.
[125] Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 23; See also Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959).

Another striking analogy comes from Katerina Clark, who points out the vivid parallels between the mythology of High Stalinist mythology and Plato's myth of the cave.[126] Through the Stalinist system of knowledge, the 'fathers' unlike the mortals in Plato's cave, knew of a higher, enlightened *ideological* reality which exists outside of merely 'seeing appearances'. In the Kremlin rituals, the Stakhanovites get to temporarily be part of this cosmology and in the process their transition comes from this acquisition of 'higher knowledge'. In their accounts of the meetings, they typically approach the Kremlin with apprehension and are marked by an inability to express oneself.[127] When they enter the Great Hall of the Kremlin, and Stalin is in visual proximity, they report being dazzled by the "blinding" light.[128] Andrei Stakhanov found that, "I could not take my eyes off him [Stalin] and "felt a great need to get closer to him".[129] In this highly ritualised moment of passage, the presence of "Stalin looking down on us with eyes of a father and teacher", proves to be the ubiquitous epiphany of consciousness for the Stakhanovites.[130] And thus, as Katerina Clark eloquently puts it:

> out of the surging elemental darkness the wild, inchoate 'mustangs' comes to see the 'forms' in the dazzling Kremlin hall in order that henceforth he may have words to express what he has so far only grasped hazily and intuitively. Once he 'knows, he changes from rebel to leader and is reintegrated: he commonly starts studying at some institute, and he joins the Party.[131]

After their audience with Stalin the two great paradoxes are resolved; the spatial (periphery/centre) and the temporal (spontaneity/consciousness). Their actions are no longer sporadic and self-centred – instead they are working within the temporal framework of the party, stepping inside history via ideologically conscious actions. With these two dialectics resolved, one saw "differently than ever before", reported Stakhanovite, A Khovinm.[132] In these redemptive moments the real and the fictional metanarratives align, creating a complex ontological system of power which transcended the jurisdictions of reality. Through a comparative analysis of Grigori Aleksandrov's musical film *The Radiant Path,* it is possible to see just how large an extent these paradigms were oscillating between fiction and reality.

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[126] Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 143.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Katerina Clark, "Utopian Anthropology", 187.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 144.
[132] Quoted in ibid.
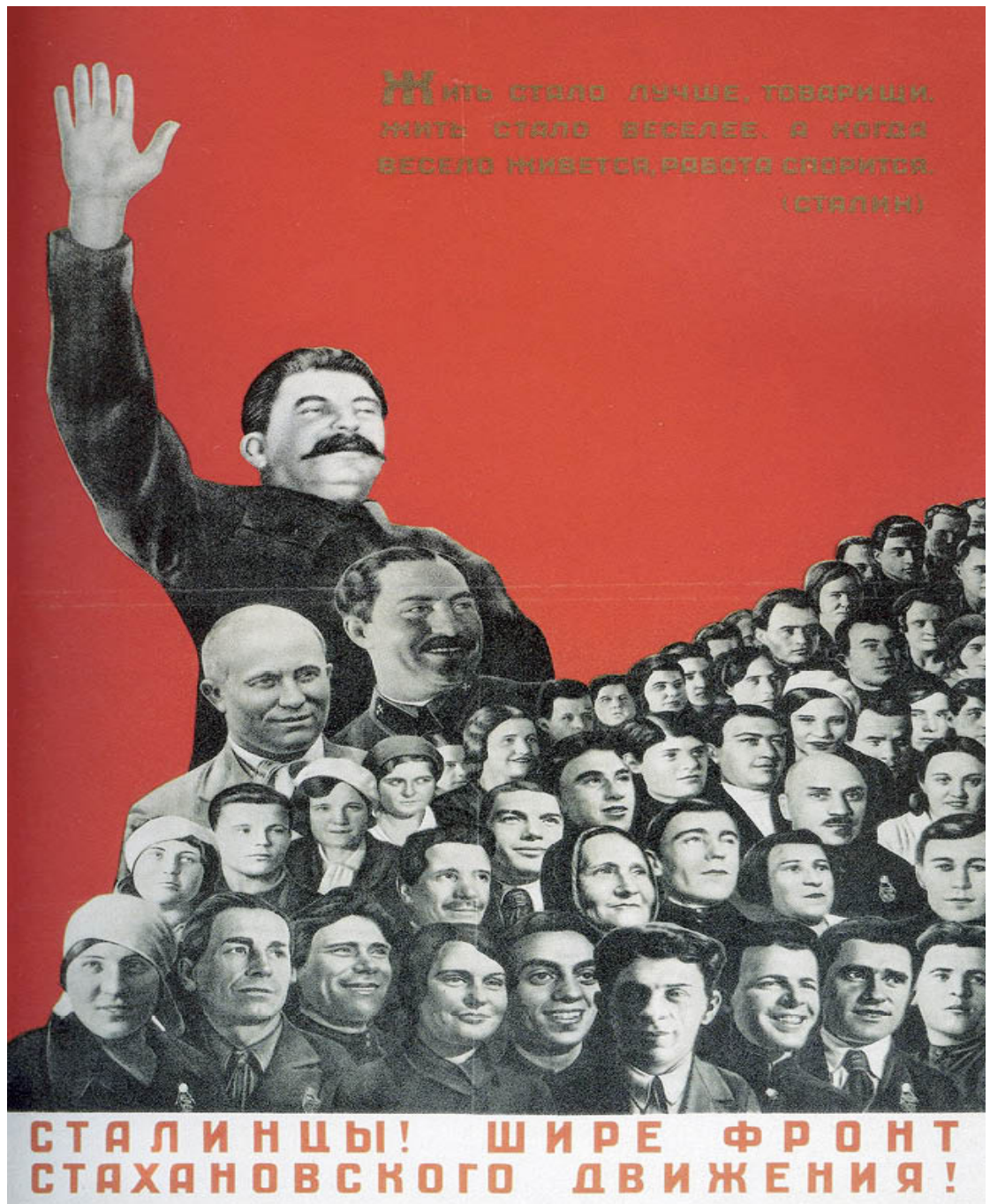
Figure. 5. Genrikh Futerfas, *Stalinists! Extend the front of the Stakhanovite movement!'*, 1936.[133]

At his speech at the First Soviet Writers Congress of 1934, Gorky stressed the importance of the socialist realism mimesis to capture labour as art: "We must choose labour as the main protagonist… that is a man, organized by the process of labour, which we arm with all the might of modern technology, a man who in his turn organises labour to be more productive, elevating it to art. We must learn to comprehend labor as art".[134] In *The Radiant Path*,

[133] Genrikh Futerfas, *Stalinists! Extend the front of the Stakhanovite movement!'*, 1936. Another good example is Gustav Klutsis, *"Long live Stalin´s tribe of Stakhanovite heroes!",* 1936.
[134] Katsnelson, "Labouring the Radiant Path", 261.

Gorky's aesthetic diktat is fully realised in a work which embodies both the art of labour and the labour of art. Aleksandrov's third film in a string of hits under Stalin, sees Stakhanovism reconfigured with fairytale-esque pathos. Through the form-conscious prism of the socialist realist master plot, Aleksandrov's film can be seen as a "diligently au courant glossary of high Stalinist mythologemes, which in this case included the Stakhanov movement and the merriment of upwardly mobile Soviet life".[135] In true hyperbolic fashion, the film coalesces the Soviet mythology of labour with the Cinderella story. The linear plot of the film focuses on the notion of *becoming*: the metamorphosis of Tanya from a simple, illiterate, peasant girl to an award winning Stakhanovite shockworker, and finally to an engineer. In the process of her transition she finds love in Moscow, and even visits the Kremlin. As the film culminates, Tanya the peasant from the periphery is reborn an educated, professional woman and a party delegate. Of all Aleksandrov's musical films, *The Radiant Path* manifestly fulfils the narrative paradigms of socialist realism in which the protagonist goal is to resolve the spontaneity and consciousness dichotomy and to overcome a feat in the public sphere. On one hand, Tanya's social mobility through labour sees her reach a state of consciousness, and synergistically, her innovate labour which breaks the Stakhanovite record is for the benefit of the State.[136]

The Radiant Path opens with Tanya mechanically performing her domestic chores with the comedy deriving from her quasi-robotic, Chaplinesque aerobics. In this epigonism of Chaplin in *Modern Times* (1936), Tanya's actions are funny, not only because of their slapstick element, but also because using the humour topos, what Tom Gunning has called the "machine gag", Tanya as a human machine embodies an unconscious ignorance. In the repository of Soviet labour mythology, Tanya's aimless labour precisely embodies this notion; she is unconsciously disconnected from the building of communism. For her, the distinction between mental and physical labour still exits, and through the aesthetic paragon of Chaplin (*Modern Times* ran on screens in Moscow in 1936, and was extremely popular with the Party), Aleksandrov gives a comic pathos to the two different states of labour/being.[137]

After her bourgeois mistress fires her, Tanya is taken under the wing of Party delegate Pronina, who sends her to literacy classes, and places her in a textile factory. Despite both being female characters, Tanya and Pronina encapsulate the archetypal father and son

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[135] Katsnelson, "Labouring the Radiant Path", 256.

[136] Rimgaila Salys, *The Musical Comedy Films of Grigorii Aleksandrov: Laughing Matters* (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), 327.

