Soul Incorporated

Nariman Skakov

In the chapter on cooperation in *Capital,* Karl Marx suggests that "man is, if not as Aristotle contends, a political, at all events a social animal."[1] Aristotle's influential definition of the human being as a zoological entity of the polis profoundly influenced the ultimate critical analysis of political economy. Unlike Aristotle, however, Marx addresses the topic of sociality exclusively through the prism of labor. His reference to *zoon politikon* is preceded by an extensive discussion of collective labor in which he argues that "apart from the new power that arises from the fusion of many forces into one single force, mere social contact begets in most industries an emulation and a stimulation of the animal spirits that heighten the efficiency of each individual workman."[2] "Animal spirits," misleadingly but revealingly translated as *zhiznennaia energiia* (vital energy) in the standard Soviet edition of *Capital,* constitute a notable rhetorical move:[3] Marx, like Aristotle, seems unable to avoid a reference to the natural, animal world, even as he tries to establish human's separateness from it. The animal trope persistently thrusts itself forward in sociopolitical debates, and "animal spirits" continue to haunt the discursive foundation pit of the universal proletarian edifice.

In his classic address to the Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, Maksim Gor'kii—a key architect of the superstructure of socialist realism—echoes Marx in his own reference to and interpretation of Aristotle. Gor'kii altogether avoids the term *political animal* in his discussion of the social core of human life.[4] Instead, he concentrates his rhetorical attention on an exception to Aristotle's binary set—human (political animal) versus natural animal: "Abstract thought was indulged in by man at a later period, by that solitary man of whom Aristotle in his *Politics* said: 'Man outside society is either a god, or a beast.' Being a beast, he sometimes compelled recognition as a god, but as

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1. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* vol. 1 (New York, 1906), 358.
2. Ibid.
3. Karl Marks, *Kapital: Kritika politicheskoi ekonomii,* vol. 1 (Moscow, 1960), 337. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
4. The very first sentence of Gor'kii's address contains a reference to a "two-legged" (*vertikal'noe*) animal that was converted into a man through the practice of labor. Throughout the text he perceives an animal state as something that should be overcome. Gor'kii's treatment of animal life is exemplified by the following passage: "Dostoyevsky has been called a seeker after truth. If he did seek, he found it in the brute and animal instincts of man, and found it not to repudiate, but to justify. Yes, the animal instincts in mankind cannot be extirpated so long as bourgeois society contains such a vast number of influences which arouse the beast in man." Maksim Gor'kii, "Soviet Literature," in H. G. Scott, ed., *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress* (Westport, Conn., 1979), 27, 46.

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a beast, he served as the material for the creation of numerous myths about beast-like men, just as the first men who learned to ride on horseback furnished the basis for the centaur myth."[5] Gor'kii takes a liberty and goes far beyond Aristotle's intended argument, which simply suggests that asocial man either "degenerates" into an animal or transcends the everyday realm as a "god." However, this remarkable (mis)interpretation of the classic text allows the godfather of socialist realism to create a rhetorical centaur, which inhabits both natural and cultural domains. It also clearly affirms the fact that animal life was a concern for Soviet policy-makers.

More recently, the conflation of the political sphere with the natural world, manifested in the figure of the political animal, found its further revitalization in the work of Giorgio Agamben. Agamben emphasizes the classical Greek distinction between bare, natural life (*zoē*) and proper, qualified life (*bios*). The imminent subjugation of zoē to bios results in a situation in which a normative framework, governed by the state, is imposed on the natural flow of life. Politics becomes biopolitics, which in turn performs complex acts of exclusion and inclusion by determining who and what is to be incorporated into the political body as well as how that incorporation is to take place. Thus, biopolitics evolves into a natural, though profoundly paradoxical, habitat for political animals—humans.

Andrei Platonov's *Dzhan* (Soul, completed 1935) elucidates and complicates many aspects of the centuries-old tension between the concepts of *human* and *animal* and, by extension, the categories of *ideology* and *corporeality*. The novella provides a complex response to materialist doctrines dealing with humanity's place in the natural order, for it violates a clear-cut border between the human and animal realms and takes the question of human-animal fluidity further than any contemporaneous Soviet texts. This ideological move also comprises a unique rhetorical gesture in the context of 1930s Soviet artistic policies, which were largely regulated by the socialist realist framework. The novella registers the passage of a nomadic "Turkmen" tribe, the collective hero of the text, from *primordial asociality* to *modernist socialist unity*. Though the small Dzhan nation is presented as a subject of political control in the first pages, it manages to escape biopolitical categorization: the people (un)consciously act against the state by reaffirming their zoological essence and their primordial instinct for freedom. Throughout the text, they enact modernist Marxist ideas about consciousness and labor while simultaneously manipulating and undermining them. As a result, unequivocal incorporation into the Soviet political body never takes place.

The present article provides an ideological and cultural background for Platonov's text by exploring the Bolshevik obsession with what was imagined to be a fluid boundary between the animal and the human. Marx's ardent followers in the Soviet Union were guilty of the same rhetorical fixation their teacher was. As a consequence, symbolic animals populate the Soviet sanctuary by permeating the political discourse, as is evident in various texts by Vladimir Lenin, Iosif Stalin, Lev Trotskii, Andrei Zhdanov, and Gor'kii. At the same time, the presence of animals was not merely discursive: the embrace

5. Ibid., 28.

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of scientific naturalism, personified in the figures of Charles Darwin, Ivan Pavlov, and Il'ia Ivanov, was followed by daring scientific experiments on zoē, bare life, which challenged the spiritual superiority of man over nature. Theory went together with practice, as the 1920s saw the rapid development of experimental biology.[6]

While the Bolshevik vanguard consistently attempted to reaffirm evolution as a natural counterpart of Marxist dialectics, the policies of the 1930s tried to establish clear-cut formulae of dialectic progression, heavily supervised by the state. The pre-Great Break period of biological experiments, by and large, came to an end with the birth of Stalinist (bio)politics, which was concerned more with the manipulation of bios, the qualified life. The enforced collectivization efforts not only consolidated individual land, livestock, and labor into collective farms, they also touched individual physical bodies and tried to merge them into a collective entity. This corporeal collectivization profoundly affected the ideological landscape of the country: biology, which guides human responses to stimuli, was replaced by biopolitical structures, which dictate restrictions on and alterations in how humans ought to carry out their biological responses. The fact that Trofim Lysenko's pseudoscientific agricultural practices, which emphasized socio-environmental factors over the biological characteristics of any lifeform, subdued major initiatives in biology and eugenics is illustrative of the trend. The Stalinist project undermined the significance of the individual body and instead concentrated its discursive attention on the body's milieu and its links with a greater virtual whole (the family or lineage).

As a consequence of this shift, the classic passage from *stikhiinost'* (spontaneity) to *soznatel'nost'* (consciousness), which was initially fuelled by the animality debate and the biological experimentation of the 1920s, turned into the rigid biopolitical policy of the 1930s. The latter rejects primordial "animal" instincts, such as survival and self-preservation, through the example of socialist realist superheroes, who easily overcome the physical limitations imposed on the human body. Such a policy also discards individual corporeality for the sake of the (virtual) collective body and gradually forms a purely discursive space. It is notable that the ban on abortion and the criminalization of homosexuality, two key corporeal freedoms, are both instituted in the mid-1930s—Stalinism's heyday. Thus, human behavior's biological bases are undermined by means of biopolitical practices and replaced by abstract rhetoric.

The opening section of this article, "Spontaneous Consciousness," links the classic Soviet clash between spontaneity and consciousness with the 1920s biological experiments that were intended to deconstruct the animal-human

6. In 1919 the Bolsheviks even funded Vladimir Durov, a famous animal trainer and owner of Russia's largest circus, to deliver "the scientific formulation of his achievements in animal training." Nikolai Krementsov, "Big Revolution, Little Revolution: Science and Politics in Bolshevik Russia," *Social Research* 73, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 1182. According to Krementsov, the blossoming Soviet science in the late 1920s followed the principle of personal patronage, whereby the role of patron was performed by various state agencies such as the People's Commissariat of Public Health (Narkomzdrav) or the People's Commissariat for Education (Narkompros). The latter never interfered with the direction of research as such. Nikolai L. Krementsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, 1996), 21.

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taxonomic hierarchy and to create a vision of a "classless" biology. I also analyze how the totalitarian shift of the late 1920s and early 1930s affected the notion of socialist reality, per the state's interpretation. The second part, "Natural Communism," shows why *Dzhan*, one of Platonov's first earnest attempts to evolve into a socialist realist writer glorifying the Soviet state's firm strides toward the communist future, fails to achieve the semantic certitude of the Stalinist text. Various recurrent and profoundly unconventional themes, often connected with animality and corporeality, significantly muddle the text's ideological coordinates and preclude the possibility of a clear passage from spontaneity to consciousness. I conclude with "Apolitical Animals," which discusses the status of the Dzhan people as a newly formed Soviet collective body. The latter's (a)political status manifests itself in the complex interplay between two rather commonplace categories: *body* and *soul*. In the course of the novella the body acquires abstract political qualities by becoming collective, while the soul, as both a designator of the Dzhan people and as a category, gains flesh. Nazar Chagataev, a graduate of the Moscow School of Economics, which produces engineers and economists, appears to reify a key Stalinist metaphor: he becomes an engineer of human (and animal) souls. However, the newly engineered soul still manages to liberate itself from the restraining efforts of the totalitarian state.

Spontaneous Consciousness

Mikhail Bulgakov's novella *Sobach'e serdtse: Chudovishchnaia istoriia* (A Dog's Heart: An Appalling Story, 1925) is arguably the most renowned literary work to reveal the political tensions of the early Soviet state by means of animalistic tropes.[7] The metaphor of *ozverenie* (animalization) is materialized for the reader when the protagonist, Professor Preobrazhenskii, an expert in rejuvenation and eugenics whose surname literally means "of the Transfiguration," surgically transfigures the homeless dog Sharik. He transplants the pituitary gland and testicles of a dead criminal into the body of the dog and observes how the latter evolves into a lecherous intriguer who names himself Poligraf Poligrafovich Sharikov. The doctor is appalled by the outcome of his experiment and concludes that evolution, as a natural process of change in the inherited characteristics of biological populations over successive generations, should not be interfered with. The dirty masses will always produce geniuses in a natural way—a lesson the professor appears to learn over the course of the novella. Therefore, the violent revolution should never undermine peaceful evolution. Any artificial interference with natural matter could lead to disaster.

