Original Article

Proletarians in Care: Laboring Animals and Plants

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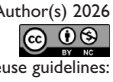

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of socialist care as depicted in Soviet agricultural brochures, manuals, and guides from the 1920s to the 1930s, with a particular focus on how care practices extended from the human to nonhuman workers. Care and care work are approached through feminist social reproduction theory, particularly through a rereading of Alexandra Kollontai's ideas from an animal-centered optic. In this perspective, the socialization of all spheres of life was expected to generate new forms of care, including for nonhuman proletarians, with Kollontai emphasizing the production of life itself rather than its mere reproduction for capital. This article traces a trajectory from the revolutionary vision of animal liberation from suffering, imagined as following women's emancipation and their contribution to class struggle, to the rejection of this ideology during Soviet collectivization and industrialization, when it was dismissed as utopian and misleading. As a result, labor itself became naturalized, and women's reproductive functions were redistributed during collectivization across all participants in production relations, irrespective of gender or species. This shift gave way to a discussion of conceiving production as labor conjugations (Alexander Bogdanov's term) that extend beyond the human body to include animals, machines, and plants. The article also problematizes the concept of care, tracing its Heideggerian origins and linking it to contemporary theories of interspecies and feminist care. As a concluding conceptual element, the works of Soviet writer Andrey Platonov are employed as a critical source for reimagining care as care for yet-to-come communism, deferred for future use.

Keywords

socialist concepts of care, Andrey Platonov, nonhuman proletarians, interspecies labor, biopolitics of care

Care With a Nonhuman Face

A humble book of 48 pages published in Russian in 1929 by veterinarian and Red Army soldier Alexey Orlov—*Caring, Not Beating Urges Work and Milking Capacity* (Orlov, 1929)—perhaps offers the core idea of a collectivist attempt to bring into peasant farming a scientific approach and mechanization to eliminate meaningless violence against livestock and to increase its

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productivity. Practical criticism of carelessness toward the soil, natural resources, and unjustified violence against animals and humans is a key focus of many manuals, lectures, technical instructions, communist party decrees, books, and brochures that in the 1920s–1930s were distributed across the entire Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), primarily among the peasant population. The main purpose of this applied literature, varying in genre but unified in content and general message, was to build a new communist village, embracing every practical narrative under the curious word "care" and its derivatives. Let me mention the most vivid titles: *Care for Horse; Care for Tractor; Care for Forest; Care for Cow; Care for Camel; Care for . . . automobile; oil engines; machines in the factory; bees; sowings; soviet civil servant; meadows; gardens; puppy; soil; poultry; pigs; vineyard; sunflower; bull; root vegetables; corn; chickens; woman in labor; animals in labor; locomotive; sugar beet* . . . I should stop somewhere. Otherwise, this list never ends, as if someone who cares were in a hurry to remember every object of their concern in an effort not to repeat "Epimetheus's fault,"[1] and through this concern to transform the object of care into a communist future. The object of care expands and embraces the whole world. Now, everything is subject to care.

This ideologically driven applied literature, produced as one of the instruments of the Narkomzem (People's Commissariat of Agriculture), served as both a blueprint for the reconstruction of agriculture and a tool for managing the so-called planned relocation of populations—a means of redistributing labor power to not-yet-cultivated territories. On paper at least, this body of literature embodied key Marxist principles concerning nature: using "poor" resources like water, wind, and sunlight to build a zero-waste economy and counteract capitalist exploitation of the earth (Shuvaev, 1931); eliminating cruelty toward farm animals; and cultivating plants in ways that encourage interspecies cooperation (Sazonov & Nikitina, 2020). Its ultimate goal was to include nonhuman beings among the proletariat, thereby reconfiguring social relations and advancing the construction of communism. Nature contains senseless suffering; it has no communism of its own. Communism must be cultivated within its parts. For this reason, nature is expected to become a worker, integrated into the production of a new society, and in this way, the exploitation of it must come to an end. In this sense, the concepts of socialization and collectivization were understood literally as the creation of a society to which both human and nonhuman beings belong. The Russian word for socialization is *obobshchestvlenie*, which comes from *obshchestvo* and *obshchiy*, meaning both "society" and "common." And in such a society, once suffering had become common, it would vanish entirely, and the long-dreamed earthly paradise of humankind would at last appear.[2]