[137] Katsnelson, "Labouring the Radiant Path", 261

dialectic of the prototypical plot of socialist realism. In post-revolutionary imagery, there was an increased political investment in gender and gendered labour which embodied the distinction between the past and present. However, with the pendulum swinging back towards a more patriarchal society than the post-revolutionary zeal of the 1920s may have hoped for, representations of women were "commandeered as metaphors for an obeisant populace, an appropriation indicative of the extreme vacillation in the alignment of gender roles in Soviet Russia".[138] Mirroring the binate gender codification in Stalinism, Tanya is gender specific; yet gender equal: choosing workman's overalls to obscure her femininity in the factory whilst in other scenes appearing throughout the story in frilly dresses, parasols and other such "accoutrements of conventionally constructed and construed womanliness".[139] Throughout the film Tanya is accosted by male suitors (including future husband Lebedev), but her sexual energy is displaced into the service of the state. Thus, labour takes on an erotic corporeality in the film, only when Tanya experiences her distinctly secular revelation on how to break the Stakhanovite record does she become lasciviously displayed. As she rises from her bed in a rumpled nightgown, she presses her hand into her bosom and climatically recites, "The heart beats, beats and will achieve what it desires", which, in the context of socialist realist mythology, is to be Stalin's champion of labour.[140]

As she plans to carry out her feat, the factory director is villainised in true Stalinist vein, declaring, "So, you will order walls to be broken on account of her fantasy?", to which, Pronina replies in the true Stalinist lexicon: "We'll turn everything upside down and throw it out to the devil! We're going to break everything obsolete". In this rhetoric mimesis, the linguistic undertone of denunciation is unequivocally apparent. As the factory wall is broken down to provide space for Tanya's machines, she achieves her record feat and is tossed in the air by her comrades. As she flies through the air, she appears in shot under a portrait of Stalin, through this visual proximity all her achievements are thus metonymically aligned with him. To honour her feat, she is invited to Moscow, and the Kremlin – a journey which is adumbrated throughout the film in through symbolic objects and moments such as a cigarette case with a view of Moscow embellished on it, or in her dream sequences where she visualises a collage of Moscow buildings such as the Kremlin. During her ritual initiation at the Kremlin, Tanya receives her Order of Lenin, however, before she can re-aggregate back into reality as party delegate – thus completing her ideological *Bildungsroman* – Aleksandrov ups the magical ante with a phantasmagorical sequence.

138Ibid, 260.
139 Ibid, 262.
140 Ibid, 264.

In this transitional scene, Tanya transcends the vectors of chronological reality as she stops by an ornate magic mirror in the Kremlin. The mirror retraces her ideological development – from a peasant girl, to a factory worker and finally to a record beating Stakhanovite – Tanya in her present form stands outside of the process. The scene nods to Chernyshevsky's W*hat Is To Be Done,* however, where his novel looks to the future, Aleksandrov's inverts the gaze to the past. Through this entirely retrospective scene, Aleksandrov suggests that Chernyshevsky's future has been achieved.[141] To complete her transformation Tanya must enter the future and to do so she is led into this magical looking glass mirror, not by her ideological mentor Pronina, but by her own hypostatic doppelgänger - a would be princess lover. As they enter the mirror together they go into a shiny new flying automobile which flies them up into the mountains thus uniting the periphery with the centre through the dream of labour. As the car flies through the air Tanya beckons out to the future topos: "Hi there, oh land of heroes! A land of dreamers, a land of scholars! / You stretch out, immeasurable and boundless, My invincible homeland". In the course of the flight the two Tanya's (lover and Stakhanovite) merge into one, intimating her self-actualisation as an engineer's people's deputy and suitor to Lebedev.[142] In this scene Tanya's outfit magically morphs from her white dress she wore to the Kremlin ceremony into a dark powerful suit, as this happens she simultaneously takes the wheel of the car signifying her new position as a leader. Tanya's liminal journey concludes as she returns to Moscow, the sacred omphalos, for the finale of the film.[143] As she steers the car towards the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition – "another symbolic space metonymic to the 'fairy tale come true" – the spatiotemporal groundings of the sequence switch from future to present as the frosted border of the looking glass mirror smashes away.[144] Tanya's *Bildungsroman* has collapsed time; the future now is staged in the present. After giving her public speech and finally having resolved her spontaneity and consciousness dialectic, Tanya is at last able to romantically love Lebedev – the Stakhanovite, socialist-realist fairy-tale *par excellence.*

2.4. (Re)writing the Past: The Third Rome Myth and the Cult of Ivan the Terrible

Two Romes have fallen, Moscow is the third and there will be no fourth
– *Ivan the Terrible*, Sergei Eisenstein

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[141] Ibid, 266.
[142] Salys, *Laughing Matters,* 317.
[143] Ibid, 328.
[144] Ibid, 330.

With its mass song and generic plot devices the thirties cultural narrative actively inseminated the metaphysical reawakening of Moscow as the *caput mundi*. Formulated in 1514-21 by a monk named Filofei, a long standing myth saw Moscow as the Third Rome - the spiritual centre of Christianity after the fall of 'Old Rome' and the conquering of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire.[145] Although the advent of communism in Russia saw the Bolsheviks officially renounce religion, the political transition gave a new relevance to the Third Rome myth: "the strident millenarianism of the Bolsheviks", writes Poe, "seemed to be the latest and most radical expression of Russian messianism"[146]. Under Stalin's 'Socialism in One Country' the revival of nationalism saw the parameters of the Third Rome myth realign accordingly with his internalising, centralising narrative. In a series of decrees in the 1930s, the Bolsheviks denounced the 'School of Pokrovskii' for its over-zealous condemnation of Russia's imperial past.[147] In doing so, they created an opportunity for Russia's imperial history to be reconceived with *caput mundi* mythologeme taking on a heightened prominence in the spatial mythology of Stalinism. Stalin levelled criticism at Pokrovskii's "abstract sociological themes" and his failure to recognise reactionary figures and polices, which, in comparison to the political climate of the present, would have been 'progressive' in their own time.[148] These criticisms paved the way for the introduction for a more static, patriotic history. The final result was the 1938, *History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, which was commissioned, co-authored and edited by Stalin.

In light of this change, historians, writers, and directors alike were encouraged to highlight the role of Muscovy in gathering lands under the aegis of what would become the Soviet Union.[149] The 'Third Rome' concept provided Stalin with a nexus whereby he could justify his restructuring of space through the historical doxa of the *caput mundi*. As early as 1933, before the official attacks on Pokrovskii, the conceptualisation of the 'Third Rome' mythologeme as part of the Stalinist metanarrative was beginning to germinate. In "Moscow", an article about his never finished film of the same title, Eisenstein evokes Filofei's dictum as the conceptual foundation of his work: "this pronouncement by Filofei comes across to us from medieval times through tsarist Muscovy and autocratic Moscow.

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[145] Clark, *Fourth Rome*, 2.
[146] Marshall Poe. "Moscow, the Third Rome: The Origins and Transformations of a "Pivotal Moment"" *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas,* Vol. 49 Issue. 3 (2001), 425.
[147] Ibid, 423.
[148] Maureen Perrie, *The Cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 25.
[149] Poe, "Third Rome", 13.

Moscow as a concept is the concentration of the socialist future of the entire world".[150] For Eisenstein, Moscow – the Third Rome, could not be specifically located in a temporal context, it existed *de facto* as a pseudo-religious validation for transgressions past and present. This notion was conveyed in his film *Ivan the Terrible* in 1944, when the Stalinist interpretation of 'Third Rome' reached its apogee.[151] In the film's opening scene the eternal topos of *Rus'* is conjured in a song about "the sea, the deep blue-Russian sea", as the verses echo high into the cupola of the Uspenskii cathedral, Ivan IV announces his mission to unify the lands of Russia and destroy the internal enemies. The scene climaxes as Ivan consecrates his proclamation by reviving the words of Filofei: "Two Romes have fallen, Moscow is the third, and there will be no fourth! And for that Third Rome the single master will be I ALONE". The meta-mythology in *Ivan the Terrible* attempts to create a direct temporal thread between Ivan and Stalin, both as the inheritors of this historical claim. However, as Poe points out, there is no evidence that Ivan was even aware of Filofei's doctrine.[152] Nonetheless, such discrepancies were irrelevant to Stalin in a period which saw the Stalinisation of Ivan the Terrible.

Eisenstein's film was the culmination of a period which saw Stalin create a cult of Ivan the Terrible around his own cult. The film was part of a collective push in Soviet historical science in 1942 to rehabilitate Ivan as the official agent of progressive centralisation.[153] In that year alone, Robert Viper's heroic biography of Ivan was re-issued and Aleksei Tolstoi completed a drama on his life. However, Ivan's re-emergence can be traced back to the mid-Thirties, with Mikhail Bulgakov's short-lived comic play *Ivan Vasil'evich,* a strange play on time-travel which established a temporal link between Ivan and Stalin's Russia. Despite the drama being supressed and the ban coming from a fairly low level, Bulgakov's attempt to enter Ivan IV into the public sphere is notable as it reflected the incipient comparison between Ivan and Stalin.[154] There is evidence in the early 1930s of Stalin's critics drawing this comparison. According to Issac Deutscher, party opposition in the 1930s referred to Stalin as "the Genghiz Khan of the Politbureau [sic], the Asiatic, the New Ivan the Terrible".[155] In 1933, E. H Carr – then working at the British foreign office – drew comparisons between Stalin's secret police, the OGPU, and Ivan's apparatus of terror, the

[150] Clark, *Fourth Rome*, 1.
[151] Poe, "Moscow, Third Rome", 13.
[152] Poe, "Moscow, Third Rome", 13.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Perrie, *Cult of Ivan*, 78.
[155] Issac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), 349-50.

oprichnina.[156] Echoes of Carr's comparison can be found in a letter to Zhdanov from workers of the Kirkov plant in 1935, where Stalin and co where seen as "oppressors of everyone expect their *oprichniki*".[157] These resemblances took on a heightened agency from 1936 onwards when Stalin's terror was getting into its stride. Through the analogical prism of Ivan's *oprichnina*, the potential for a damaging contemporary criticism of Stalin's terror existed. The historical narrative of Ivan IV – the paranoid tyrant who persecuted innocent victims – provided an all too clear looking glass on the late 1930s. Therefore, in order to avoid suspicion of subversive intent, the historiography of Ivan was gradually revised to vindicate his actions. Provided in a manner consistent with the official presentation of events of 1936-8, Ivan's transpicuous motives were framed through the paradigm described by Perrie as the "necessary eradication of despicable spies and traitors in a complex web of conspiracy".[158]

Stalin used Ivan IV's transmogrification as historical contingency, through rehabilitating Ivan's extreme violence as necessary and progressive, he attempted to reframe his own actions as such. By 1939, the positive spatial image of Ivan as the centraliser began to accrue widespread narrative authority as it appeared in the higher education textbook. Ivan. S. V. Bakhrushin's chapter stressed his positive features: "No-one denies the great and strong intellect of Ivan IV… In his aspiration to consolidate strong central power… he demonstrated far-sightedness".[159] Nor did Bakhrushin avoid the topic of Ivan's cruelty, in fact, it also appeared in a manifestly constructive light. Despite his "great natural cruelty" having some "pathological features", the tsar's cruelty could be justified as necessary: "Ivan Groznyi recognised the necessity of creating a strong state and did not hesitate to take harsh measures".[160] Interestingly, although these rewritings were part of a larger canonical campaign in the 1930s to praise the progressive activity of state builders, historians such as Maureen Perrie see the specific apologias for the terror via the *oprichnina* as improvised 'history from below'.[161] She argues that with no evidence of a deliberate campaign 'from above', in the late thirties the agency came from individual historians who were hypersensitive of the emerging parallel between the boyars under Ivan the Terrible and

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[156] Taken from the *Spectator*, 6 August 1932; R. W. Davies, "Carr's changing Views of the Soviet Union", in Michael Cox (ed.), *E.H Carr: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Palgrave, 2000), 99.