Preobrazhenskii, as many critics highlight, is modeled on the famous Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov.[8] The distinguished scientist made several ma-

7. See the discussion of a general animal taxonomy in Bulgakov in A. Colin Wright, "Animals and Animal Imagery in M. A. Bulgakov," *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 36, no. 2 (1991): 220–28.

8. On Pavlov's complex relationship with the Soviet authorities, see Daniel P. Todes, "Pavlov and the Bolsheviks," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 17, no. 3 (1995): 379–418.

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jor contributions in many areas of physiology and neurological science. Most significant was Pavlov's ambition to explain human behavior in exclusively physiological terms, with the nervous system at the center and the cerebral cortex as the prime distributor and organizer of all of the organism's activity, as manifested in the notion of the conditioned reflex. The human body, approached via experiments on animals, was treated as a neurological rather than a psychological or spiritual entity. In the lecture "Foundations of the Culture of Animals and Man," delivered in 1918, Pavlov acknowledges striking similarities between animal and human behavioral patterns, a conclusion that was famously obtained through experiments on animal life.[9]

Il'ia Ivanov, a distinguished scientist and key player in the sphere of Soviet biology, inspired another notable artistic text exploring human-animal hybridity. The natural scientist specialized in the field of artificial insemination and the interspecific hybridization of animals. He traveled to Africa in 1926 to carry out experiments involving the artificial insemination of female chimpanzees with human sperm. After his return to the Soviet Union the project was slightly modified, as he attempted to inseminate volunteer Soviet women with the sperm of an orangutan male. The scientist's experiment in many ways shaped the creation of *Orango* (1932), by Dmitrii Shostakovich, who visited Ivanov's fully state-funded primate station in Sukhum in 1929.[10] The unfinished three-act opéra bouffe tells the story of Jean Or, the Orango of the title, who is the result of a French scientist's successful experiment in crossbreeding anthropoid mammals with humans. *Orango* in many respects crosses discursive paths with Bulgakov's novella, for it elevates a purely biological issue to the level of ideology.[11]

9. Ivan Pavlov, "Osnovy kul'tury zhivotnykh i cheloveka," *Rossiiskii fiziologicheskii zhurnal im. I. M. Sechenova* 85, nos. 9–10 (1999): 159. Vsevolod Pudovkin's documentary film, *Mekhanika golovnogo mozga* (Mechanics of the Brain, 1926), dismantles the human-animal hierarchy and provides a striking and, at times, shocking illustration of Pavlov's studies in classical conditioning (see, for instance, the graphic scene in which a dog is electrocuted). The film comprises several vignettes that suggest a linear interconnection between "lower forms of life" (e.g., a frog) and human life (a child), while a dog and a monkey are used as intermediary entities.

10. Ivanov's experiments are extensively discussed in Kirill Rossiianov, "Beyond Species: Il'ya Ivanov and His Experiments on Cross-Breeding Humans with Anthropoid Apes," *Science in Context* 15, no. 2 (June 2002): 277–316.

11. Orango, half-man and half-ape, serves as a soldier in World War I, becomes involved in newspaper blackmail and stock market speculation, and then turns into a powerful international press baron who aggressively promotes the values of capitalism. However, the remarkable "self-made man" story has a tragic end (for Orango, at least): a worldwide financial crisis ruins him. The protagonist is betrayed, gradually "degenerates" fully into an ape, and finally is sold by his wife, a Russian émigré and Parisian coquette, to a Soviet circus for the price of $150. There, in the red capital—happy, new Moscow, where the action of the opera takes place—he is exhibited for the amusement of the glorious proletariat. The pinnacle is reached when an edifying chorus invites the audience to laugh at "the fruitless attempt / To control the steering wheel of life / With the hands of an ape." Dmitri Shostakovich, *Prologue to "Orango," Symphonie No. 4*, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Master Chorale, conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen, recorded 2 December 2011, Deutsche Grammophon, compact disc booklet, at www.laphil.com/philpedia/music/orango-world-premiere-orchestration-gerard-mcburney-dmitri-shostakovich (last accessed 1 July 2014).

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Pavlov's and Ivanov's projects both aimed to establish direct links between various species of animals and *Homo sapiens*. The scientists undermined the typical claim of man's spiritual superiority over nature by treating humans as "mere" biological bodies.[12] This stance found ideological echoes in Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* (1915), which designate the "history of the intellectual development of animals" as one of the fields on which "the theory of cognition and dialectics should be based."[13] From the very beginning, animals were inscribed into the core philosophical concept of the Soviet Union: dialectical materialism. The absence of a rigid hierarchical boundary between the human and animal realms was crucial for both biologists and Soviet ideologues. With ease and eagerness, the Soviet identity-building project overcame the idea that humans occupy an exclusive position in the natural order.[14] The conditioned reflex and the desired product of hybridization (the missing link between man and ape) would have confirmed Darwin's theory of biological evolution and provided proof of the Darwinian evolutionary lineage—from animals to humans. The sense of continuity was crucial, and the "natural" and sacred human-animal hierarchy perceived as an obstacle to be overcome.

Moreover, Darwin's gradualist continuism was appropriated not only because of its potential use in antireligious propaganda. Evolutionary biology was also believed to remove the boundaries between species and advance notions of natural selection and modification by descent. The latter thus make a case for historical development in nature. In 1861 Marx stressed, "Darwin's work is most important and suits my purpose in that it provides a basis in natural science for the historical class struggle."[15] Darwinism justified Marxism, which can be understood as a Darwinist historical project culminating

12. Eric Naiman, in his book *Sex in Public*, draws attention to Emmanuil Enchmen's rather bizarre notion of "physiological passports," conceived in the early 1920s and inspired, in part, by Pavlov's experiments. These "passports" were supposed to numerically reflect bodily functions, pleasures, and desires and treated their bearers as mere "organisms." For Enchmen, the human being was nothing but a biological entity that had to be regulated by means of a physiological "ration card." Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, 1997), 76–77.

13. Vladimir Lenin, *Filosofskie tetradi*, in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 55 vols., 5th ed. (Moscow, 1958–65), 29:314. Other fields include the history of philosophy of science, the history of the intellectual development of children, the history of philosophy of language, psychology, and the physiology of the sense organs.

14. Proponents of Cosmism, fuelled by a marked anthropocentrism, provide an alternative to Pavlov's and Ivanov's scientific endeavors. (I thank Eric Naiman for drawing my attention to this point.) Konstantin Tsiolkovskii, Vladimir Vernadskii, and Aleksandr Chizhevskii did manage to find points of contiguity with the Soviet project. Moreover, the acknowledged importance of Nikolai Fedorov's anthropocentric ideas to Platonov should also be recognized while exploring the politico-ideological canvas of the Soviet Union in the 1920s.

15. Marx to Ferdinand Lasalle, 16 January 1861, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, 50 vols. (Moscow, 1975–2005), 41:245. It should be noted that Darwin's famous metaphor—the struggle for existence—finds its roots in political economy, namely, in the works of Thomas Malthus. This particular aspect of Darwin's theory prompted heated debates in Russia. See Nikolai L. Krementsov and Daniel P. Todes, "On Metaphors, Animals, and Us," *Journal of Social Issues* 47, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 71–74. In the essay "Kul'tura proletariata" (Culture of the Proletariat), Platonov, with his distinctive taste for equivocal definitions, describes Darwin's teachings—the "proletarians' favorite"—as a "culture of

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in the blessed state of communism. The dismantling of biological hierarchies' sanctity and the sense of biological continuity, then, have significant ideological consequences, and Soviet policymakers seem to have understood that. As Sergei Novikov, a Soviet bureaucrat who helped Ivanov secure state funding for his project, suggested, the hybridization project was an "exclusively important problem for Materialism."[16] A few years later, the presidium of the Communist Academy unambiguously proclaimed that "only the proletariat is the sole heir to the materialist foundations of Darwinism."[17] But more importantly, Stalin himself, in his then canonical "Dialectical and Historical Materialism" of 1938, quotes Friedrich Engels's description of Darwin as someone who delivers a "blow to the metaphysical conception of nature" by viewing the organic world in its continuous development.[18]

Pavlov's biological experiments on animals and Ivanov's endeavors in the field of artificial insemination and human-animal hybridization in many ways served as precursors to the ultimate human experimentation: the Soviet brand of eugenics, propagated by Nikolai Kol'tsov, Iurii Filipchenko, and Aleksandr Serebrovskii. Studies of genealogical relation between species and heredity in mammals proved to be the ultimate foundation for the practice of improving the genetic quality of the Soviet population. As Mark B. Adams puts it, "Ivanov's *zootekhnika* was almost certainly the inspiration for Serebrovskii's *antropotekhnika*"—the latter being used as a synonym for eugenics in Russia.[19]

The Soviet science of human betterment primarily focused not so much on physical characteristics but on creative talents: musical, mathematical, and artistic abilities. Nevertheless, the science of the human gene turned out to be too corporeal for Stalinism. The year 1930 saw the sudden end of Soviet eugenics, with the Russian Eugenics Society disbanded and the Eugenics Section of the Institute of Experimental Biology abolished. Eugenics was proclaimed bourgeois and linked with the fascist *Rassenhygiene*. It was also accused of being anti-Marxist, for it ignored the social environment and overemphasized biology.[20] The relative autonomy of the scientific community and the daring experiments of the 1920s were replaced by strict state control and

organisms." Andrei Platonov, *Sochineniia: Nauchnoe izdanie*, ed. N. V. Kornienko, vol. 1, *1918–1927*, bk. 2, *Stat'i* (Moscow, 2004), 90.

16. Quoted in Rossiianov, "Beyond Species," 286.

17. *Vestnik Kommunisticheskoi akademii*, nos. 4–5 (1932): 119–20.

18. Joseph Stalin, "Dialectical and Historical Materialism," *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (New York, 1939), 108.

19. Mark B. Adams, "Eugenics in Russia, 1900–1940," in Mark B. Adams, ed., *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia* (Oxford, 1989), 181. Serebrovskii himself referred to human beings as "one of the animal organisms." Aleksandr Serebrovskii, "Antropogenetika i evgenika v sotsialisticheskom obshchestve," in S. G. Levit and A. S. Serebrovskii, eds., *Trudy kabineta nasledstvennosti i konstitutsii cheloveka pri Mediko-biologicheskom institute* 1, no. 5 (1929): 1.