The brochures about communist care convey the idea that all living beings, woven into processes of collectivization, become participants in shaping the world through productive work, where the birth of the world transcends the boundaries of biological ties. In the early Soviet Union, the concept of care as the foundation of a communist society and state originated with the socialist feminist and revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai. After the October Revolution, she entered the first Soviet Government as People's Commissar of Social Welfare, a post she held from October 26, 1917, to March 19, 1918. Her work focused on improving the social conditions of women, children, and people with disabilities, as well as on enhancing prenatal care. She also convened a committee to develop a free public health system for the Soviet Republic and supported policies that benefited women, such as those related to abortion and divorce (Novikova & Ghodsee, 2023, p. 72). At the same time, her understanding of social care went far beyond the creation of corresponding institutions. In Kollontai's publicist writings and prose, care had to be rethought at its core and become the foundation for the emergence of a new world.

Susan Ferguson (2020), in her book *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour and Social Reproduction*, examines Kollontai's ideas through the lens of social reproduction theory. This theory analyzes the connection between the production of life, the functioning of the family, and the production of labor power required for capital accumulation. The core criticism raised by this

approach is the paradox that social reproduction work, along with the closely related sphere of care work that sustains the biological existence of the labor force, is not recognized within the capitalist system as productive labor possessing value. On one hand, Ferguson distinguishes Kollontai for conceptualizing the double oppression of women in both the workplace and the domestic sphere as a unified systemic issue, emphasizing her vision of a radical redistribution of productive responsibilities among all members of communist society—one organized around the production of life rather than the production of capital. On the other hand, Ferguson criticizes Kollontai for overlooking how women's bodies become intertwined with the state and its reproductive duties. When Kollontai speaks of a communist democratic society that relieves women of the burden of motherhood and socializes the care of children—"the future labor units"—she emphasizes that one important social function remains for women. This function, carried out by their own choice, is motherhood and breastfeeding (Kollontai, 1977c, p. 144). Ferguson also stresses that Kollontai underestimates and never actually develops the concept of women's unpaid domestic labor as the basis of social reproduction. She argues that Kollontai's calls to socialize everyday life appear naïve. Ferguson finally adds that, in Kollontai's vision, the emancipation of women proceeds through the call first to enter capitalist labor relations and only subsequently join the class struggle. According to her, this problem, common among many socialist feminists, stems from the expectation that a woman, rather than engaging in superfluous domestic labor, will begin contributing to society and the state (Ferguson, 2020, p. 68).

Yet Kollontai understood this point quite clearly. In her 1918 article "The Family and the Communist State," she argued that the unpaid and burdensome domestic care work placed on women's shoulders before the revolution must no longer function as hard reproductive labor. Such work, she insisted, perpetuated capitalist and patriarchal relations. Instead, it had to be socialized, grounded in free love, and directed toward the benefit of society and the state (Kollontai, 1919, pp. 16–17). Thus, care work of social reproduction should be shared collectively by all proletarians and peasants regardless of gender, as well as be "equal in their rights and obligations": "In place of the individual and egotistic family, there will arise a great universal family of workers, in which all the workers, men and women, will be, above all, brothers, comrades" (Kollontai, 1919, p. 19).

It is important to note that in her remarks on social reproduction, Kollontai speaks rather about the renewed *production* of the world and society. This constitutes both a forceful claim and an attempt to re-create the world beyond existing social and economic relations. She viewed peasant and proletarian women's domestic labor—including childbirth—as a capitalist mechanism of state-building that simultaneously resulted in women's subjugation, since patriarchy is inseparable from capitalism (Kollontai, 1919, p. 14). Her unconventional thinking regarded the solution to this problem as a further stage in social development—one involving a radical rejection of the family form that enslaves women in domestic servitude and a movement toward a society in which "the machine superseded the wife" (Kollontai, 1977a, p. 254). These ideas are most vividly expressed in her prose and essays, which articulate a vision of everyday life transformed through automation.