[157] Sara Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent,* 1934 – 1941 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 135.

[158] Perrie, *Cult of Ivan*, 78.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibid, 84.

Stalin's terror.[162] Thus, the push for 'proof' of treason against Ivan was in actuality an attempt to vindicate Stalin by proxy. Working in the framework of the terror, the ability of these historians to defuse the negative primacy of historical analogies gave them a chance to remove themselves from the radius of blame. Moreover, the Party leadership must have been circumspect in the unfolding Ivan-Stalin dichotomy, above all else they must have understood that this had to be *a compliment rather than a commendation*.

In 1940 Ivan officially entered the Stalinist lexicon with directives from the Central Committee "on the restoration of the true historical image of Ivan IV in Russian history".[163] However, the main instruments for this restoration were literary and artistic works rather than historical ones. As aforementioned, a number of major works on Ivan IV were commissioned, with Stalin himself personally intervening in some of their productions. There was no attempt to circumvent the terror parallels, rather, as Zhdanov wrote of Eisenstein's film "It was necessary to justify Ivan the Terrible, to show that blood had not been split in vain."[164] Tolstoi's drama reinforces this motif, the validity of the terror is justified through the spatial meta-myth of 'Third Rome': "the Tsar shouldered the gate and carried it... The gate of the Third Rome, that is of the Russian kingdom."[165] Moreover, Tolstoi explicitly reconciles mass violence as being incumbent to power: "An autocracy is a heavy burden... A lot of things have to be broken-down, it is necessary to cut the living flesh".[166] Stalin openly confessed his admiration for *Groznyi*, the *oprichnina* and their extreme cruelty , yet, in many cases he often criticised Ivan for being "insufficiently terrible".[167] Several accounts from members of his circle corroborate this sentiment: Mikoyan recalls that "Stalin said that Ivan Groznyi killed too few boyars".[168] In archival transcripts of Tolstoi's telephone conversation with Stalin regarding the script of his drama, Stalin approved of *Groznyi* 's personality but disliked his "suffering pangs of conscience".[169] Similarly, Khrennikov's diary spoke of how Stalin told Scherbrakov that he disliked that "he repented afterwards and begged forgiveness from god".[170] More than justifying the terror, these sentiments demonstrate how the cult of Ivan IV reinforced Stalin's violent resolve and emboldened his centralising dogma.

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[162] Ibid.
[163] Kevin M.F. Platt and David Brandenburg, "Terribly Romantic, Terribly Progressive, or Terribly Tragic: Rehabilitating Ivan V.I. Under Stalin", *Russian Review,* Vol. 58, Oct. 1999, 639.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Eugene Blum, "The concept of 'Moscow the Third Rome' in the art of Stalin's time" (2003), 15.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Merrie, *Cult of Ivan,* 86.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid, 87.
[170] Ibid, 86.

Stalin had a new narrative authority over the thirties, through the progressive spatial parallels and rhetoric of liquidating those against it, the revised of Ivan historically arched the Stalinist spatial metanarrative. Using Ivan's era as a spatiotemporal mechanism of reflection, Stalin obliquely justified his actions in the thirties by oscillating between past and present. In doing so, his cult, which was built around the centralisation of space, was authenticated through the historical contingency of Ivan the Terrible and the mythology of the 'Third Rome'. The sub-cult of Ivan IV was an apologia for the horrific events of the late thirties and by placing his actions in a different temporality Stalin was able to indirectly address his critics. The heroification of Ivan in the culture sphere provided a dimension for Stalin to modulate his image. As Perrie points out, "the Ivan he wanted to see on stage was an analogue of his own self-image as a heroic and far-sighted ruler".[171]

[171] Ibid, 194.

Chapter Three: The Cosmology of the Red Arctic

3.1 'Even Higher': From Centre to Periphery

We were born that fairytale might become reality.
To conquer the vastness of space
Reason gave us steel wings for arms,
And in the place of a heart they gave us a fiery motor.[172]

In the dominant spatial model of Stalinism, the super centralisation of space saw the centre assimilate the periphery. In this complex relationship with the fringe territories of the Soviet topos, Stalin actively sought to revolutionise space in rhetoric and reality. After the revolution, the Bolsheviks inherited not only a vast, almost uncontrollable empire, but also a complex cultural mythology of territory.[173] With the epoch of Stalinism, marked by the First Five-Year Plan, there was an urgency to ideologically regulate this unbounded, ungraspable space. In cultural terms, there was a deliberate attempt to align the unofficial and official topography of the Soviet Union through the replication of the socialist realist mythology. The key narratives utilised in creation of the centre also functioned on a sub-level, helping the spatial metanarrative of the Stalin cult dominate all of Soviet space. The thirties saw Stalin take on Russia's vast expanses in an epic battle with nature, a force which embodied the "inertia and sluggishness of the country, a burden of its history".[174] This battle worked in conjunction with the centrality schema adding weight to the developing narrative. Explored using the same blueprint of paradigms, the Stalinist dialogue with nature broadened the Soviet body of myth. The same thematic constructs: rite of passage, domination of space and patriarchal family structures – were again the principal modes of navigation within the nature motif.

The Stalinist discourse with nature was best characterised by the title of the Soviet classroom song "Even Higher".[175] In this song the worlds of reality and fantasy are interwoven in an attempt to push the Soviet utopia into the stratosphere. This mentality was a result of the departure from the positivism that dominated the 1920s, an inversion of logistical principles shifting the axis from rational to irrational. Vladimir Papernyi defines the ordering of reality as having changed from "horizontal structures" to "vertical" ones.[176]

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[172] Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 138.

[173] Widdis, *Visions of a New Land,* 6.

[174] Schlögel, *Moscow* 1937, 310.

[175] Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 138.

[176] Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, 9.

As a result, the gaze of the Soviet man was reconfiguring upwards to political leaders such as Stalin or heroes such as Stakhanov, instead of along to his fellow peers. This reorientation elicited the start of a fantastical thought climate, one which was concerned with the pursuit of fairy tale feats. Nature was the chosen arena for these feats; here the Soviet man could become the heroic protagonist of the state story. By attempting to colonise Mother Nature through epic expeditions in the Soviet periphery, Stalin looked to overcome the innate spatial anxiety provoked by the infinite Russian landscape. The ability to exercise control over Russia's oldest foe would be nothing short of remarkable, as Gill points out "what was symbolically significant about the transformation of nature was the claim that it was being tamed and put to work in service of the regime's political end".[177] The Soviet Union's conquest of nature is an important window into the temperament of the period; through this paradigm it is possible to see how the fantastical landscape rhetoric naturalised the Stalin cult.

In this chapter the spatial metanarrative of Stalinism will be considered through the lens of the Arctic myth. It is perhaps this dialogue that best posits the complex collision of worlds in Stalin's USSR. On one hand, the attempt to civilise the frozen peripheral spaces and tame Mother Russia can be seen as an extension of the scientific conquest of unenlightened spaces. However, the fantastical rhetoric with which this was pursued completely undermined the principle and created a social climate that was diametrically opposed to the ideals of Marxism. Through this prism one can see how this idiosyncratic sphere of thought shaped an infrastructure for the Stalin cult. In his biography of Stalin, Robert Service summates this notion calling Stalin Russia's 'Modernities Sorcerer', a term that nicely aligns the two modes of reality.[178] I will look to explore these two modes of reality by analysing the rhetorical nature of the Arctic expeditions. Firstly, I will look at how the character of the Arctic was transformed under the spatial model of Stalinism. Thereafter, I will analyse the pantheon of Arctic heroes, paying particular attention to the Arctic aviator, who was seen as the paradigmatic new man and an embodiment of the socialist realist worldview. In doing so, this chapter will show how the Stalinist body of myth and cultural metanarrative was not only able to exist in in the extreme periphery, but also instrumentalise it to benefit the cult.

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[177] Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy*, 14.
[178] Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 2004), 299.

3.2. 'On Top of the World': Colonising the Arctic in Rhetoric and Reality

In the darkness of the polar night, the sun of human intellect now shines brightly.