20. Nikolai Krementsov, "From 'Beastly Philosophy' to Medical Genetics: Eugenics in Russia and the Soviet Union," *Annals of Science* 68, no. 1 (January 2011): 78. However, "some part of Soviet eugenics did survive, but not as 'eugenics.'" Adams, "Eugenics in Russia, 1900–1940," 188. Due to Nikolai Vavilov's personal efforts, much of the genetic research was relocated to agricultural institutions such as the Vsesoiuznyi institut rastenievodstva (All-Union Institute of Plant Breeding).

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dominated by the pseudoscientific postulates of Trofim Lysenko—a leading Soviet horticulturist who vehemently rejected the concept of the gene as a material unit of heredity and assigned a larger role to external conditions in questions of inheritance.[21] This shift from the physical to the social realm was supposedly Marxist in nature, for it downplayed the role of the individual and emphasized societal structures.

More importantly, Lysenkoism represented a move toward highly politicized science, which revealed a divorce from objective reality. Lysenko accomplished a leap into the realm of fiction: his suppression of animal biologists and human geneticists is highly symbolic, as inanimate plants replaced human and animal flesh. Moreover, the "militant materialism" of the Communist Academy resulted in attacks on scientific opponents on purely ideological rather than scientific grounds.[22] This combative practice developed into a widely accepted custom within Stalinist science, which was concerned not with the search for objective truth but with adhering to ideological dogmas. As a consequence, the verb *biologizirovat'* (to biologize) became a pejorative term standing for any attempts to explain social phenomena by means of biology.[23] An abstract collective proletarian body entered the scene, and pure ideology replaced (corpo)reality.

While Stalinist science tried to transform reality by means of strict discipline and planned economy, it lapsed into the domain of pseudoscience and obsession with the imaginary, abstract realm of exaggerated statistics. A similar progression from the real toward ideological abstraction can be detected in the development of a key category of Soviet Marxism: the passage from stikhiinost' toward soznatel'nost'. In the course of its development, from Lenin's writing in the early twentieth century to its heyday in Stalinist socialist realism, this opposition reveals the ultimate leap from reality to the unreal and pure fiction.[24] The necessity for the move from spontaneity toward consciousness, at the time it was conceived by Lenin and Stalin in the early twentieth century, was justified by a real cause: preparation for the revolution. Stalinism, having already accomplished the task of revolution, pushed the binary into the artistic realm. The discourse of transformation acquired a purely speculative function.

Historically, the dialectic clash of the two was, according to Katerina

21. Trofim D. Lysenko, *Agrobiologiia: Raboty po voprosam genetiki, selektsii i semenovodstva* (Moscow, 1946), 395. For further discussion of Lysenko's role in the late Stalinist state, see Ethan Pollock, *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton, 2006), 41–71. For a discussion of Lysenko's theories in the broader cultural context, see Boris Gasparov, "Development or Rebuilding: Views of Academician T. D. Lysenko in the Context of the Late Avant-Garde," in John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich, eds., *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment* (Stanford, 1996), 133–50.

22. Krementsov, *Stalinist Science*, 25.

23. Adams, "Eugenics in Russia, 1900–1940," 184.

24. Even the empirical sciences in the Soviet Union were not immune to the imaginary, poetic word. Pavlov concluded his lecture on "Foundations of the Culture of Animals and Man" by reciting his own prose poem. Pavlov, "Osnovy kul'tury zhivotnykh i cheloveka," 160. It is also notable that the first public assault on eugenics in the Soviet Union took place in the pages of *Izvestiia*, on 4 June 1930, in literary form: Dem'ian Bednyi's poem "Evgenika" attacked Serebrovskii's initiatives and accused the scientist of antiproletarian sentiments.

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Clark, "an efficient formula for transcoding German Marxism into Russian culture."[25] Marx did not appear to emphasize *Spontanität* and *Bewußtsein* as an explicit and viable antinomy. However, in "Estranged Labour" he provides an illuminating passage that clearly elevates the problem of worker's class consciousness to the level of animal versus human and, by extension, that of spontaneity versus consciousness: "The animal is immediately identical with its life-activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is *its life-activity*. Man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life-activity. . . . His own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labor reverses this relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life-activity, his *essential* being, a mere means to his *existence*."[26] The alleged lack of self-reflexivity and volition in animals is counterpoised with the conscious human volitional act. However, estranged labor turns the proletarian into an exploited animal, for it transforms human labor from a "conscious life-activity" into a "mere means" for existence. The solution lies in regaining consciousness and challenging the capitalist system of production. This socioeconomic premise became Lenin's political mantra. The spontaneity-consciousness dyad, as "two poles of the primary dialectic of historical development," developed into a major cultural category in Lenin's writings, and they justified the transformation of backward rural Russia into an aspiring communist society.[27] Stikhiinost′ (from *stikhiia*, a natural element) has strong connotations of the "blind forces of nature," which have an ambivalent potential, at once creative and destructive. These natural forces are meant to be "tamed" by means of soznatel′nost′, which was understood to reside primarily in the minds of the political vanguard, representatives of the Russian intelligentsia. That is, the vanguard of the party was supposed to master the elemental ignorance of the masses.[28]

According to Lenin, in *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), the forces of spontaneity are always already in place as natural elements, while consciousness is rendered largely as a potentiality, something more ephemeral. The passage from the former to the latter finds its synthetic culmination in history's ultimate end—that is, in communism. Lenin maintains that the common working class is incapable of bearing the standard of the proletarian revolution. Its aim is limited to having "bread and butter" on its table. Hence, "class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*," and in

25. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington, 2000), 20.

26. Karl Marx, "Estranged Labour," in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst, N. Y., 1988), 76. Emphasis in the original.

27. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 21.

28. There is an apparent link between spontaneity-consciousness and psychoanalytic practices; in the latter, a patient achieves a conscious state and thus redeems the repressed trauma. This is evident in the following quotation from Trotskii's *Literature and Revolution*: "Finally, the nature of man himself is hidden in the deepest and darkest corner of the unconscious, of the elemental, of the subsoil. . . . Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses and thereby to raise himself to a new plane." Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (Chicago, 2005), 207.

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order to develop potential consciousness where it is less apparent, the movement needs the vanguard of the proletariat.[29] Stalin emulates the structure of Lenin's argument in his "Reply to *Social-Democrat*," in which he exposes eight "lies" about the Bolsheviks and reinstates one single truth: "The masses of proletarians, as long as they remain proletarians, have neither the time nor the opportunity to work out socialist consciousness."[30]

The specific situation in Russia called for interference from the outside that would produce a "shortcut to the revolution by raising worker consciousness and by other deliberate actions."[31] According to this configuration, agency cannot simply emerge from nature but must instead be artificially introduced from without. The described artificial shortcut from animal spontaneity to proletarian consciousness clearly manifests itself in *Orango* and *A Dog's Heart*. The animals in Shostakovich's opera and Bulgakov's novella are artificially inoculated with sentience-consciousness (soznatel'nost') by the representatives of the scientific, though antirevolutionary, vanguard. The experiments have disastrous consequences and jeopardize the possibility of fulfilling the Hegelian synthetic (that is, artificial) fusion. Animals are inscribed into socialist dialectics, but nature prevails.

This type of transformation, however, is vigorously challenged in Platonov's texts, in which animals and people driven to the animal state develop consciousness in a natural way; that is, they gain something that can be termed, in Platonov's own words, *spontaneous consciousness*.[32] The necessity for representatives of the intelligentsia class to introduce consciousness into the proletarian body, as conceived by Lenin and Stalin, is dramatically manipulated by Platonov. In his early essay "Golova proletariata" (The Head of the Proletariat) Platonov emphasizes the fact that the proletariat already has a strong, healthy body and its next step must be "to create a head for itself, to construct it on its own body [*vystroit' ee na sebe*]."[33] The narrative line of the later novella *Dzhan* describes such a do-it-yourself attempt. The effort of a

29. Vladimir Lenin, *What Is to Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, ed. V. J. Jerome, trans. Joe Fineberg and George Hanna (New York, 1969), 78. Emphasis in the original.

30. J. V. Stalin, "A Reply to *Social-Democrat*," in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, *1901–1907* (Moscow, 1954), 164.

31. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 18. Clark also suggests that "Lenin himself was strongly on the side of 'consciousness' in the sense of favoring reason, order, control, technology, and guidance and enlightenment for the masses. His rhetoric is full of imagery about bringing 'light' to the 'darkness' of the Russian people." Ibid., 23.

32. Platonov coins the term *stikhiinaia soznatel'nost'* in "Satana mysli" (Satan of Thought), an early utopian scientific musing: "Composers and their orchestras played symphonies of will and spontaneous consciousness in the recreation clubs of mining and irrigation works." Platonov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 1, bk. 1, *Rasskazy. Stikhotvoreniia*, 199–200. He also defines truth (*istina*) as "consciousness's nature" (*stikhiia soznaniia*) in "Proletarskaia poeziia" (Proletarian Poetry). Platonov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 1, bk. 2, 163. For a discussion of the spontaneity-consciousness, or nature-science, clash in early Platonov, see Eliot Borenstein, *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917–1929* (Durham, 2000), 196–99. For a discussion of the spontaneity-consciousness binary in Platonov's *Kotlovan*, see Kevin M. F. Platt, *History in a Grotesque Key: Russian Literature and the Idea of Revolution* (Stanford, 1997), 144–59.

33. Platonov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 1, bk. 2, 114.

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politically conscious individual to lead his backward nation into the realm of enlightened communism fails in many ways, and the nation has to construct its own "head" (consciousness) out of spare elements found in the Turkmen desert. This rather unconventional story provides an original commentary on Stalinist biopolitical practices.[34]

Natural Communism

Dzhan, if reduced to its narrative core, is a story about the process of building communism in one isolated desert. The novella's protagonist, Nazar Chagataev, is the child of an extramarital affair between Giul'chatai, a married Turkmen woman, and Ivan, a Russian soldier in the Khiva expeditionary force. The wretched mother, unable to provide for her son, is obliged to send him away, but the boy is saved by a shepherd and then sent to a Soviet orphanage. Born in Sary-Kamysh and educated in Moscow, the adult Chagataev is sent back to the Turkmen desert to reclaim his native nation of outcasts for the purposes of building communism. Before his departure from the capital, he marries a divorced and already pregnant Russian woman named Vera and adopts her adolescent daughter, Ksenia. The protagonist's return to his mother and motherland is marked by scenes of extreme physical devastation and suffering. The people of the Dzhan nation, after wandering in the open space of the desert, finally settle down with the aid of Chagataev, who ultimately merges with their collective body and shares in their misery and anguish.