For example, in the short story *Soon (In 48 Years)* (Kollontai, 1923b), young women and men devote 2 hr to community work and spend the rest of their time on personal pursuits—science, technology, and art. This narrative illustrates both Kollontai's demand that "housework ceases to be necessary" (Kollontai, 1977a, p. 253) and her reflections on love articulated in the article "Make Way for Winged Eros" (1923). Everyday life and domestic labor were to become deterritorialized through public kitchens, kindergartens, laundries, etc., and automated (Roberts, 2020, p. 199). The easing of women's reproductive labor, achieved by transferring child care to the communist collective and the state, was intended to free up time for love. Love was considered a vital socioeconomic function that capitalism had denied to both peasant and proletarian women. This will further create space for love to be extended to other members of the collective, and, I

dare suggest, as a marginal note, even to the emancipated more-than-human proletarians of the future: "The narrow and exclusive affection of the mother for her own children must expand until it embraces all the children of the great proletarian family" (Kollontai, 1919, p. 19).

Kollontai's ideas about the emancipation of women are of particular interest to me because they are rooted in "a transformative love" and directed against building a new society based on patriarchal unity and homogeneity. In "Winged Eros," she points out that for the development of communism, the masculine sphere alone and the process of becoming a man are not sufficient. She contrasts rationality and efficiency in post-revolutionary decisions to the sphere of care and affect (Curatorlab in Conversation with Bini Adamczak, 2020, p. 137), suggesting that automation contributes to the development and strengthening of care in the new society.

Similarly, these ideas could be applied to animals. The undervalued labor of nonhuman living beings was to be eliminated through mechanization and science, along with the education and upbringing of a new society in which the animal is liberated from cruel nature. The participation of working animals would be transferred into the productive domain of the new communist society, rather than into the reproduction of old capitalist and peasant structures. This point is crucial for understanding the emergence of the concept of collective care, which extends beyond the human horizon. As reproductive labor within social reproduction ceases to be assigned exclusively to women, responsibility falls to all members of the new community—regardless of gender, race, or species. This concept moves beyond a merely human proletariat.

During collectivization, the early Soviet discourse of social care for children and motherhood—framed in terms of "upbringing" and "education" *(vospitaniye)*, together with prenatal care—was redeployed in zootechnics and agrotechnics, applied to a wide range of agricultural animals and plants. Whether this can be seen as a consequence of "the imposition of universal norms without regard for local contexts—including in the field of emancipation" (Talaver, 2020, p. 14)—is difficult to assert with complete certainty. However, the coincidence of rhetoric and material measures adopted in the 1920s in relation to women, and later transferred to the sphere of agriculture, cannot, in my view, be overlooked.

Lectures for managers of commercial dairy farms (MTFs), herdsmen, and milkmaids emphasize that "care for an animal begins long before its birth" (Ryleyev, Lecture 1, 1932a, p. 2) and that "care for young stock does not commence with its birth, but long in advance" (Dorofeyev, 1934, p. 22). This care begins with the health of the mothers and breeding males, as well as their proper housing, moderate workload, and balanced diet. The practical care literature also stresses that "kind and gentle treatment is the best means of educating *(vospitannykh)* productive animals" (Ryleyev, Lecture 3, 1932b, p. 2). However, proper care of livestock is impossible without the mechanization of agriculture itself—an idea that naturally follows from the discussions of the automation and socialization of everyday life. Once people and the state socialize the very notion of care, cows, horses, pigs, and many other nonhuman proletarians no longer need to concern themselves with their own survival. Conversely, under capitalism and the harsh rule of the solitary peasant-owner, they were "preoccupied only with the care of somehow keeping themselves warm" (Orlov, 1925, p. 4) and endured a "careless" condition.

Consequently, care introduced a new grammar of the body into reality when collectivized humans, machines, plants, and animals received new social settings through processes of looking after and concern for others. The distribution of brochures on care for animals, machines, plants, children, and proletarians, in general, began shortly after (practically simultaneously with) the active process of eliminating illiteracy in the village. A vivid expression of the interdependence between the kolkhoz's[3] "literacy," that is, the knowledge of care, and its broader significance appears in Boris Barnet's (1951) postwar film *A Bountiful Summer*.