– Maxim Gorky

On July 28th 1932, Otto Schmidt and Vladimir Vize set-off on ambitious three-and-a-half-month traversal of Russia's Northern coast in their ice-breaking ship the *Sibiriakov*. Not only did the resulting voyage see Schmidt and his company travel over 2,500 miles in uncharted Arctic seas, but it irrecoverably transformed the Soviet Union's dialogue with the North. As Schmidt and co returned to Moscow as masters of the Northern periphery, the Arctic took on a decidedly mythic, deeply Stalinist oeuvre. The *Sibiriakov* expedition was markedly the first of this nature and it engendered the epoch of the Red Arctic. In just under a decade, the Arctic bore witness to a series of remarkable expeditions – The *Cheliuskin* epic (1933-4), SP-1 and the North Pole Landing (1937-8), the long-distance flights (1936-8) – which to this day remain prominent moments in the history of the Soviet Union.[179] Indeed, in the thirties the image of the Soviet Arctic was a larger-than-life epic, an epic which had *genuine* popular appeal. By all indicators, from the thousands of unsolicited, unaltered letters sent by the Soviet citizens to Glavsevmorput (the official Arctic institution) or the heroes themselves, to the avidly consumed popular culture that it sprang, "ordinary Soviet citizens found Arctic heroes to be admirable and the Arctic myth to be more exciting than most Stalinist propaganda efforts".[180] After visiting the Arctic, a similar sentiment lead British author Harry Smolka to describe the Soviet Union as being "wholly occupied with itself at present" and a place whose "youngsters do not dream of battles against men, but of battles against nature".[181] By gazing into the icy glaciers of the Soviet Arctic, it is possible to see a unique reflection of the Stalinist worldview: how the Soviets viewed the natural world, how they engaged with it, and the role it had in creating a cultural bridge between the individual and the state.

The conceptual origins of the Soviet Arctic myth can be traced back to the 1920s. From the beginning, a strong measure of antipathy coloured the Russo-Soviet attitudes towards its northern topos. Having inverted Frederick Jackson's famous 'Frontier Hypothesis', Georgy

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[179] McCannon, *Red Arctic,* 19.
[180] Ibid, 135.
[181] H. P. Smolka, *Forty Thousand against the Arctic: Russia's Polar Empire* (London: Hutchison & Co, 1937), 275.

Plekhanov, one of the founders of Russian Marxism, concluded that the forces of nature had frozen Russia into a perpetual state of stagnation.[182] In his introduction to his encompassing history of the Russian Revolution, Trotsky reaffirmed Plekhanov's hypothesis verbatim: "The population of Russia's gigantic and austere plain open to eastern winds and Asiatic migrations, was condemned by Nature itself to a long backwardness".[183] In the context of Marxism, for a revolution to be truly *revolutionary*, society must have its world-picture transformed, social and national space re-envisaged, and the relationship between the individual and space reshaped. [184] Once the post-revolutionary dust had settled in the 1920s, the Bolsheviks were faced with the urgent task of reimaging the spatial poetics of the landscape. In Soviet Russia, with its vast, amorphous topography, there was an anxiety that if space itself was not energised, it may, to paraphrase Plekhanov, condemn the revolution into stagnation. Thus, in this early Soviet period, the *krugozor* (horizon) assumed a new ideological significance. As Emma Widdis writes, "as the limit of visible space, the horizon was a point of focus, toward which to strive". [185] Just as the Bolsheviks had overcome history; they would overcome space. Mikhail Bakhtin suggested that the crosshairs of the spatial conquest were aimed at the horizon because "the age and the masses demand[ed] a new range, very distant or very close, just not medium-range, not domestic".[186]

The Soviet Union opted for the very distant and they embarked on a penetrating period of spatial exploration, what Katerina Clark has called a "dash to the periphery".[187] This dash saw the Soviet make footholds in the North in the late twenties and into the early thirties. The screening and engagement with the territory was characterised in terms of exploration rather than exploitation.[188] However, as the Five-Year Plans were rolled out, the ideological significance of the Arctic transformed from a place of exploration to a place of *conquest*. The quest for information became one for control. This switch was symptomatic of the shifting in spatial aesthetics from horizontal to vertical. *Osvoenie*, the mastery or conquest of space, is the term frequently used to describe the Stalinist spatial model and it is perhaps

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[182] Mark Bassin, "Turner, Solov'ev, and the 'Frontier Hypothesis': The Nationalist Significance of Open Spaces," *Journal of Modern History* Vol. 65, 3 (September 1993); 1-17, and idem, "Geographical Deteminism in Fin-de-siecle Marxism: Georgii Plekhanov and the Environmental Basis of Russian History", *Annals of the Association of American geographers* 82, 1 (Spring 1992): 3-22.
[183] Leon Trotsky, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 1.
[184] Emma Widdis, "To Explore or Conquer? Mobile Perspectives on the Soviet Cultural Revolution" in *The Landscape of Stalinism*, 219.
[185] Ibid, 220.
[186] ibid.
[187] Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution*, 281.
[188] Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, 6.

the one that best reflects its aggressive nature.[189] From 1932, *osvoenie* came to define the imperialistic spatial strategy toward its Northern periphery. The Arctic was the perfect manifestation of the Stalinist spatial conquest. Here, there was no need for spatial purification; this northern frontier was a *tabula rasa*, a landscape void of any spatiotemporal lineage, it was as one historian described it "a mirror for the habitual".[190] More than this, it was the most extreme topography that would elicit the most extreme exploits, if Stalin could bring the Soviet lifestyle to the wild snow dunes of the Arctic he could *modernise anywhere*. In the conquest of the Arctic it is possible to view a transposition of the centre/periphery paradigm; in this narrative the journey to the centre is inverted with the new celestial journey being out from the centre into the extreme periphery – on a civilising mission.

It was the sentiment of *osvoenie* that coloured the aesthetic of the Arctic myth, depicting it as a battleground rather than a landscape. The Arctic was a formidable enemy, personified by Stalinist discourse as a tangible, anthropomorphic opponent.[191] Dwelling in the outermost region of the Soviet's mythical wilderness, on the very edge of the earth, the Arctic was the crowning campaign of the Soviet's great "struggle against the elements".[192] Struggle was termed in militaristic rhetoric, fought by the "army of polar explorers (*armiia poliarnikov)*" on the "Arctic Front."[193] This synergic fusion of the martial and adventure lexicon makes the Soviet Union's Arctic rhetoric comparable to colonial discourse. This is particularly salient in the case of The North Pole, one of the topographical protagonists of the Arctic myth. An enduring symbol in the mental universe of Western civilisation, the North Pole like other remote or exotic locales – the Indies, the source of the Nile or the peaks of the Himalayas – was mythologised through its aura of unattainability. As the last blank spot of the map, the pole was "the epitome of inaccessibility": earth's final and most jealously guarded secret.[194] Additionally, it was imagined both literally and figuratively as the top of the world, mastery over it amounted to being on the highest of the high grounds, strategic or sacred. In the Soviet discourse, the occidental human 'Other' is supplanted by nature as the principal obstacle for the coloniser with the North Pole being villainised as the evil "Tsar of the North's" icy stronghold.[195] The state sponsored pseudo-folklore of the North Pole as the

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[189] Ibid.

[190] Peter Knox-Shaw, *The Explorer in English Fiction* (New York: St Martins, 1986), 11.

[191] McCannon, *Red Arctic,* 83.

[192] John McCannon, "Tabula Rasa in the North: The Soviet Arctic and Mythic Landscapes in Stalinist Popular Culture" in *The Landscape of Stalinism*, 243.

[193] Evgenii Fedorov, *Polar Diaries* (Moscow: Progress, 1993) 257.

[194] McCannon, *Red Arctic¸* 84.

[195] Kovalev, I. F. *Tale of Three Falcons*, 274-279. Quoted in Frank Miller, *Folklore for Stalin: Russian Folklore and Pseudofolklore of the Stalin Era* (New York: M.E Sharpe, 1990), 145.

Arctic's elusive "polar citadel" was juxtaposed by a scientific lexis of demystification.[196] In the introduction to his *Pravda* article, journalist Lazar Brontman, who accompanied the SP-1 expedition to set up an outpost at the North Pole writes: "The central Arctic remained, as before, merely a white spot in science as in geography. The Soviet explorers were the first to solve its mysteries and wipe the white spot from the map of the earth."[197]

Unlike the American Robert Peary, who devoted 23 years planning to go to the North Pole to stay for just 30 hours, Otto Schmidt writes in the foreword to Brontman's book: "The idea of merely visiting the Pole or flying across it did not satisfy us. We wanted to settle at the Pole, to study the Central Arctic Basin thoroughly, to render it habitable".[198] With its new technological and scientific abilities, the Soviets aimed to do much more than merely make the 'white spots' disappear. When leaving the group, Brontman wonders what Schmidt is thinking about, and in line with the notion of *osvoenie* he writes:

> No doubt he was reflecting from here, from the North Pole, a dozen Polar stations would arise, created by his efforts, on the island and coats of the Polar Basin… The whole map of the Arctic would be criss-crossed by the routes travelled by this man, whose cold, deep, analytical mind is lined with the ardent heart of a conqueror and a Bolshevik.[199]

SP-1 was a success, Schmidt and co. drifted over 2000 kilometres from the North Pole to the south latitudes of the Greenland Sea. In the process, amongst other studies, they made scientific enquires into the weather, currents, ice, and depth of the polar Basin; moreover through finding birds, bears and plankton they disproved assumptions that no life existed in the Polar Regions.[200] Having conquered the 'polar citadel', there was an unmistakable link between the Arctic and the words of Stalin himself: "There are no fortresses which the Bolsheviks cannot capture".[201] Such hyperbolic depictions of the Arctic allowed for any victory over it to be represented in a similar vein. For example, one headline celebrating the SP-1 Expedition boasted, "we have conquered time and space!".[202] After the Cheliuskinites were rescued by air, *Izvesttia* proclaimed that "technology has conquered nature, man has conquered death".[203] This kind of language was indicative of the psychological landscape of

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[196] Lazar Brontman, *On the Top of the World: The Soviet Expedition to the North Pole* (Alcester: Gollancz, 1938).
[197] Ibid, 22.
[198] Ibid, 134.
[199] Ibid, 185.
[200] Tim Youngs, "The Conquest of the Arctic: The 1937 Soviet Expedition" in *Arctic Discourses,* eds, Anka Ryall, Johan Schimanski, (Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars: 2010), 135.
[201] McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 85
[202] *Sovetskai Arktika* (August 1938): 7-10, quoted from McCannon, "Tabula Rasa", 243.
[203] Izvestiia, No. 88, 14 April 1934. Izvestiia Digital Archive.
https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/27338285 [Accessed 14 June 2017].