It is notable that there are three variations of the text's ending: the version abridged by Soviet editors, which describes the dispersal of the Dzhan people after Chagataev's failed attempt to collectivize them; the writer's original ending, which adds to this Chagataev's return to Moscow together with the Turkmen girl Aidym and his reunion with Ksenia, who survives her mother; and the extended third redaction, which depicts the hero setting off to bring the people together only to find out that they have reunited of their own accord, and after this revelation he leaves for Moscow with Aidym. This last version can be considered a somewhat happy socialist realist ending: the people settle themselves, and the younger generation, represented by Aidym and Ksenia, continues along the road toward Soviet enlightenment. Platonov's commit-

34. The critical literature on *Dzhan* is relatively modest in size. Among other works, see Per-Arne Bodin, "Bibleiskoe, mificheskoe, utopicheskoe: Analiz povesti Platonova 'Dzhan,'" in E. I. Kolesnikova, ed., *Tvorchestvo Andreia Platonova: Issledovaniia i materialy*, bk. 4 (Saint Petersburg, 2008), 149–56; Philip Ross Bullock, *The Feminine in the Prose of Andrey Platonov* (London, 2005), 123–34; V. A. Chalmaev, *Andrei Platonov: K sokrovennomu cheloveku* (Moscow, 1989), 378–406; Mikhail Geller, *Andrei Platonov v poiskakh schast'ia* (Moscow, 1999), 340–64; Stephen Hutchings, "Remembering of a Kind: Philosophy and Art, Miscegenation and Incest in Platonov's 'Džan,'" *Russian Literature* 51, no. 1 (January 2002): 49–72; Natal'ia V. Kornienko, "Andrei Platonov: 'Turkmeniia—strana ironii.' Obraz Turkmenii v sovetskoi i russkoi literature 30-kh godov," in S. U. Alieva et al., eds., *Natsiia, lichnost', literatura*, pt. 1 (Moscow, 1996), 98–122; Thomas Seifrid, *Andrei Platonov: Uncertainties of Spirit* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), 183–86; Nariman Skakov, "Prostranstva 'Dzhana' Andreia Platonova," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 107, no. 1 (2011): 211–30; and Vladimir Vasil'ev, *Andrei Platonov: Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva* (Moscow, 1990), 194–205.

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ment to inventing a proper ending that might satisfy the totalitarian regime reveals at least an attempt at being a true Soviet writer.

Viewed in this light, *Dzhan*'s narrative line reveals a standard socialist realist antagonism. The required Soviet Stalinist aesthetic foremostly manifests itself through the clash between two party representatives who are given the same task: to save the group of marginalized vagabonds from total oblivion and to bring them back into the great Soviet family. The two professional revolutionaries, per Lenin and Stalin's precepts, are meant to represent the avant-garde of the working class, whose goal is to educate the masses and assist them on their path toward communism. However, the conflict between the two lacks a clear ideological resolution. While the text offers a negative portrayal of one of the "messengers" (Nur-Mokhammed), the main hero (Chagataev) fails to accomplish his mission in a conventional sense in the original ending, and his relative success in the later redaction is not attributable to his conscious efforts, for the people gather of their own accord.

Nur-Mokhammed, a person sent by the district executive committee, is arguably the ultimate representative of deleterious individualism, an alien who does not belong to the collective body of the Dzhan. The "accredited official" carries a leather briefcase and is the only person who keeps his clothes intact and looks "at people with the eyes of a stranger."[35] He expresses his inner doubts to Nazar with no hesitation, maintaining that "the nation's heart had long been exhausted by need, while its mind had grown stupid, leaving the nation with no way of sensing its happiness." The absence of consciousness is the natural condition of the Dzhan people, and the "vanguard representative" considers it a futile project even to attempt to save them: "Better to give peace to this nation, to forget it forever or else lead it somewhere into the desert, into the steppes and mountains, so it would get lost and could then be considered not to exist."[36] Nur-Mokhammed finally confesses that as he cannot resurrect the dead, he simply waits for the remaining people to perish. The Dzhan people's state of existence is so miserable that they no longer seem to constitute subjects capable of communist transformation, or even of life itself.

At a later point in the novella, the party ideologue and demagogue does attempt to speed up the process of the Dzhan people's extinction by literally unsettling them: his "leadership" abilities find their application when he guides the nation into the open space of the desert. As Nur-Mokhammed puts it, "They need somewhere or other to head for. I'm taking them the long way, around the edge of the delta. A man feels better when he's on the move."[37] Their futile move, combined with proximity to or even incorporation into hostile nature, results in their entering a borderline state, which is marked by tropes of emptiness and desert/-ion: "People's bodies had become empty and their hearts had gradually perished."[38]

35. Andrei Platonov, "Soul," in *Soul and Other Stories*, trans. Robert and Elizabeth Chandler, with Katia Grigoruk, Angela Livingstone, Olga Meerson, and Eric Naiman (New York, 2008), 87, 52.

36. Ibid., 52.

37. Ibid., 60.

38. Ibid., 80.

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The Dzhan people are scattered by the wind, which also empties their bodies and minds. Nature triumphs and epistemic categories are rendered irrelevant as the nation merges with the natural flow of an existence that is devoid of any intellectual reflection: it enters a state of *samotek* (natural drift). Chagataev, as the positive counterpart to Nur-Mokhammed, halts the process of unsettling—aimless wandering in the desert—by bringing his nation to a conscious state and leading them out of the empty wilderness. Half-alien and half-native, he is the ideal medium to accomplish the task given to him by the central apparatus. Although Nazar initially merges with his unconscious nation through immense physical endurance in the open desert, he regains his Bolshevik consciousness and manages to realize his true calling from within the depths of his despair while being attacked by vultures: "He felt as if he belonged to others, as if he were the last possession of those who have no possessions, about to be squandered to no purpose, and he was seized by the greatest, most vital fury of his life."[39] In truly Marxist materialist fashion, the question of property—his mutilated body as his very last commodity—informs the protagonist's political consciousness. Chagataev rises to fight against wild nature, in this instance represented by vultures.

It is evident that Chagataev's mission is one of cultivation. His revolutionary task is to bring culture from Moscow and transform the archaic, animalistic elements, as represented by the Dzhan people. The word *culture*, deriving from the Latin *colere* (to tend, to guard, to cultivate, to till), has strong connections with *agriculture,* the cultivation of land and domestication of wild animals. Culture is a pure superstructural extension of the material base which manifests itself in the process of land cultivation. The nomadic way of life naturally problematizes the notion of (settled) culture, for there is literally no stable ground that can be cultivated or understood as a point of departure. The Dzhan nomads, in order to become a part of the Soviet family, must be settled, their ceaseless wandering halted, and their natural and uncultivated state altered.

As the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan puts it, "Domestication means domination: the two words have the same root sense of mastery over another being—of bringing it into one's house or domain."[40] The process of domestication—the taming of wild elements—is manifestly at work in Platonov's novella. Chagataev exercises his spiritual and physical power to domesticate the uncultivated Dzhan people. In place of unconscious wandering in the open desert, they are given an opportunity to start building communism in their native land. However, as a starting point, the future builders require their own shelter and they are bestowed one by their new leader, who brings them to their first Soviet *domus*—a space where domestication can take place.

When Chagataev and Aidym start fetching clay to build the first house, no one offers any help; the Dzhan people are indifferent to the efforts to lay the foundations of a settled dwelling space. But the leader challenges them:

39. Ibid., 94.

40. Yi-Fu Tuan, "Animal Pets: Cruelty and Affection," in Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald, eds., *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings* (Oxford, 2007), 143.

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"Chagataev gathered everyone together and asked whether they intended to live of their own accord [*po svoemu zhelaniiu*] or were they still living merely thanks to such outside forces as food, air, water and habit acquired at birth."[41] The question he poses is a straightforward binary opposition: blind forces of nature versus conscious existence. Eventually, Chagataev brings his people back to a conscious state by means of the example and practice of labor. After some time, Old Ivan, the one ethnic Russian among them, finally joins Chagataev's efforts in laying down the foundation of the future communal home. The collective process of communist construction finally begins.

Labor in general, whether voluntary or forced, is a fundamental category for the process of communist construction. There is a truly Marxist echo in the notorious Nazi motto "Work makes one free" as well as in Vissarion Belinskii's famous dictum "Work ennobles man." For Marx and Engels, "men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation."[42] The Dzhan's construction efforts, though primitive in essence, are key to their becoming a conscious communist nation and distinguishing themselves from the wild natural elements. Chagataev takes care of their "physical organization," and the nation builds "four small houses of adobe brick, with a common surrounding wall" in a valley in the Ustiurt Plateau, their new, elevated dwelling space.[43]

It is not an accident that one of the key Soviet cultural policymakers, Andrei Zhdanov, in an oft-quoted passage that lies at the heart of the socialist realist paradigm, fuses the rhetoric of labor with a peculiar reference to animality, evoking the passage from spontaneity to consciousness:

> In our country the main heroes of works of literature are the *active builders of a new life*—working men and women, men and women collective farmers, Party members, business managers, engineers, members of the Young Communist League, Pioneers. Such are the chief types and the chief heroes of our Soviet literature. Our literature is impregnated with enthusiasm and the spirit of heroic deeds. It is optimistic, but not optimistic in accordance with any "inward," *animal* [*zoologicheskomu*] instinct. It is optimistic in essence, because it is the literature of the rising class of the proletariat, the only progressive and advanced class. Our Soviet literature is strong by virtue of the fact that it is serving a new cause—the cause of socialist *construction*.[44]

According to Zhdanov's rhetoric, real actions and especially labor practices inspire the fictional reality of Soviet art. Heroic and self-sacrificing efforts to construct a new socialist society are the sole themes of socialist realist litera-

41. Platonov, "Soul," 102.

42. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London, 1974), 42. Emphasis in the original. In the chapter "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man," in *Dialectics of Nature*, Engels unambiguously declares that "labour created man himself." Frederick Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, ed. and trans. Clemens Dutt (New York, 1940), 281.

43. Platonov, "Soul," 108.

44. Andrei A. Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature—The Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature," in Scott, ed., *Problems of Soviet Literature*, 40. Emphasis added.

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ture. Moreover, art is meant to be "impregnated with enthusiasm," but not an enthusiasm of the base, zoological variety. This enthusiasm appears to be metaphysical; that is, lying beyond the physical realm and oriented toward a future that is, paradoxically, being built right now, at this very moment.[45] It also registers the passage from natural, base spontaneity (the mode of the past) to more abstract consciousness (that of the present and future). Zhdanov's comments clearly demonstrate the transformation of the individual body of Soviet bare life into the abstract collective body of Stalinist biopolitics.

