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Reviews

Slava Gerovitch, *Soviet Space Mythologies. Public Images, Private Memories, and the Making of a Cultural Identity*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015, xviii + 232pp., $27.95 p/b.

THIS BOOK IS A FASCINATING HISTORY OF THE TRIUMPHS AND FAILURES of the Soviet space programme in the 1960s, portraying vividly its leading figures—cosmonauts, engineers and military personnel—caught in the identity split between professional roles and public personas, and positioning them within the complicated technological and institutional settings of Soviet cosmonautics. Yet, the book is much more than a historical account of spaceflight: it elucidates how its master narrative—'flawless cosmonauts flew perfect missions, supported by unfailing technology' (p. xiv)—was constructed by Soviet propaganda and utilised by the political elite and various stakeholders in the space programme; how it was then contested through counter-narratives from within the professional milieu engaged in it; and finally how it shaped the collective identity and memories of the Soviet generations of the Space Age. Along these lines, the analysis ventures beyond the 1960s back into the Stalin era when the mythology of the aviation heroes was built, and further into the period of *perestroika* and the post-Soviet decades when the singular master narrative of spaceflight was shattered by a myriad of private memories resurfacing in declassified documents, memoirs, historical revisionism and works of art.

The book is structured in seven chapters organised thematically, yet communicating with each other through a number of recurrent topics explored in different contexts. Dedicating Chapter 1 to the mythology of Soviet space conquest, Gerovitch approaches his topic from the outside in: the propaganda images that streamlined unpredictable and risky space missions into a one-way trajectory of heroic success. Yet, underneath the coherency of this propaganda narrative Gerovitch unravels a much more complex process of myth production than the notion of a singular propaganda machine under the control of the party-state would suggest. Opening up a topic that builds up throughout the book, Gerovitch also juxtaposes the public visibility of cosmonauts with the primacy of engineers behind the scenes asserting that 'this public representation inverted the actual power hierarchy within the space enterprise' (p. 11).

Chapter 2 traces the roots of space mythology back to the Stalin era, highlighting that de-Stalinisation triggered a genuine nostalgia for Stalin's authoritarianism due to its 'iron discipline' (p. 24), even among the technical cadres who had fallen victim to Stalin's crackdown on the technical intelligentsia. Trying to explain this peculiar image of Stalinism as a golden age, Gerovitch ventures into the travails of bureaucratic management that strained the elite space programme no less than any other economic sector. Confronted with the inefficiency of fragmented authority and dispersed supply chains, spacecraft designers relied on horizontal professional networking and created an informal coordination body that managed to concentrate enormous decision-making resources.

Chapter 3 shifts to the notion of the New Man which found a powerful example in the figure of the cosmonaut. Tackling the inner contradictions of this notion as it shaped the public conduct and image of cosmonauts, Gerovitch brings to the fore what he calls the 'paradox of "disciplined initiative"' (p. 50) emphasising that a 'hero both embodied best Soviet qualities and undermined the collectivist message' (p. 65). Additional to the regime's strategy of social engineering, Gerovitch also discusses the moulding of cosmonauts' personality by cybernetic psychology and spacecraft engineering. The latter shows the complex match of humans and machines caught between the desire of cosmonauts to be actual pilots and the aspiration of spacecraft engineers for perfect automation wherein the cosmonaut would be a passive passenger.

Focusing on Gagarin's *Vostok* mission, the first human flight in space, Chapter 4 illustrates the tensions and disputes within the space programme identified thus far by the author by providing a detailed account of all phases of this flight. They are reconstructed through multiple voices and source materials— party documents, communication transcripts, official reports, press releases, diary entries and memoirs. Apart from outlining the conflicting positions within the spaceflight endeavour, this chapter creates a suspenseful narrative of Gagarin's feat even for a reader who is not versed in the technical jargon.

Chapter 5 further qualifies the tense relationship between humans and machines during spaceflight, showing its evolution from one space mission to another, from one type of spacecraft to another. Contesting the 'stereotype of fixed "national styles" in space engineering' (p. 100), Gerovitch identifies a rivalry between the professional groups employed in the space programme over determining the goals and the participation in space missions. Shifting the focus from the cosmonaut in space to the cosmonaut on the parade grounds, Chapter 6 discusses the high price of his or her fame upon return since cosmonauts were forced to sacrifice professional ambitions for the sake of state-run propaganda campaigns. Bringing these two roles together, Gerovitch concludes: 'The cosmonauts had to follow the preset agenda of the space propaganda machine, just as they had to fit into the controlling machinery of their spacecraft. Neither machine left them much room for initiative' (p. 154).

The final chapter completes the story of space myth-making by tracing the interplay between the unitary official history and the counter-stories of spaceflight after the 'collapse of the master narrative' (p. 156). This led both to decentralisation and privatisation of memories as well as to mass production and consumption of symbols.

Despite focusing on the Soviet history of spaceflight, the book recurrently juxtaposes its specificities to those of American astronautics thus providing valuable insights into the Cold War space race. Out of this story emerge a number of multifaceted portraits of leading individuals, including Sergei Korolev, Nikolai Kamanin, Yuri Gagarin, Gherman Titov, Valentina Tereshkova. Moreover, with its multiple dimensions, Slava Gerovitch's study ventures into Soviet utopianism, visual propaganda and social engineering as well as the power games among elite professional groups and the inept management of the command economy. Not only does the space programme represent a prime case for all those themes but the author skilfully interweaves these diverse aspects into a fascinating and multi-layered story. Finally, this book is important reading for those interested in the interplay of myth, memory and identity.

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Veljko Vujačić, *Nationalism, Myth, and the State in Russia and Serbia. Antecedents of the Dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015, xiii + 321pp., £64.99/$99.99 h/b.

IN THE LAST TWO DECADES, MANY SCHOLARS OF NATIONALISM, ETHNICITY and transition studies have contributed important academic research on the dissolution of the multinational federations of Yugoslavia, the USSR and Czechoslovakia. The comparison of the relatively peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union along the borders of Soviet republics leaving 25 million ethnic Russians outside Russia with the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia leading to protracted conflicts in the former federal units with tremendous human costs has been a fascinating academic pursuit. Due to the proliferation of single case and comparative studies focused on Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union aimed at explaining the unintended consequences of the nationality policies of communist states for politicising identities and fuelling ethnic conflicts, a further contribution on the same research question seems like a challenging