Stalinism, the continual leap between reality and fantasy in such exaggerated binaries created a radical, illusionary environment of thought. Not only had Stalin conquered 'time and space', but through the repository of the Arctic the power of Stalin's socialist vision reached its apogee, claiming to have overcome the curse of the Russian *prostor*, and by extension 'death' itself .[204]

The Soviet Union used the blank canvas of the Arctic snow to draw out their own terms, own ideology and even their own cosmology. In the Glasevmorput's network of remote towns and polar stations which were seen as "foreposts of Soviet civilisation", the Soviets kept with the centralised Moscow schema, citizens of the Red Arctic were on Moscow clock time – a remarkable show of ideological resilience in the battle against nature.[205] When a reporter from the *London Times* visited one Arctic commune, he asked the community why they chose to operate on Moscow time:

> "Never mind the sun, comrade. If we took any notice of it, we should not be living here after all. We cannot accept the moods of the Arctic. After all, it's we who are the bosses here." So that was the law in Igarka! Men decided to live here and they are bending Nature to their command. They do not even abide by the mills of time![206]

This report is an example of the Stalinist rhetoric of conquest actualised – language such as 'bosses' and 'command' show the colonising attitude towards nature had diffused down to citizen level. However, it was not just Moscow time that these Soviet Arctic outposts managed to adhere to. One of the key narratives of the Arctic myth was that no matter how extreme the conditions on this frozen tundra, light from the beacon of Moscow would ultimately penetrate the darkness. In the Benthamesque ordering of space, the Kremlin acts as the immobile dominant centre – a panoptic viewing point from which the whole territory could metaphorically be 'seen' and hence controlled: "Stalin, mythically, wrote through the night at his desk, a light glowing at his window, the epicentre of Soviet space".[207] This civilising light was manifested in the modes of daily living with these polar communities having top-of-the-range facilities and home comforts. According to the official Soviet line, between 1935 and 1936, Soviet polar stations were apparently provided with the following: 430,000 roubles' worth of books, 175,000 roubles' worth of bikes, and 550,000 worth of

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[204] *Prostor* (wide-open space) have a long history as complex signifiers of a Russian character and landscape which is defined by the sense of "boundless empty space".
[205] McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 46.
[206] Peter Smolka, *Forty Thousand Against the Arctic*, 169.
[207] Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, 8.

sport equipment, ten pianos and enough trumpets and horns for five full brass bands.[208] More importantly, by 1937, Glavsevmorput were spending around 1.5 million on schools for the 2,176 children living in or near polar stations.[209] The conditions in these 'outposts of Soviet culture' bore no resemblance to the fantastic images conjured up by the Soviet propaganda machine. As Soviet explorer Ernst Krenkel commented, "no one had any particular desire to go to the Arctic in those years".[210] In fact, much of the Glavsevmorput budget went on monetary incentives for the Arctic worker; in 1933, there was a 150 percent wage increase for personnel working above the 55 parallel.[211]

In these figures and in the itinerary of miscellaneous items sent from Moscow it is possible to see the extent of the USSR's attempts to super centralise the Arctic. As much as the snowscapes of the Northern topos stood out in direct contrast to Moscow, they were part of the all-encompassing Stalinist spatial program to connect every point, every place in the Soviet cosmos into a unified, homogenised totality. Although Soviet information such as the '175,000 roubles' worth of books sent to these outposts give a tangible insight into their pursuit of civility, it is in the realms of the abstract that one can best comprehend the true reach of Stalin and Moscow. Through examining the behavioural modes of the settlers in this frozen wilderness it is possible to see just how far reaching the ritualised routines of Moscow really were. The citizens of these communities faithfully participated in the ceremonialism of the Stalin cult despite being hundreds of miles away from the realities of Soviet life. All the niceties of the modern Soviet calendar were celebrated, from May Day to the Stalinist Constitution Day, with as much grandiose as the circumstances would allow.[212] Through the modern apparatus of the radio and 'wireless operator' they were able to follow events from the mainland, participating in the ritual behaviour of the Stalinist period: following show trials, Soviet elections and sports events. Thanks to the uninterrupted flow of information, the synchronicity of Stalinist life seemed to be maintained all over Soviet space. Brontman's romantic account of his communication with Moscow typifies the spatial lexicon of the Arctic myth, with the voice of socialism emanating from Moscow across the *prostor*: "For the first time the North Pole spoke to Moscow. A human voice carried across the wild open spaces which only a few days before had seemed inaccessible; and across the Arctic Ocean, over sea, tundra, and the forests of the North, Moscow

[208] McCannon, "Tabula Rasa", 247.
[209] McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 46.
[210] Ernest Krenkel, *RAEM Is My Call-Sign*. (Moscow: Progress, 1978), 93.
[211] McCannon, *Red Arctic,* 46.
[212] Brontman, *On the Top of the World,* 236.

answered." [213] Thus, despite living in environmental adversity far removed from the proximity of the Soviet domestic sphere, these settlers could still participate in the creation of a particular topography of thought.

Indeed, in true fashion of the Stalin cult, during expedition SP-1, the crew sent a letter to *Pravda* via wireless, declaring: "We should like the Soviet government to name our drifting station on the North Pole after Comrade Stalin".[214] This was one of several instances where Stalin's name was attached to the heroic feats of the Arctic conquest, other examples such as the 'Stalin Route' and the 'Stalin Path' publicly underscored his prominence in the myth-making of the Arctic. However, his namesake was only a small part of his association to the myth. He was depicted as something of a mystical muse, who, from his office in the Kremlin was able to transcend the physical world and inspire the explorers. During the one expedition, Papanin and his crew gathered round the radio to listen to their leader's address. An article reporting this event aptly named "Warmed by Stalin-like Care" read:

> Yesterday evening there was the extraordinary picture of a meeting of the thirty members of the leading unit of the expedition on the ice at the pole, listening to the reading of a telegram of greetings from the leaders of the Party and government. They gathered under the open ski, in a snowstorm, but felt no cold because the bright words and the anxious care of the great Stalin warmed them and they sensed the glowing of their beloved homeland.[215]

Radiating from the centre, his all-pervasive presence in the Arctic rhetorically emboldened the status of his cult. It was the force of his personality and his genius that animated the Soviet presence in the Arctic; Stalin's name and image were "inextricably woven into the narrative history of every heroic episode that took place".[216] He was able to transcend the age old enemy of the Russian periphery, doing so in the most spectacular arena of all, the Arctic.

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[213] Ibid, 157.
[214] Ibid, 237.
[215] Pravda, No. 142, 25 May 1937, 1. Pravda Digital Archive.
http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/21700159 [Accessed 26 February 2017].
[216] McCannon, "Tabula Rasa", 248.

3.3. Icarus of the North: Stalin and the Arctic Aviators

Andrea: As it is said, "Unhappy is the land that breeds no heroes."

Galileo: No, Andrea: "Unhappy is the land that *needs* such heroes"

– Berlot Brecht

"There he sat", wrote Englishman H.P Smolka in his account of his flight with Grazianski – one of the Soviet Union/Stalin's most beloved pilots – "enjoying every minute of his triumph over the air and looking for all the world like the symbolic poster displayed to Soviet youth today as its ideal: 'Knight of the Sky'".[217] Smolka goes on to wonder if Grazianski too "had already sacrificed the naivety common of the best type of Russian young men to the spoiling consciousness of belonging to the country's modern stardom".[218] In the late thirties, Grazianski, along with his fellow aviators took on a leading place in the Soviet pantheon of heroes. Much like the Stakhanovites they were held up as the archetypal *Homo Sovietcus,* in the encoded socialist realist aesthetic they configured as 'sons' in the metanarrative. However, whereas the Stakhanovites can by and large be seen as narrative cogs in the hero master plot, the polar explorers, particularly the pilots took this paradigm to a different level. From them an entire iconography of aviation and polar exploration came into being. From the mid-to late thirties "polar explorers and Arctic pilots became subjects of innumerable books, films, radio broadcasts; and inspired a multitude of poems, plays, and other artistic works".[219] Sharing a space on all sorts of cultural ephemera alongside Stalin, this symbiosis heightened this cult status. For example, the sixty-two world record flights record by the aviators, were down to the people of the Soviet Union, but more specially, "Comrade Stalin, who teaches, trains, heartens and lead us to victory".[220] In an age when progress was measured by new records, these Arctic heroes encapsulated the Stalinist mantra: 'higher, faster, further'.[221]

The Arctic and its heroes had a podium position in the grand pageant of High-Stalinism, a *tabula rasa* inseminated with the cultural ethos of socialist realism; it became an unrivalled source of Soviet myth-making. Socialist realism portrayed *what should be* in the rhetoric of what *actually was* and as the difference between fact and fiction became hazy, heroism fed the symbiosis. Bold epics and adventures became the cornerstone of cultural Stalinism in the

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[217] Smolka, *Forty Thousand,* 72.
[218] Ibid.
[219] McCannon*, Red Arctic*, 81.
[220] Brontman, *On Top of the World*, 184.
[221] Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, 305.

thirties. These real and fiction heroics represented teleological progress of socialism, by conquering the Arctic they were fulfilling the words of Karl Marx who wrote that "in changing nature, man changes himself".[222] The icy dunes of the Arctic periphery acted as a testing ground, a crucible in which national character was sculpted. In the ritualised environment of the Soviet Union, and in the lexicon of socialist realism, each expedition to the Arctic became a trial. For a hero to become *heroic* in Stalinist oeuvre, the trials were markedly internal and external. As previously mentioned Clark equates the ideological *Bildungsroman* to the dialectic synthesis of the spontaneous and conscious elements of the positive hero.[223] Very much in the vein of Nietzsche's 'Dionysian' and 'Apollonian' forces, the hero had to tame his nebulous blend of wild courage and raw skill with a maturity and control. In the developing mythology of the Soviet Arctic these paradigms were dependably replicated, the polar celebrities were depicted as models of this heroic synthesis.