The Dzhan people find themselves making this conversion in a mode that to some extent reflects the socialist realist template. The nation, members of which formerly lived in individual dugouts or under the open sky, participates in the construction of socialist edifices and subsequently enters them as a collective body. And this is where their domestication and cultivation, both of which are oriented toward the glorious future, take place: "These dwellings—without windows, since there was no glass—became the home of the entire nation, who for the first time had found a proper shelter from the wind, the cold, and all the little creatures that fly and sting. Some people were unable to get used to sleeping and living behind blind walls; after short intervals of time they would go outside, breathe deeply, have a good look at nature, and return with a sigh back into their homes."[46] Their passage, though positive in essence, clearly reveals the trauma of transfer from the domain of nature to that of culture. Walls are described as "blind," though they shelter the people from the hostile desert. There are no windows—conventional architectural elements that create an illusion of unity with nature. The building becomes a womb, a cocoon from which future life should spring. In addition to hope, however, these buildings also bring a feeling of claustrophobia, the fear of entrapment in a small space. Entering into the solid edifice is a traumatic experience for some members of the Dzhan tribe, for they cannot endure being separated from the open realm of nature and feel the need to go outside from time to time to regain their (natural) sense of selfhood. Here their experience echoes György Lukács's description of estrangement from nature as "a projection of man's experience of his self-made environment as a prison instead of as a parental home."[47]

This sense of entrapment is surmounted at a later point, when the Dzhan people disperse throughout the open space of the desert and beyond. However, this dramatic resolution is preceded by acts of collective eating and

45. Clark refers to this paradox as a manifestation of social realism's inherent "modal schizophrenia." Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 36–45.

46. Platonov, "Soul," 108. The principal building in Platonov's oeuvre is arguably the uncompleted proletarian house of *Kotlovan*. There is an apparent link between the ultimate Soviet domus and the conception of architectural and technological organization as a means of taming the elemental forces of nature, an idea which is present in the theories of Aleksandr Bogdanov, a major theorist of proletarian culture. For a discussion of the relevance of Bogdanov's ideas in *Kotlovan*, see Nina Malygina, "Kommentarii," in Andrei Platonov, *Sobranie*, ed. N. V. Kornienko, vol. 3, *Chevengur. Kotlovan*, ed. N. M. Malygina (Moscow, 2009), 586.

47. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of The Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (London, 1978), 64.

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sleeping. After receiving an abundant food parcel from Tashkent, consisting of two trucks of produce and other necessities, the Dzhan make several meals that are consumed at one communal table. The scene is described with tender intimacy infused with communist vocabulary: "They ate without greed, taking care of the food in their mouths, with a consciousness of the food's necessity and with meek thoughtfulness." Several days later, in cooler weather, the Dzhan people all gather in one house, like a herd or a pack: "By six o'clock the entire nation had lain down in the one room, and people were sleeping beside one another in close-packed bliss."[48] The collective body of the Dzhan sleeps continuously in the same position for two days and two nights. When the people finally get up—with the exception of Giul'chatai, Chagataev's mother, who has died in her sleep—they have a final meal together and depart their Soviet domus during the night.

The episode in which the Dzhan people leave the socialist edifice built for them is the conclusion of the novella's first published version.[49] In a radical manner, the characters evade domestication. What is arguably at stake for the Dzhan people is the preservation of their freedom, unrestrained mobility, and alterity. Their leader, Chagataev, tries to settle them, to stop their ceaseless motion in space and bring them as a homogenized nation into the grand Soviet domus, yet they willfully reject this gesture of external, totalizing help. As Chagataev painfully realizes, they do "not need communism." Instead, his nation needs "oblivion—until the wind [has] chilled its body and slowly squandered it in space."[50] The Dzhan people disperse in the open space of the desert and are gone with the wind.

The role of the wind assumes added significance when one considers the fact that the word *animal* is a cognate of the Greek ἄνεμος (*ánemos*, wind) and bears an etymological link to the Latin *animalis* (animate, living, or of the air).[51] Animal nature, then, finds in its roots one of the basic natural elements: wind, the natural cause of animation. The latter is given a prominent place in the novella during a key episode in which the Dzhan people find themselves wandering in the desert: "Sheep, the Dzhan nation, and wild animals—this triple procession was moving in orderly fashion through the desert. But the sheep sometimes strayed from their grassy path and followed a wandering tumbleweed as it was driven about by the wind—and so the universal guiding force, of everything from plants to humans, was really the wind."[52] The wind appears to be the ultimate driving force of the Dzhan people: it scatters, displaces, and, most importantly, liberates them.[53] Moreover, the wind is the

48. Platonov, "Soul," 112–13.

49. The dramatic dispersal of the people toward the end echoes the beginning of *Dzhan*, when the narrator describes Chagataev's classmates at a graduation party in the following manner: "The young people sat at the tables, ready to go their separate ways out into the land around them and build happiness for themselves there." Ibid., 5.

50. Ibid., 102.

51. The Russian word *zhivotnoe* has a comparable etymology, for it derives from the Old Church Slavonic noun *zhivot*, meaning life, or the vital animating principle.

52. Platonov, "Soul," 76.

53. Wind, a permanent feature of deserts, constantly transforms sand landscapes and, by and large, regulates the deserts' biological cycles. For about fifty days a year,

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vital principle, the primary designator, and the soul of the nation itself, for *anima* means "air, breath, life, soul, spirit."[54] Wind, as a current of air, is not just a natural element; it is also the spiritual essence and the very name of the nation—Dzhan, which means *soul*, or, as Platonov himself puts it in the title footnote, "a soul that is looking for happiness (a Turkmen folk belief)."[55]

The blurred ideological coordinates of Platonov's novella dramatically displace the typical opposition between nature and culture.[56] Paradoxically, even the attempted act of cultivation—bringing the Dzhan nation into the realm of Soviet culture—is accomplished by utilizing nature: the wild, uncontrollable natural forces in *Dzhan* are "tamed" by explicitly natural means. Chagataev initially nourishes the people's bodies and minds by sacrificing his own flesh during his hunt for vultures, and he later settles them by building adobe houses from natural elements found around Sary-Kamysh. In a sense, the people, together with Chagataev, merge with the natural landscape and come to embody nature, such as when they eat the raw meat of various animals or try to quench their thirst by eating moist sand. The Bolshevik messenger seems to understand that in order to accomplish his communist quest, he must take advantage of the powers afforded only by nature; in this he substantially departs from prescribed party directives.

Even much earlier in the novella, Chagataev's return to Turkmenia from Moscow is marked by an unexpected move: while nominally "having forgotten his mission," the protagonist enters his homeland by leaving the train of modernity and merging with the natural realm. He enters the wilderness spontaneously, leaving behind not only the train but also his luggage and papers within it. He returns to his native land with no belongings whatsoever, just as he left it a dozen years prior. In this moment of transition, nature begins to reveal itself through multiple sounds and smells, and as if enchanted by desert sirens, the hero sets off into an open space inhabited by multiple "unseen creatures." In the middle of his wandering, he encounters a camel: Chagataev, "full of astonishment at strange reality," realizes that there is no hierarchy of beings and that "the desert's deserted emptiness, the camel, even the pitiful wandering grass—all this ought to be serious, grand and triumphant."[57]

Kara-Kum has strong winds at a velocity of 15 meters per second and up, while the Ustiurt is subject to squall winds of 24–26 meters per second. A. G. Babaev, I. S. Zonn, N. N. Drozdov, and Z. G. Freikin, *Pustyni* (Moscow, 1986), 49.

54. "Anima, n.," etymology, *OED Online*, at www.oed.com/view/Entry/7734 (last accessed 18 July 2014).

55. Andrei Platonov, "Dzhan," *Sobranie*, ed. N. V. Kornienko, vol. 4, *Schastlivaia Moskva: Roman, povest', rasskazy* (Moscow, 2010), 111.

56. Artemii Magun suggests that Platonov's "socialist tragedies" always attempt to "overcome the 'dialectics of nature'; that is, the confrontation between nature and machinery [*tekhniki*]." Artemii Magun, "Otritsatel'naia revoliutsiia Andreia Platonova," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 106, no. 6 (2010): 70.

57. Platonov, "Soul," 22, 28. Platonov's notebooks from the period during which he was working on *Dzhan* are full of references to animals that consistently dismantle the human-animal hierarchy. For example, "Humanity—without being ennobled by animals and plants—will perish, decline, and fall into spiteful despair, like a lonely person in loneliness"; "It is also necessary to write about animals: they have a lot of freedom of will, independent intelligence, etc."; "About animals, about animals—a whole world of

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While *animal* is generally understood as a generic singular, the word fails to connote the whole multiplicity of animal life as it manifests itself in Platonov's novella. Hans Günther provides an exhaustive taxonomy of animal imagery in the writer's oeuvre, from anthropomorphic animals to "degenerating" humans.[58] The amalgamation of human and animal elements, however, does not just represent the blurring of the line between the two modes of being, as Günther implies. It also has essential ideological consequences.[59] The new Soviet man, as conceptualized during the early Soviet period, was in need of a new body, and the two opposite semantic vectors of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism annihilated the old corporeal framework. Moreover, the conceptual clarity of totalitarianism was challenged by Platonov's obscure natural nomenclature, which unleashed, to use Jacques Derrida's words, "an existence that refuses to be conceptualized."[60]

The transformation from human into animal in *Dzhan*, then, culminates in a semantic and ideological dissonance. The human-animal divide, and by extension, the physiological-spiritual boundary, is an artificial construct, and Platonov's text underlines its arbitrariness.[61] The return to base animality and corporeality by an individual can be read as a rejection of the abstract collective body of the Stalinist state, which suppresses zoological impulses. Socialist realism is undermined by means of natural realism.[62] The writer consis-

freedom and happiness is lying in vain." Andrei Platonov, *Zapisnye knizhki: Materialy k biografii*, ed. N. V. Kornienko (Moscow, 2000), 155, 175.

58. Khans Giunter [Hans Günther], *Po obe storony utopii: Konteksty tvorchestva A. Platonova* (Moscow, 2012), 145–61. Other classifications of animal life in Platonov's works are made by Konstantin Barsht and Annie Epelboin. Barsht sees animals as mere bodies devoid of consciousness and implies that the animal form comprises a "catastrophic deviation" from its human counterpart. Konstantin Barsht, "Chelovek, zhivotnoe, rastenie, mineral: Antropologicheskaia kontseptsiia A. Platonova," *Europa Orientalis* 19, no. 1 (2000): 138. Epelboin's reading is more nuanced, and she interprets Platonov's various animals (such as the horse Proletarskaia Sila from *Chevengur* and the bear Misha from *Kotlovan*) as highly conscious ideological agents who display inherent class instincts. Annie Epelboin, "Metaphorical Animals and the Proletariat," in Angela Livingstone, ed., "A Hundred Years of Andrei Platonov," special issue in 2 vols., *Essays in Poetics: The Journal of the British Neo-Formalist Circle* 27, vol. 2 (2002): 174, 178, 180.

59. Jane Costlow and Amy Nelson suggest that "the often unacknowledged interaction between humans and other animals profoundly influenced the symbolic and the real in ways that sometimes worked with, but often compromised, the hegemonic aspirations of the state and its official ideology." Jane T. Costlow and Amy Nelson, eds., *Other Animals: Beyond the Human in Russian Culture and History* (Pittsburgh, 2010), 115. Oksana Timofeeva acknowledges the significance of the connection between animal "politics" and the Soviet project, but she does not explore further reverberations. Oksana Timofeeva, "Bednaia zhizn': Zootekhnik Viskovskii protiv filosofa Khaideggera," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* 106, no. 6 (2010): 96. Moreover, the critic tends to follow the convention of defining *animal* solely through a problematic, anthropocentric prism: "A Platonovian animal is a secret human, who suffers because its mind is unuttered, unacknowledged, and hidden in the body." Timofeeva, "Bednaia zhizn'," 104.

60. Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 379.

61. The case of zoophilia described in *Dzhan* arguably constitutes an extreme form of this destruction of the human-animal borderline. See Platonov, "Soul," 38.

62. It should be noted that the human body is a rather negative category in early Platonov, especially in his polemical journalistic texts, where the body is pronounced

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tently challenges the alleged superiority of the human order over the animal order and "of the law over the living being."[63]

In the course of the novella, the narrative fails to make a clear demarcation between humans and animals. While Chagataev at one point encounters a camel "sitting like a human being, propped up on his front legs in a drift of sand," the Dzhan people, including the hero's mother, Giul'chatai, crawl on all fours during their journey through the desert.[64] The degenerating humans enter the field of unmediated nature, while animals gain consciousness and strive toward communal (communist) cohabitation by merging (collectivizing) into herds and flocks and establishing close familial ties. The animals achieve a truly political status, unlike their human counterparts.[65]

Indeed, animals seem to develop proletarian class consciousness in a natural way. They do not need the domesticating impositions of culture. Whereas the protagonist consistently attempts to domesticate the Dzhan people, who are estranged from one another, animals seek human companionship and willingly enter the human domus.[66] Sheep, for instance, wander in circles in the desert while desperately trying to find not just nourishment and water but also a human master with a shepherd dog.[67]

It is a sense of companionship with animals, too, that underscores Chagataev's communally oriented enthusiasm. Once the project of domestication is accomplished and the hero finally has some spare time, he brings sleeping tortoises into one of the houses of his newly founded Soviet village. Some of the tortoises revive, seeming to come back to life, while others remain asleep, waiting for summer. A piercingly intimate tone prevails in the following passage, in which Chagataev, contemplating animal life, seems to realize the grand mystery of existence:

> Chagataev sensed with surprise that it is possible to exist with only animals and voiceless plants as your neighbors, with desert on the horizon, so long as you have a human being in a dwelling nearby, even if that human being is only a child like Aidym. . . . Surely not every animal and plant could be sad

bourgeois and something that ought to be overcome by proletarian consciousness. See Andrei Platonov, "Dostoevskii" and "Kul'tura proletariata," *Sochineniia*, vol. 1, bk. 2, 45–46, 99; and "Pitomnik novogo cheloveka" (Nursery of the New Man), *Sobranie*, ed. N. V. Kornienko, vol. 1, *Usomnivshiisia Makar: Rasskazy 1920-kh godov. Stikhotvoreniia*, ed. N. M. Malygina (Moscow, 2009), 29.

63. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 2 vols., trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago, 2011), 1:31.

64. Platonov, "Soul," 26.

65. Vultures, more so than any of the other beings described in the novella, demonstrate the strongest sense of kinship.

66. A dog that Chagataev encounters in an abandoned village is the only exception to the tendency to desire human companionship and unity which most of the animals show: "The dog looked greedily and sadly at the people. Its dark, difficult hope lay in a desire to eat all these people when they died." Platonov, "Soul," 104.

67. Other striking examples of politically conscious animals in Platonov's oeuvre include the bear Misha, who hunts kulaks, and the horses who collectivize themselves in *Kotlovan*. The novella seems to suggest that only animals can evolve into true proletarians, as the humans in *Kotlovan* expire in futile labor, sleep in coffins, or vainly seek the meaning of life.

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> and wretched; this was a dream or pretense of theirs, or some temporary disfigurement they were suffering from. Otherwise one would have to assume that true enthusiasm lies only in the human heart—and such an assumption is worthless and empty, since the blackthorn is imbued with a scent, and the eyes of a tortoise with a thoughtfulness, that signify the great inner worth of their existence, a dignity complete in itself and needing no supplement from the soul of a human being. They might require a helping hand from Chagataev, but they had no need whatsoever for superiority, condescension or pity.[68]

Enthusiasm is not a solely human category: it can also be found outside the domain of the human soul. A "dignity complete in itself" is an inherent quality of flora and fauna. Like Chagataev's nation, the animal-natural world simply needs a "helping hand" to be fully capable of happiness and a dignified, free existence. Although the flat space of the desert annihilates all conceptual hierarchies, making it possible for the Bolshevik messenger to dwell among speechless animals and plants, Platonov nevertheless underlines the necessity of human camaraderie, even if the companion is "only a child like Aidym." This stance echoes the very ending of the text: in the last sentence, Chagataev realizes, while feeling Ksenia's soul through the hurried beating of her heart, "that help could come to him only from another human being."[69] This loop reestablishes an anthropocentric point of view: politics and ideology cannot do away with the importance of human companionship.

Apolitical Animals

The ontological need for the other, which lies at the heart of human companionship, is key to Aristotle's definition of man as a "political animal" (*ζῷον πολιτικόν*). In book 1 of *Politics* he writes, "It is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity; he is like the 'Tribeless, lawless, heartless one,' whom Homer denounces—the natural outcast is forthwith a lover of war; he may be compared to an isolated piece at draughts."[70] It is remarkable that in two sentences, meant to delineate the realm of politics and culture from that of nature, the very word *nature* (*phusis*) and its derivative *natural* occur four times. Just as the city-state is natural because it finds its origins in primitive natural associations such as village communities and serves as their ultimate end, so, too, "man is by nature a political animal"—that is, an animal of the polis (city-state) or a social being, who naturally wants to live together with his peers. Moreover, human beings are endowed by nature with speech and are able to communicate moral concepts and laws that lie at the core of every city-state.[71]

68. Platonov, "Soul," 119–20.
69. Ibid., 146.
70. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York, 2005), 4.
71. Philosophers continue to argue about what Aristotle's apparently fundamental term *nature* stands for. In *Physics* he defines it as "a principle or cause of being moved and of being at rest." Things that are not natural and exist "from other causes" are called arti-

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Paradoxically, the city-state appears to exist both by nature and by craft. Aristotle's sociality is a necessity or a natural condition, but it is implemented by a volitional act and the craft of lawmaking. The philosopher's political naturalism clearly positions human society against the horizon of zoological life in its totality. At the same time, this horizon becomes a vertical line representing the hierarchical division between the natural animal world and the artificially created city-state. However, the exceptional case of the "tribeless, lawless, heartless one" muddles this already precarious taxonomy. This stateless—that is, *a*political—animal is "either a bad man or above humanity" and thus is situated beneath and at the same time beyond the state structure.[72]

Aristotle's muddled taxonomy of beings is one of the main concerns within the discourse of sacred life initiated by Giorgio Agamben. In *Homo Sacer* Agamben emphasizes the ancient Greek distinction between zoē and bios. The former stands for "the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)," while the latter is more abstract and comprises "a way of living proper to an individual or a group."[73] In the classical world, simple natural life (*zoē*), seen to have a primarily reproductive function, is excluded from the domain of the polis and instead confined to the sphere of the home (*oikos*). Bios, on the other hand, has a clear moral dimension and is a subject to regulation by the state. The subjugation of zoē to bios, according to Aristotle and as described through Agamben's lens, is the end goal for political animals, defined by being "born with regard to life, but existing essentially with regard to the good life."[74] Each individual's trajectory from the natural life to the "good life" is governed by *nomos*, a set of provisional codes dictating social and political behavior. This normative framework is crucial for the polis and becomes the ultimate concern within the sphere of politics. Seen in this light, Stalin's notorious 1935 statement that "life has become better" and "merrier" clearly marks the Soviet passage from zoē to bios, from a natural life to the good life.

What is more important for the present reading of *Dzhan* is Agamben's suggestion that politics is in fact biopolitics, in which the state makes normative decisions concerning not only bios—human life in the political sphere—but also zoē—how citizens should live naturally as corporeal beings.[75] Mecha-

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facts. An artifact reveals human workmanship and modification, as distinguished from a natural object. While the inherent principle of motion or of stationariness governs natural entities, artifacts always involve intentional agency: "They are products of art." Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R. P. Hardie and Russell Kerr Gaye (Stilwell, Kans., 2006), 17. For further readings, see Andrea Falcon, *Aristotle and the Science of Nature: Unity without Uniformity* (Cambridge, Eng., 2005); David Keyt, "Three Fundamental Theorems in Aristotle's Politics," *Phronesis* 32, no. 1 (1987): 54–79; and Helen S. Lang, *The Order of Nature in Aristotle's Physics: Place and the Elements* (Cambridge, Eng., 1998).

72. Aristotle, *Politics*, 4.

73. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, 1998), 1.

74. Ibid., 2. See also Aristotle: "When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life." Aristotle, *Politics*, 4.