Vasilii Molokov, one of the chief Soviet pilots, was an ideal embodiment of this mature heroism. Known as 'Uncle Vasya', he became the paragon of modesty and self-control in the Arctic myth. Having recused more people than any other pilot during the Chelyuskin expedition, he insisted "I have fulfilled my duty, nothing more".[224] Undoubtedly heroic, he eschewed hubristic adventure in favour of training and sagacity: "People say that Soviet pilots gamble with death. But if we play a game with death, it is based on carefully calculated odds. We study our own strength and that of the Arctic – and only then do we fly"[225]. Similarly, for the Soviet hagiographers, Otto Schmidt represented the eclectic amalgam of the positive hero. The head of the Glavsevmorput, he was the organiser, spokesman and leader of the Red Arctic. Throughout the thirties, his superlative courage was the structuring force behind the flurry of scientific enquiry into the region. His heroic spark was synergistically joined with erudition, composure and an altruistic dedication to the Soviet cause. Schmidt's rhetoric itself encompassed the principles of the socialist realist hero: "We do not chase after records (although we break not a few upon the way). We do not look for adventure (although we experience them every step). Our goal is to study the North for the good of the entire USSR".[226] Like Stalin himself, Schmidt had a certain aura, as one contemporary said of him, "[Schmidt] only had to enter a room for everyone to immediately feel that this man knew everything, understood everything, and could do everything".[227] His

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[222] Quoted in McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 107
[223] Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 15.
[224] McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 102.
[225] Ibid.
[226] McCannon, *Red Arctic,* 102.
[227] Krenkel, *RAEM*, 108.

ubiquity with the Arctic saw him mythologised as "Grandfather Frost" and in the socialist realist model of the 'great family', Schmidt shared a lectern with Stalin as the fatherly voice of the people. In a cultural context, Schmidt appears as something of a 'regional replication' of Stalin as the symbolic super father of Soviet space. Nonetheless, Schmidt's status was dwarfed by Stalin, who was at the apex of this familial pyramid as the 'Father of Nations'. As Brontman observes during the SP-1 expedition, Papanin and Schmidt toast Stalin, "who raised our people, every one of us, out of poverty and subjection".[228] Without the inspiration and guidance from Stalin, the fulfilment of such heroic tasks would not have been possible. As the SP-1 expedition culminated, Schmidt promoted three cheers for Comrade Stalin; for the man who "teaches, trains, heartens and leads us to victory".[229]

Of all the Arctic heroes Stalin had a particularly special bond with the aviators. Known as 'Stalin's Falcon's', the thematic kinship nexus was fully articulated as they became Stalin's "surrogate children".[230] Stalin was not only their nurturing father but also their mentor; he tempered their nebulous blend of heroic energy and helped to resolve their spontaneity and consciousness dialectic. Of all the "fledging children of Stalin", as the fliers were often titled, Valery Chkalov was portrayed as the eldest and greatest loved in the family. No individual personified the untampered spark of spontaneous heroism more conspicuously than Chkalov, whose antics and boisterousness were legendary. For example, in one of many instances, when asked why he preferred the single engine ANT-25 aircraft over the apparently safer four engine ANT-6, his blithe reply embodies the Dionysian spirit: "Why bother with four engines? That's just four times the risk of failure!"[231] Like Andrei Stakhanov, whose initial torrent of heroic energy was depicted as an antiauthoritarian reaction to old norms of the managers, one panegyric said of Chkalov: "limited and malicious people tried to force him into dead end norms, of limits to the possible… nevertheless he – true Soviet man that he was – shattered all these impediments".[232] As he entered the public sphere, Stalin took great interest in rearing the ruthless Chkalov; he presided over the progress of the young aviator with great solicitude. In one renowned episode, Stalin openly chastised Chkalov after learning that he flew without a parachute. After protesting that a parachute would be at odds with his training to save his life and the costly aeroplane at the same time, Stalin paternalistic told him: "your life is more important to me, to the Soviet people, than any machine, no matter how costly. You absolutely must

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[228] Brontman, *On Top of the World,* 182.
[229] Ibid, 184.
[230] Clark, *Soviet Novel,* 127.
[231] McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 102.
[232] Clark, *Soviet Novel,* 139.

carry a parachute".[233] On another occasion in 1936, seized with the extemporaneous urge to fly to the North Pole, Chkalov went to the Kremlin to seek Stalin's approval. Upon receiving him, Stalin bestowed his fatherly wisdom upon Chkalov, ordering him to be more cautious. As Chkalov recalled in *Izvestiia* two years later: "Joseph Vissarionovich listened to us in silence, then began to criticize our plan. He spoke in a whisper, but his words were firm and decisive… why such risk without reason? You need practice first".[234] And practice he did, flying south east to Udd Island – since known as Chkalov Island – on Stalin's directive.

Any attempt to break records was often made on the direct orders of Stalin himself. Even the smaller details, such as the choosing of equipment, was mediated through Stalin. Famously on the eve of Chkalov's Arctic flight of 1936 he was summoned to the Kremlin to meet with Stalin, who suggested changing the entire route of their flight. They did not protest. This flight path was later christened the 'Stalin Route'. These flights into the Arctic were of a highly ritual nature, they configured as a sort of trial by the elements. In the allegorical fashion of the Homeric theme of *nostos* (return home), the flights are microcosmic national epics which form Soviet consciousness. In their voyage, the aviators hope to prove their worth as a 'son', the subsequent tribulations they encounter enables the heroes to *become* heroic. In between the departure and the return, the Arctic pilots and explorers, can be seen as being in a liminal state, undergoing a dramatically formative process. A stock episode during these ritual moments would be the notion of Stalin or Moscow giving the hero strength as they faced the elements. As Chkalov wrote, when flying, "we Soviet pilots all feel his [Stalin] loving, attentive fatherly eyes upon us".[235] Similarly, in a poem penned by Perets Markish in 1937, the record breaking 'Stalin Path' transpolar flight is reimaged through the eyes of Chkalov and his crew. During a particularly fearful moment during the flight the crew seemingly evoke some sort of prayer to Stalin:

> Their lips quietly whispered:
> "Leader and Friend, guide us from afar!
> Against these Storms and Winds,
> Above these deserts of eternal ice".[236]

Through their engagement with the peripheral portal of the Arctic they became "guardians of the threshold".[237] They were the physical intermediators who enacted the Soviet's battle.

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[233] McCannon, *Red Arctic,* 107.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.
[236] McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 106.
[237] Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 21.

Although the flights were not of a wholly political nature they did sustain the sacralised political schema put forth by Stalin that, "We Bolsheviks are of a special make up… It is not given to every man to be a member of such a party. Not every man could withstand the storms."[238] Guiding the pilots through these storms was Stalin. In *Our Father*, an essay by Chkalov, he wrote of Stalin: "He is our father. He teaches us and rears us. We are dear to his heart as his own children".[239] Veneration from the Arctic heroes, the biggest of all the Soviet celebrities, further sacralised the central image of Stalin as the all-knowing compassionate father.

From the extreme periphery the Soviet pilots would return full circle to Moscow. As Schlögel writes, "the arrival in Moscow was merely the finale, the climax of the return home from the frontier, from an adventurous voyage of discovery to the ends of the known world, back to the centre of power and attention".[240] Waiting in the centre would be their eternal father, Stalin. This public reunion was another stock episode in the metanarrative of the Arctic myth. For example, on their return from an Arctic expedition the crew of the Chelyuskin were personally greeted by Stalin.[241] Moreover, when Valerii Chkalov and Georgii Baidukov flew to the Soviet Far East in record time, they were greeted with a fatherly kiss, with Pravda reporting, "It was Stalin who raised these brave men".[242] Similar to the Stakhanovites, when they returned they were invited to the Kremlin to complete their process of passage. It is in this moment that the Soviet's battle with the periphery is resolved – after his Kremlin reception Chkalov reported: "the content of my life became richer; I began to fly with greater discipline than ever before".[243] In these kairotic moments, when father and son are reunited, it is possible to see a perfect harmony in the circular Stalinist metanarrative. In many ways, these singular moments came to epitomise the atmosphere of Stalinism. Stalin's heroes were key functionaries in the conceptual framework of the cult. Anthropologists such as Victor Turner posit that to understand the values of a particular society, it is essential to look at its rituals.[244] The ritual process of the 1930's Soviet Union elicit that at the deepest level the values of the Soviet citizens were tied up in the landscape. Stalin utilised the landscape, weaving it into his fantastical narrative of heroes and hierarchy.

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[238] J.V Stain, "On the Death of Lenin" , a speech delivered at the Second All-Union Congress of Soviets, January 26, 1924, *Works, Vol. 6* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Public House, 1953), 47.
[239] McCannon, *Red Arctic,* 108.
[240] Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, 297.
[241] See entire issue of Pravda, No. 151, 03 June 1936. Pravda Digital Archive. http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/21709751 [Accessed 23 March 2017].
[242] Pravda, No. 220, 11 August, 1936. Pravda Digital Archive. https://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/21695481 [Accessed 10 January 2017].
[243] Clark, *Soviet Novel*, 127.
[244] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 8.

These cultic rituals whilst engaging with and captivating the populace, simultaneously reaffirmed the binary of unequal power relations between Stalin's peers and the rest of the USSR.[245] The further Stalin placed himself at the epicentre of this heroic narrative; the further reality was blurred.

It is through the prism of the Arctic myth that one is able to understand the particular climate of thought that was able to facilitate the Stalin cult. The rhetoric of Stalinism elicited the new Soviet man to engage in the wondrous state conquest, and in turn climb the newly reordered vertical social ladder. When great feats were accomplished they were portrayed as being representative of society, with the collective becoming individualised. The Soviet Arctic myth was instrumental in creating a landscape of heroism, one in which all citizens of the USSR were encouraged to gaze upwards and become a Chkalov or a Stakhanovite (Fig. 5). "If Stalin was the father of the Arctic heroes" writes McCannon, "the *narod*, the Soviet nation, was their extended family".[246] This rhetorical framework associated Stalin and the Arctic heroes with the population as a whole. As Brontman writes, the polar explorers and birds of steel in the sky were "sent out by our great Soviet country", the success of the Arctic conquest was because of the "victory of the country's single will".[247] In the socialist realist model the spoils of heroism diffused down amongst the Soviet people, who were unified, high and low, in the "Stalinist tribe". In this developing metanarrative of daring heroes and dangerous feats, there was a central name woven into the story, Stalin. The Arctic conquest actively reinforced the thematic constructs of Stalin's image by using the structural dialectics of the Soviet myth body. In doing so, it solidified the key depictions of Stalin as a leader: the immovable centre, the conqueror of the periphery, the father of the Soviet family, all of which were crucial pillars of veneration which upheld the cult.