75. Agamben suggests that "it is not the free man and his statutes and prerogatives, nor even simply homo, but rather corpus that is the new subject of politics." Agamben,

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nisms and calculations of power enter the sphere of nature and become more explicit in the case of the *Homo sacer*. By law in the Roman empire, people who committed a certain kind of crime were banned from society and their rights as citizens revoked. Such a citizen thus became a *Homo sacer* (sacred man) and could be killed by anybody, while his life, paradoxically, was deemed "sacred," so he could not be sacrificed in a ritual ceremony. The political and spiritual status represented by this life is profoundly paradoxical, for it "is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to law and the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion: the life of the bandit [or of the *Homo sacer*] is the life of the *loup garou*, the werewolf, who is precisely *neither man nor beast*, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither."[76] The political status of an outlaw—a person without a state, which is essentially what the Dzhan people are—makes one inhabit the "threshold of indistinction." The Dzhan, who are defined as "runaways and orphans from everywhere, and old, exhausted slaves who had been cast out," become permanent refugees who are forced to dwell on the verge of everlasting indistinction.[77] They are pure and impure at the same time. They are bodies without civil rights but with a clear ideological and metaphysical potential, and their sacredness is revealed in the very name of Dzhan, or soul.[78] More importantly, the Dzhan people can indeed be killed without any legal consequences, as the khan of Khiva, in an episode from Chagataev's childhood, uses them as political scapegoats. After failing to track down real criminals, he orders "everyone obscure and nameless to be seized, so that the inhabitants of Khiva, seeing the torture and execution of these people, would acquire fear and trembling." Thus, the Dzhan, who "grew used to waiting for death," become sacrificial elements for the state apparatus, yet remain immune to being recognized by that state as rightful citizens.[79]

However, something inexplicable happens when all the remaining members of the desperate nation set off toward Khiva. The people seem to have nothing to lose and are described as "happy and peaceful, equally ready to destroy the khanate or to say good-bye to their own lives." The lack of fear of death bewilders the khan and his guards, who "watched in astonishment as this transient nation passed proudly past them, not afraid of the power of bullets or steel, as if they were people of happiness and standing." This episode transforms the Dzhan people from scapegoats into untouchables. In the Khiva bazaar the vagabond nation begins "to take the different fruits and to eat its fill without money, while the merchants stood by in silence, not fighting off these rapacious strangers."[80] The "transient nation" again finds itself

Homo Sacer, 124. Pavlov's and Ivanov's experiments, which treated humans as merely biological bodies, in some way prepared the ground for the Stalinist ideological leap.

76. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 105. Emphasis in the original.

77. Platonov, "Soul," 24.

78. There are direct references to sacred or bare life in *Dzhan*. For example, Chagataev feels "sympathy for all poor life" of his native land and "cared for everything that existed, as if it were sacred." Ibid., 22, 29.

79. Ibid., 33.

80. Ibid., 33–35.

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suspended between life and death, exclusion and sacredness, bestiality and divinity.

Throughout the text, Platonov consistently exposes the double bind in which human subjects find themselves. The Dzhan's transition from apolitical to political status, and from the natural, animal realm to the cultural, human one, is never final. Rather, it demonstrates a process of oscillation between two poles, and this is the locus of the ultimate deconstruction of Stalinist discourse and its rigid polarities, which were violently imposed on the inhabitants of the Soviet state. *Dzhan* shows that the freedom to oscillate cannot be taken from the people, for it is naturally embedded. Nazar Chagataev realizes this ultimate truth when he sets off in search of his dispersed nation and meets the old man Suf'ian in the house of a *doutar* maker.

> Then Chagataev asked him what had happened to their Dzhan tribe.
>
> "They've gone their different ways, Nazar, each of them has gone off on his own to live," said Sufyan. "The nation didn't have the strength to go anywhere before, but you fed it—so off it wandered."
>
> "But why?" Chagataev asked in surprise. "The nation will lose all its strength again!"
>
> "The nation's doing what it has to do," answered Sufyan. "And when it's been away long enough, it will go back to the Ust-Yurt."
>
> "But where have they all gone?"
>
> "I didn't ask," said Sufyan. "They've got minds of their own."[81]

The suprasocialist task appears already to have been achieved by Chagataev: the people have gained the strength to live on their own. Their natural volition is respected, for "the nation's doing what it has to do" and "they've got minds of their own." Their uninhibited act of evasion signifies a resistance to totalizing ideology: the Dzhan people refuse to become political animals—that is, subjects of biopolitical practices and strict categorization. Instead, they evolve into truly apolitical animals, with the uncultivated Turkmen desert as their natural habitat. Members of the nation find themselves suspended between several sets of extreme polarities: between nature and artifice, base animality and the repudiation of corporeality through intense physical endurance, and the complete absence of any system of kinship and a transcendent collectivity.

The beginning of the novella, for instance, depicts the Dzhan people as thoroughly asocial animals lacking any emotion: Chagataev's mother indifferently banishes her young son and shows almost total apathy upon his return as a grown man; blind Molla Cherkezov does not care whether he lives with a donkey or a wife; even the child Aidym—the hope for the socialist future—has eyes that seem not to see and shows no attachment to her father when Chagataev takes her away from her home. The tension between emotional impotence (lack of care for each other) and a natural tendency toward collectivity culminates in a clash between the asocial condition of the people and the socialist agenda that they are encouraged to implement. The overall "degeneration" of the Dzhan people is redeemed toward the end of the novella—or, to

81. Ibid., 132–33.

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be more precise, toward the end of the extended version, when the "isolated pieces at draughts" merge into a single collective body and become a sacred socialist nation.[82] In his *History of Animals*, Aristotle defines a "political animal" as one that has "some one common activity" or function (almost akin to Nikolai Fedorov's concept of *obshchee delo*).[83] The "politically correct" ending appears to turn the asocial animals of the Dzhan nation into truly socialist political animals by endowing them with the common task of building communism. The sense that they become part of the great socialist supranation becomes apparent in an official recognition of Chagataev's mission, which states that "happiness always takes on a large dimension; it is equivalent to the whole of socialism."[84]

"The whole of socialism" is a blessed state: a supranational condition, a proletarian paradise, and the universal polis. In this sense, it is illuminating that Aristotle's term *polis* can also mean *citizenship* and a *body of citizens*.[85] Thus, instead of founding a city-state, the Dzhan people, with Chagataev's assistance, find themselves merged with the Soviet collective body. However, this newly expanded body preserves its distinct corporeal features and refuses to evolve into an abstract rhetorical body representing the Stalinist state. The ultimate incorporation is achieved through the conceptual transfiguration of a key category: their main designator and proper name, which means *soul*. That final union is preceded by some remarkable passages that reveal several qualitative transmutations of the notion of soul.

For instance, soul literally fuses with body in the following passage, which centers on the people's experience of starving: "Food at this moment would serve both to nourish the soul, and to make empty, submissive eyes begin to shine again and take in the sunlight scattered over the earth."[86] The soul appears to be directly connected to the gastrointestinal tract, for it is nourished with ordinary food.[87] Its immateriality is vigorously challenged, as it appears to be incorporated into a human body. At a later point, however, the soul itself

82. The concepts of *the collective* and *the individual* are extensively and exhaustively discussed in Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley, 1999).

83. Aristotle, *History of Animals: Books I–III*, trans. A. L. Peck, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 15.

84. Platonov, "Soul," 143.

85. Aristotle uses an analogy infused with bodily references when he discusses the primacy of the city-state: "The state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand, except in an equivocal sense, as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that. But things are defined by their working and power; and we ought not to say that they are the same when they no longer have their proper quality, but only that they have the same name." Aristotle, *Politics*, 5.

86. Platonov, "Soul," 92.

87. This idea is further developed in *Schastlivaia Moskva* (Happy Moscow, 1933–36), which was written at the same time as *Dzhan*. In the novel, Sambikin claims that he has discovered the exact location of the human soul—it is found in an empty space in the intestine, somewhere between undigested food and excrement. Andrey Platonov, *Happy Moscow*, trans. Robert and Elizabeth Chandler, Angela Livingstone, Nadya Burova, and Eric Naiman (London, 2001), 74.

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functions as a source of sustenance. The collective body of the Dzhan is described as nourishing itself not only through ordinary food but also through the soul: "No nation, not even the Dzhan, can live life split up and scattered. People receive nourishment from one another not only through the bread they eat but also through the soul, through sensing and imagining one another."[88] The soul here becomes a hybrid entity, belonging to both the physical and spiritual realms (due to its "sensing and imagining" abilities) and capable of unifying the scattered and alienated people. At the moment when the Dzhan are converted into a single collective body, they attain the full realization of the actual name of their tribe. When the people, who are internally ethnically diverse, regain their soul, it replaces the concept of individual identity. Even as an immaterial category, the soul serves as the sole common denominator of the people's bodies. Moreover, it is crucial that the soul is already inherent or even embedded in the collective body of the nation; it only needs to be rediscovered.

The soul's uniting aspect is crucial to understanding *Dzhan*'s ideological coordinates. This is the discursive kernel of Platonov's project of displacing Stalinist ideology: the collective body of the totalitarian state cannot have a soul, as it is an inherently individual category. By materializing the notion of the soul and then turning it into a supracommunal entity, Platonov evades oppressive biopolitical constraints, for the soul is a guarantor of freedom. Thus, Chagataev's mission is to help the Dzhan people attain their true soul, to free it from ideological constraints and metaphysical doubts. As he explains to the group, "You must have been given someone else's soul. . . . Life itself is enough to earn you happiness! Our soul is in the world now. And that's the only soul there is."[89] Chagataev is apparently talking about the Soviet soul, a proletarian soul, which possesses the power to bring consciousness back to the mind.

The sphere of bare life in the desert, facing an open horizon, seems to be the natural habitat for the ensouled Dzhan people; it comprises some kind of a national park for the surrogate proletariat. The sacred and at the same time profane status of its dwellers allows them to evade any ideological and political conceptualization. The peripatetic nation of the Dzhan enters a zone of absolute indistinction and finds itself constantly on the move. Indeed, according to the Turkmen folk belief cited by Platonov, *dzhan* means "a soul that is looking for happiness." This is not a settled soul, it is a soul in motion—*anima*.

Moreover, the Dzhan's nomadic state, demonstrating a perpetual kinesis of physical bodies and metaphysical categories, resonates with the nation's problematic ethnic homogeneity. This fictional detail reflects the actual condition of early twentieth-century Turkmens, who "conceptualized community boundaries in terms of genealogy rather than territory."[90] The Turkmen "nation" comprised tribes that spoke different dialects and were genealogically diverse and hostile to each other. Hence, the purely artificial construction of

88. Platonov, "Soul," 130.
89. Ibid., 105–6.
90. Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton, 2004), 42.

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nationhood based on geographic location formed an irrelevant identity category for the inhabitants of Soviet "Turkmenistan" in the early years after the October revolution. The situation of dispersal and disconnectedness was a natural one for the inhabitants of the Kara-Kum desert and its surroundings.

Accordingly, the persistent motif of the tumbleweed—a "wandering plant, the rough bush known as 'roll-over-fields' [*'perekati-pole'*]"—serves as a potent symbol of the Dzhan nation in the novella, perfectly reflecting its historical and aesthetic realities. The plant appears prominently at the moment of Chagataev's banishment from his native land by his own mother, and it is described as "dusty and tired, almost dead from the labor of its own life and movement; it had no one, no family, no one close, and it was always moving away into the distance."[91] Over the course of the novella, the plant serves as a guide for the little boy Nazar and for the lost sheep, and at times as a source of food for the desperate, semiconscious Chagataev. Toward the end of *Dzhan*, immediately after his mother's death, the protagonist "pulled some tumbleweed out of the snow and took it into the house where his mother was lying." The image of the literally domesticated plant closes the narrative cycle of the novella: "Chagataev was now seeing off his mother, just as once, in his childhood, she had seen off Nazar."[92] However, this domestication is only temporary. The tumbleweed, which "is freer and more alive than a laborer with no land," evades the Bolsheviks' grassrooting (*korenizatsiia*) policies.[93] The entrance of the tribal and untamable Dzhan into the normative framework of the Soviet state is postponed, as it continues its tumbleweed-like journey through the open and windy space of the Turkmen desert.

On his way home to the Turkmen desert, and to his reunion with his mother and nation, Chagataev encounters a homemade portrait of Stalin. The "canvas" bears little resemblance to the Soviet leader: the painted Stalin "looked like an old man, the kind father of all orphaned people on earth; without realizing it, however, the artist had tried to make Stalin's face resemble his own, to show that he himself now had a father and kinsfolk and did not live alone in the world."[94] The artifact's artifice is openly acknowledged. The depicted "father" remains divorced from reality (with the lack of a link to the real Stalin) and is elevated to a universal level. At the same time, the figure of the leader is inscribed into the reality of the amateur artist through mutual resemblance.

Throughout the novella, the figure of Stalin oscillates between abstract and real realms: he is a gatherer of "whole nations," a "good word," an inscription on a "fortress's clay wall," and "an unknown man."[95] However, this instability is somewhat resolved toward the end of *Dzhan*, when "the greatest genius of all times and nations" ultimately evolves into a product of the protagonist's imagination: "Had Chagataev not imagined Stalin, had he not sensed him as a father, as a kind strength that protected and enlightened his

91. Platonov, "Soul," 13.
92. Ibid., 118.
93. Ibid., 105.
94. Ibid., 21.
95. Ibid., 130, 30, 54, 67.

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life, he would not have been able to recognize the meaning of his existence."[96] The sentence does not portray an ordinary being; it is rather a description of a divine figure. Stalin is more than he is and hence transcends reality.

Gustav Klutsis's *Shock Workers of the Fields, Engage in Fighting for Socialist Reconstruction!* (1932), a canonical propaganda poster, features a photograph of the leader emerging from and hovering above a sea of peasant workers that is made up of smaller photographic portraits. The photomontage emphasizes the simple fact that the individual body in the Soviet Union of the 1930s was always subjected to a larger cause; it was part of something greater. Moreover, the ontological status of the photographic image, positioned on the threshold between the real and the imaginary, helps the artist capture the essence of socialist realism: its rootedness in reality is combined with transcendental aspirations.[97] Stalin represents a collective body while literally emerging from various real individuals.[98] Of course, this collective body rejects the possibility of soul, a strictly individual and idealistic category. "Soul work" is replaced by banners with ideological truisms.

The poster, with its evident corporeal manipulations, comprises a striking counterillustration to *Dzhan*. Chagataev, who is also inseverable from the body of his nation, merges with the Dzhan people by subjecting himself to extreme collective physical experiences. Instead of vertical imposition, he practices horizontal dissolution in the open Turkmen desert, where sky merges with earth. Nevertheless, the protagonist compares himself to the Soviet leader in a moment of utter desperation: like Stalin, the gatherer of all of humanity, he must gather the Dzhan tribe and "let it recover, let it begin life from the very beginning, since it's never been allowed to live until now."[99] However, unlike Stalin, Chagataev does not evolve into a transcendental entity and does not deprive his nation of its agency: he neither negates its bodily framework nor suppresses its zoological impulses.

Communist ethics required a total commitment and supracorporeal loyalty to its cause. The animus of the Stalinist state toward individual bodies and animal life culminates in *Dzhan* in an illusion of bodily transcendence. The collective body of the Dzhan, however, is by no means virtual, and its corporeality, sustained by the animating force of life, is the novella's most vivid feature. As one of the nation's members puts it, "I've nowhere to live but my own body."[100] Even the soul of the nation becomes a hybrid entity, belonging to both physical and spiritual realms.

96. Ibid., 131.

97. Victoria Bonnell argues that photomontage, as an agent of verisimilitude, is "the quintessential application of socialist realism in the visual sphere." Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, 1997), 40.

98. Other notable examples of propaganda art depicting Stalin in the same manner include Genrikh Futerfas's *Stalin's Followers! Widen the Front of Stakhanov's Movement!* (1936), Aleksandr Gerasimov's *The Speech of I. V. Stalin at the Sixteenth Party Congress* (1935), and a number of other posters by Gustav Klutsis, such as *The Victory of Socialism in Our Country Is Guaranteed* (1932), *With Lenin's Banner* (1933), and *Cadres Decide Everything* (1936).

99. Platonov, "Soul," 130.

100. Ibid., 132.

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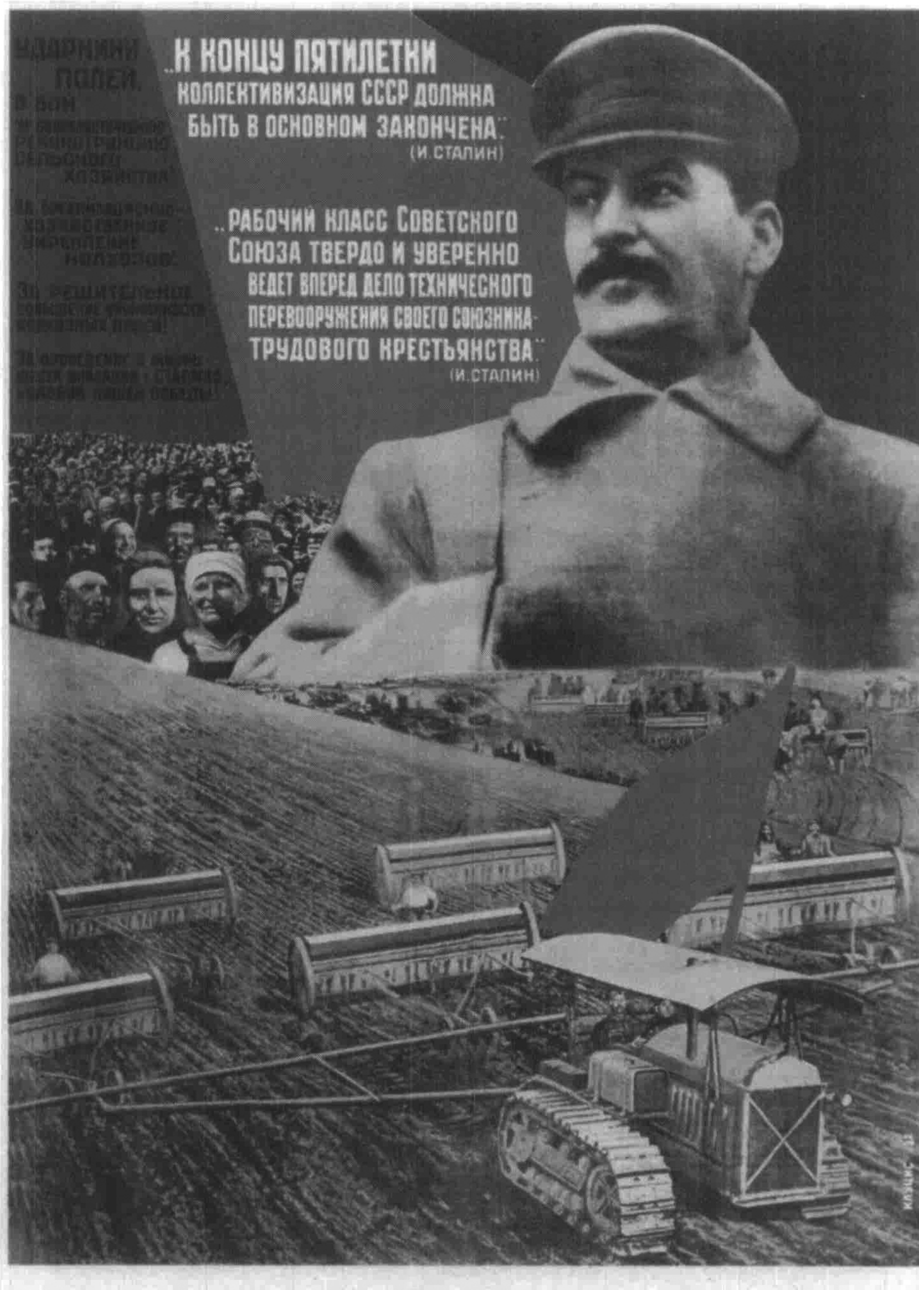

Gustav Klutsis, *Shock Workers of the Fields, Engage in Fighting for Socialist Reconstruction!*, color lithograph, 1932. Russian State Library. Photograph from Fine Art Images.

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The novella shows the Dzhan nation at various stages of its development, from dissolution through elemental want to induction into the domus of the Soviet civilizing process. But ultimately, the text reveals the Dzhan people as a site of bare life itself in its indestructible corporeal glory. Their very bodily integrity results in the possibility of freedom, for the body always has the potential to escape ideological categorization by the mere fact of its physical existence. Here, Stalinist cosmology is deconstructed by means of an elemental manifestation of nature.

Platonov, immersed in Soviet culture and politics, clearly understood the internal workings of the discursive deadlock in which human subjects could find themselves, suspended between the realms of the animal and the human, the corporeal and the political, and the natural and the cultural. This awareness, to a large extent, explains the writer's own ambivalent ideological stance: the ardent materialist with a concrete transformational agenda was also a prophet of lyric abstraction and (anti)utopian thinking. Throughout Platonov's texts, animal and human flesh always meet the abstraction of culture. The people of the Dzhan nation—representing the inexterminable manifestation of life, of incorporated souls—comprise a striking instance of Platonov's aesthetic vision, even as it was clouded by the Stalinist nightmare.

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