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[245] Róisín Healy and Enrico Dal, ed, *The Shadow of Colonialism on Europe's Modern Past*, Edited by Róisín Healy, Enrico Dal
Lago, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 228.
[246] McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 108.
[247] Brontman, *On Top of the World,* 227. The second remark was made in relation to the 1934 to Cheliuskin rescue in *Pravda,* 11 April 1934. Quoted in McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 107.

Figure. 6. Aleksandr Deineka, *Future Pilots,* 1937.[248]

3.4 The Fall of Icarus: Trouble in the Tundra

But it stank, too, even way up north, beneath the Arctic storms, at the polar stations so beloved in the legends of the thirties.
> – *The Gulag Archipelago*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

On December 15th 1938, Chkalov died while flying a prototype of the Polikarpov I-180 on its maiden voyage. Deeply saddened by the death of his 'eldest son', Stalin prepared a funeral for him which would be worthy of the highest dignitary. His body lay in the Hall of Columns as thousands upon thousands of mourners paid their respect. At the funeral Stalin himself was a pallbearer, metaphorically extending their relationship from cradle to grave.[249] Like Icarus, it seems that Chkalov had flown too close to the sun: some believed he had died because of his rashness and hubris; others blamed the premature nature of the test flight. Other claims even suggested that it was Stalin himself who had ordered his death, Chkalov becoming too popular for his liking, but perhaps more importantly for openly voicing the opinion that Bukharin and Rykov should not have been found guilty at third Moscow show

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[248] Aleksandr Deineka, *Future Pilots*, Moscow, 1937.
[249] See front cover of Literaturnaia gazeta, No. 27, (May 15, 1939), 1. Literaturnaia gazeta Digital Archive. http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/26819989 [Accessed 23 March 2017].

trial.[250] Whatever the reason, the death of Chkalov can be seen as a keystone moment in the Arctic chronicle; not only did it irritate the conquests dark backdrop, but it also marked the decline of the Red Arctic. The incident unleashed a full scale witch hunt in the Soviet aviation sphere. Key figures in the field such as aeronautical engineers V.M. Peliakov and V.M. Miasischev, along with N.M. Kharlamov, head of the Central Aero hydrodynamic Institute, were amongst those arrested.[251] Despite coming at a time when the purges were more or less losing momentum, Chkalov's death unleashed another wave of repression in the Arctic industry. If the Arctic was a mirror for the habitual, then the landscape, no matter how far away, was always going to fall victim to the great purges that accompanied the Stalin cult between 1936-1938.

Amidst the heroic expeditions of the 'Even Higher' epoch, Glavsevmorput hit a string of crisis' between 1936-1938. Struggling to meet the targets of the Second Five-Year Plan and under immense pressure from the centre, the organisation under Schmidt's leadership sought to quicken progress in the region. The heightened tempos, combined with the tumultuous terrain and a series of logistical errors saw Glavsevmorput sustain losses of over 27 million rubles from river accidents alone.[252] The organisations calamity, natural or otherwise, could not have occurred at a worse time. The purges had reached their zenith and as a result Glavsevmorput's vulnerability meant that it was easy prey. The transcendent force of Stalinist spatial metanarrative posited that the peripheral areas were brought under control. This meant that for Glavsevmorput, no matter how far they operated from the centre, when the purges fell, "they did with sledgehammer force."[253] In synch with the dialectical nature of the terror, Glavsevmorput became an arena in which antipathies were settled. Engulfed with the typical factionalisation that overcame institutions during the purges, the senior highly educated personnel, most of whom had gained their credentials before the revolution, came into opposition with the party activists and junior scientists who swelled the subordinate positions in the organisation. The purges turned the inevitable logistical venations of operating in such a landscape into deliberate acts of espionage and sabotage. For every misfortune that struck Glavsevmorput, the answer was to be found in the unmasking of a Trotskyite. As the title in an article that appeared in *Sovetstkaia Arktika* in summer 1938 declared: "Were there really no signals warning us of the serious shortcomings

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[250] Scott Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2006), 248-251; McCannon*, Red Arctic*, 163.
[251] McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 163.
[252] McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 147.
[253] Ibid, 148.

in our agency's work? Without a doubt, there were signals – the anti-Soviet activities of the many wreckers in the ranks of GUSMP [Glasvermorput]".[254]

The terror even struck Arctic's pantheon of heroes – at least those in its lower echelon. As McCannon writes, "A March 1938 document lists 299 GUSMP personnel who had received high honours in the previous four years; 11 had been arrested, 24 had been fired or demoted, and 7 had died."[255] It seemed that the abundance of middle ranking heroes buffered Stalin's 'familial' purging. Indeed, underneath the rhetoric of heroism was a malignant reality, even those high-ranking heroes of the metanarrative had to treat lightly. As Mikhail Gromov, Hero of the Soviet Union wrote: "you were summoned to the Leader and, when you went, you did not know whether you were going to get a cross on your chest or a cross in the ground."[256] Eventually, the maelstrom of the terror began to affect Schmidt. As the 'gatekeeper' of the Soviet Arctic and head of the GUSMP, Schmidt had reaped the rewards of the organisations success. Subsequently, when failure came forth it was he who shouldered maximum culpability. As accusations germinated, Schmidt appeared less frequently in the public eye throughout 1938. Although Russian, his Baltic-German ancestry, the fact that he spoke German and his many foreign contacts in Europe and America, meant that Schmidt fitted the profile of a saboteur perfectly.[257] As Schmidt became a languished, beleaguered figure, long-time rival and co-worker Papanin planned a palace coup. As the stakes were raised, Schmidt bowed out on the 4th March 1939 with his 'voluntary resignation'.

Schmidt survived the purges. As the head of an institution struck by crisis, during a period when the purges were in full swing, this shows the random, chaotic nature of the purges. Primarily because, by whatever logic that was applied the purges, Schmidt should have fallen victim to the Stalinist machinery of murder: "the fact that he avoided arrest or death is remarkable".[258] In this anomalous episode, much can be extracted from the socialist realist myth-making process and the effects of its transposition from fiction to reality. Through the creation of the heroic metanarratives around the new Soviet idols, Stalin was creating and empowering *genuinely* popular figures, which in turn empowered him. The oscillatory dynamic of this power structure meant that in cases of people such as Stakhanov, Schmidt and Chkalov, who were integral to the metanarrative, to purge would destabilise the

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[254] Quoted in McCannon, *Red Arctic*, 153.
[255] Ibid, 159.
[256] Quoted in Arkadii Vaksberg, *Stalin's Prosecutor: The Life of Andrei Vyshinsky* (New York: Grove Publishing, 1991), 262.
[257] McCannon, *Red Arctic,* 165.
[258] Ibid, 130.

foundation of the Stalinist myth body. As McCannon writes, "to purge a hero who was truly beloved by most of the entire nation and who had been built up as an embodiment of Soviet virtue would have been to rip the heart out of the very ideals upon which Stalinist culture itself was based."[259] In this case, the Arctic myth rather than being merely a product of the socialist realist aesthetic and world-view, in fact directly contributed to the formulation of the movement itself. Their synergy and tandem evolution throughout the thirties highlights the extent to which reality and fiction crossed over.

As the rhetoric of the terror was taken into the lexicon of the extreme, the adventures of the Arctic heroes provided a common point of tangency. This unified the fantastical mantra of the Stalinist metanarrative by characterising heroism and malevolence with a mutual vivacity. The figure of the 'wrecker' is configured out of the same binary of equivalents as the superhuman power of the Arctic hero. As Groys points out, the show trials of the 1930s demonstrated that ostensibly normal citizens were "capable of strewing ground glass in the food of workers, giving them small pox and skin disease, poisoning wells and public places".[260] These titanically destructive feats were carried out with a similar superhuman energy and rhetoricised on a similar semantic plain as the Arctic heroes. Thus, the epic feats of the Arctic expeditions were not so much a "heroic diversion", as many scholars have argued, as they were structural antithesis to the lexis of purges.[261] After all, the notion of a 'diversion' or 'distraction' would surely be too at odds with the regimes open campaign against 'enemies of the people'. And although they provided a vessel of escape, Kendall Bailes best summates the situation, arguing, "one can be excused for interpreting these spectaculars as a means of diverting attention from the abuses of the regime… it would be folly to assert that [their] sole purpose… was to divert attention from the purges".[262] So as newspaper articles reported the recording breaking flights of Chkalov and company, unimaginable indictments and death sentences appeared next them; side by side they represent the antithetical synthesis inherent to Stalinism.

Did the Arctic Myth help build support for Stalin, and in turn add to the cult? Asks John McCannon. "The reply is a guarded yes".[263] Without the likes of Schmidt, Papanin, Chkalov and Vodop'ianov, Schlögel argues that the events of 1937 would not have happened:

[259] Ibid, 131.
[260] Groys, *Total Art,* 110.
[261] Vaksberg, *Stalin's Prosecutor,* 77; Conquest, *The Great Terror*, 236; Robert McNeal, *Stalin: Man and Ruler* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 186-187; and Robert Tucker, *Stalin in Power* (New York: Norton, 1990), 285, 321, 565.
[262] Kendall Bailes, *Technology and Science under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia, 1917-1941* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 381, 389.
[263] McCannon, *Red Arctic,* 179.

"Expeditions associated with mortal dangers became a symbolic locus of freedom in a country in which freedom had been abolished. The tension, nervousness and feverish excitement that were displayed in the rescues expressed more than simple anxiety about the fate of the crew".[264] Indeed, as records were crumpled, and heroic victories were celebrated, the murderous apparatus of Stalinism was in full swing. The anxious energy of the Arctic myth was compounded in the reality of the purges. The mania for flying and polar expeditions "was the cement that held together things that could not be united by force".[265]

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[264] Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, 313.
[265] Ibid.

Conclusion: Empty Space, The Foundation Pit

The foundation pit. A promise, a fantasy, a reality? In 1939, as the first decade of Stalinism came to an end, the foundation pit of the Palace of Soviets was completed. Located in the heart of Moscow, the excavated pit was a slightly concave concrete slab with concentric vertical rings, intended to carry the main hall columns. Ironically, this incongruous 66-foot pit was to be as tall as the 'world's tallest building' would become. This epicentral spatial vacuum, perhaps tells us more about the psychology and function of Stalinist space than the structures that were built and the products that were made. This gigantic void embodied the paradoxical nature of Soviet space in the thirties: full and empty, present and absent, real and unreal. Antithetically, the performative absence of the Palace of Soviets made the building more present than ever in imagining of the centre. Like Stalin himself, the structure was omnipresent; in the lexis of socialist realism it existed between rhetoric and reality. The projection of the Palace conflated the language of what *would be* and what actually *was*. It could be seen in newspapers, magazines, scaled models, as a vignette or as striking outline drawing. As Schlögel writes, "the 'tallest building of the age' existed not just as a mirage, but as a definite reality".[266] In the spatial metanarrative of the age, this empty space was a symbol of reconciliation and solidarity that embodied that promise of not too distant horizon, for which the sacrifice of the thirties had worked toward. In reality, this giant crater reflected the unstable, chaotic temperament of Stalinism – an ominous void of spatial anxiety, control and terror. The paradoxical nature of foundation pit and the imaginary shadow it cast over the Soviet landscape, embody the very essence of the spatial alchemy of the Stalin cult. A phenomenon that was centred on the imagination, saturation and projection of space, and the synergic marriage of fantasy and reality.

After Stalin consolidated his power in the late 1920s, he initiated a spatial process that irrecoverably altered the Soviet topos. Stalin reconfigured Soviet society centripetally with Moscow as its *axis mundi*. In this spatial transformation the Soviet people reconnected with the sacral lineage of centralised authority. However, this reconnecting was down to more than an innate feeling. The concurrent epoch of the Stalin cult was not coincidental, throughout the 1930s Stalin's image would become synonymous with the centre. Through sacral saturation of Soviet space, Stalin's image began to transcend reality and took on a life of its own. As a result of this, the magnetic notion of Stalin as the heart of the Soviet Union was expounded through a carefully constructed body of 'cult products'. Through socialist

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[266] Schlögel, *Moscow 1937*, 545.

realism, all cultural mediums became repositories of the developing state myth. In emerging system of meaning a dialectic pattern of spatial paradigms emerged: centre and periphery, spontaneity and consciousness, chosen and not chosen. These juxtaposed paradigms were all resolved through undergoing a ritual rite of passage to the Soviet's centre, Moscow.

The metanarrative actively inseminated the metaphysical reawakening of Moscow as the *caput mundi*. Under Stalin's 'Socialism in One Country' the revival of nationalism saw the parameters of the Third Rome myth realign accordingly with his internalising, centralising narrative. This reconnection with the imperial past provided Stalin with a nexus whereby he could justify his centralisation of space through the historical doxa of the *captu mundi*. As the terror unfolded Stalin again turned to the imperial past. Through the rehabilitation of Ivan the Terrible reign of terror as a progressive, modernising era, in the progressive spatial parallels and rhetoric of liquidating those against it – Stalin had a new narrative authority over the thirties. Using historical contingency as a means of positive reflection, Stalin used the spatial metanarrative to justify the terror and consolidate his cult through the sub-cult of Ivan IV.

As the metanarrative effaced the borders between fiction and reality, it facilitated a radical reorientation of social values. By verticalising social temperament an environment of idealism and mysticism flourished. From the centre Stalin was the advocate of these values – encouraging the *Homo Sovietcus* to defy reason and reach 'even higher'. This mentality reached an apotheosis with Stalin's conquest of the Arctic. This northern frontier was a figurative *tabula rasa,* void of any spatiotemporal lineage, Stalin used it as a spatial mirror. He turned nature into a battleground, with the Arctic as its greatest foe. In this struggle against the elements a canon of Arctic heroes led the fight. Stalin was portrayed as the loving father of the heroes, from his office in the Kremlin he was able to transcend the physical world and inspire his 'sons' during their expeditions. At the apex of this pantheon of heroes was the aviator. The aviator metanarrative developed much of the dialectic tensions of the myth body, the flights into the Arctic were of a highly ritual nature, configuring as a crucible – a trial by the elements. In the allegorical fashion of the Homeric theme of nostos (return home), the flights were microcosmic national epics which formed Soviet consciousness. In their voyage, the aviators hoped to prove their worth as a 'son', and in the subsequent tribulations they encountered the heroes' to *became* heroic. On their return from the depths of the periphery the pilots brought the metanarrative full circle – from centre to periphery and back again. Awaiting them in Moscow would be Stalin; as McCannon points out the Stalin cult was inextricably linked with the Arctic heroes. In the Arctic myth, Stalin

used the reflective landscape to place himself at the epicentre of the developing cultural of heroism. Despite being so far from the centre, the Arctic and its canon of heroes did not escape the frantic chaos of the terror. The transcendent reach of the Stalinist spatial metanarrative posited that the peripheral areas were brought under control. This meant that for Arctic institutions, no matter how far they operated from the centre, the purges still devastated them.

In trying to explain how the Stalin cosmology came to be, I focused my lens on the cultural topography of the 1930s. Beneath all the cult products were complex spatial dialectics that were carefully elucidated by the cult producers. In the 1930s, this metanarrative blurred the boundaries of the real: fiction became reality; reality became fiction. The result was a landscape of thought which was regulated by a repository of myth. All cultural space was saturated with the metanarrative and in the developing cosmos of Stalinism, a new semantic ordering of space emerged. By deconstructing this space and demystifying the cultic products that gave it meaning, I sought to highlight the spatial metanarrative as one of the key explanations for the facilitation of the Stalin cult. In doing so, the landscape of cult at once emerged and remerged as a synchronous history of objects, spaces, symbols and meanings. In the process of deconstructing and reconstructing these elements, the cosmology of the cult can be understood as an alchemy of time, space, culture, terror, and emotion. I have shown how these elements all combined to create a spatial metanarrative that amounted to more than the sum of its parts; that amounted to the Stalin cult. And yet, this surplus, Stalin's elevation, his larger than life (omni)presence, is in many ways where the explanation ends. A woman who faints when she mistakes Stalin for a floating portrait; a group of Soviet World War II veterans who had to turn a poster of Stalin to face the wall in order to feel free enough to talk openly; citizens who reacted so intensely to the death of Stalin that they suffered heart attacks.[267] This surplus is of a different order – one which is beyond the fathom of study.

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[267] Plamper, *Stalin Cult,* 1-2.

Epilogue: The Spectre of Stalin

'Who's there?'
 'Old age my name.
 I've come to you coming for you.'

'Not now.
Occupied .
I've got things to do.'

I wrote
Made calls
I ate scrambled eggs.

Went to the door,
but no one was around.
Was it my friends making fun of me?
Or maybe it was I, misheard the name?

Not age,
maturity alone was here,
And could not wait,
and sighed,
then went away?!

<div align="right">

– A Knock on the Door, Yevgeny Yevtushenko

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You reach a moment in life when, among the people you have known, the dead outnumber the living. And the mind refuses to accept more faces, more expressions: on every new face you encounter, it prints the old forms.

<div align="right">

– Invisible Cities, Italo Calvino

</div>

Sometimes. In extraordinary situations…In a destroyed city…. I can't find a way out, and I meet him [Stalin]. In very strange confusing dreams.[268]

<div align="right">

– Molotov Remembers, Vyacheslav Molotov

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On the 5 March 1953, Stalin died one real and several symbolic deaths.[269] With so much meaning attached to him, would his death mark the end of the culture of veneration? In the initial period after his passing it seemed that the Soviet Union underwent something of an existential crisis, the cosmos of meaning that Stalin left in his wake collapsed without him as the centripetal force. With the sudden loss of spatiotemporal identity, Khrushchev decided to derail the legacy of the Stalin cult in his 1956 secret speech. This catalysed an unprecedented iconoclastic campaign that attempted to remove all traces of Stalin from the Soviet topos, with the policy of de-Stalinization officially advocating the destruction of all products of the Stalin cult. Iconoclastic initiatives were taken from above and below: from

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[268] Albert Resis*, Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 198.
[269]Plamper, *Stalin Cult*, 221.

the state sponsored policy to simple telling of an anti-Stalin joke. Whilst some participated in the destruction of the symbols, others were more cautious and questioned the legitimacy of this radical course of action.[270] In the years that followed Stalin's physical image was regularly defaced or removed from Soviet space. And yet, it seems that this iconoclasm worked only as a temporary anaesthetic; not much closure was to be found in these efforts. "Stalin had to die again and again", writes Plamper, and yet, despite these recurring cycles of death, the spectre of Stalin lives on more than ever in modern day Russia. Indeed, over the past 10 years, public images of Stalin have gradually been re-emerging. As he does so, one thing is clear: in the dreams, nightmares, memories and emotions of Russia, looms the notion of Stalin. Through his real and rhetorical saturation of space, Stalin became much more than a political leader. Because the spatial metanarrative of the cult was underpinned by its synergic fusion of fantasy and reality, when Stalin died in the real world, this death was only partial. Indeed, he has continued to live on in the mental universe of which he was the architect. Ironically there is substance in the hollow platitude; "Stalin will live eternally!"

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[270] See Polly Jones, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization* (London: Routledge, 2009).

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