The film portrays a world of joyful people who, through their laboring bodies, embrace all of nature and transform their coexistence with it into an idyll. This idyll is embodied in the kolkhoz called *Forward (Vpered)* by means of the mechanization and scientification of agriculture. The

inevitability of these changes is underscored by the slogans framing the film's narrative, including the words of Ivan Michurin[4]: "We cannot wait for favors from nature. To take them from it is our task," as well as slogans like "Good care—good calves," "Let's mechanize kolkhoz farms," and "Stakhanovite watch for peace."[5] The film is also notable for two details. First, a line spoken by the female zootechnician who complains to a party official about the poor management of the kolkhoz by its chairman:

> The livestock is underfed, milk yields are consistently declining [. . .] Instead of addressing the issue seriously, he put an uncultured man in charge of the farm—someone with a primitive understanding of animal husbandry. This farm director is not interested in lectures, brochures, or anything at all! (Barnet, 1951)

Second, the film reflects a peculiar kind of "equality" between working animals—both human and nonhuman—in a scene where a woman requests the construction of a sanatorium equipped with quartz lamps, and later the film's heroine asks for the same treatment, but for the cows. A sanatorium for cows, just like one for humans, becomes a striking illustration of care extended to all participants in the construction of communism.[6]

By this point, the agricultural and animal husbandry forms of care and their manifestations at the border between human and nonhuman sociality emerge from a concern with questions of a better world and future, of labor and production, community and nature, and sexuality and gender, brought forth by the Russian Revolution of 1917. It seems that communism originally had a nonhuman face (Timofeeva, 2013); just as the revolution, combining utopianism with true Marxist practices, followed in the footsteps of the oppressed animal, with its horizon being the liberation of the not-human-enough others from capitalism and bourgeois nature. As Justyna Tymieniecka-Suchanek notes, this aspiration was perhaps best expressed by the futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov in 1920 in the lines (Tymieniecka-Suchanek, 2020, p. 158):

> Let the linden tree send her ambassadors
> To the high seats of governments everywhere [. . .]
> Again the cattle low within the cave,
> and the innocent child takes suck from the she-goat's udder
> and beasts and people crowd about
> the Divine Birth of women for today.
> I see horse-freedom
> And equal rights for cows. (Khlebnikov, 1997, p. 176)

Khlebnikov envisions an equality among humans, plants, and animals who move toward "the Divine Birth of women for today," possibly a non-masculine, monstrous beginning of a new future that breaks free from human oppression. Addressing the oppressed of the entire earth with the promise of a new future, the new emancipated woman is to bring about a transformation of the world, to give birth to it together with other multiple beings.

Kollontai's (1923a) writings also engage the motif of the animal dimension of the feminine. In her third letter to the youth, *On the Dragon and the White Bird*, she argues that a woman should be recognized as an individual animal—the white bird—rather than reduced to the "species-repetitive" or "collectively feminine." The white bird here, like the "love of the worker bees" in her eponymous collection of stories and short novels published in 1923, embodies "the creativity of every individual—within the depths of the collective" (Kollontai, 1923a, p. 174). This claim may be extended further: the animal must be emancipated not only from nature, understood as biological determinism, but also from the patriarchal perceptions that have historically defined and confined it. The short story *Soon (In 48 Years)* elaborates this idea by portraying liberation from nature as the sole adversary through practices of care—protecting forests,

improving field cultivation, and tending gardens. Here, the vision of liberating nature from itself emerges as a perpetual project of human striving. Once the sexual and social questions have been resolved, communist society, through forms of care articulated in science, technology, teaching, and art, will be able to liberate the animal from nature. "You have conquered the social forces. We shall conquer nature," concludes the young generation of the *Tenth Commune*, which by that time no longer knew what it meant to fight against living people (Kollontai, 1923b).

In this sense, the stage of producing a new community and collectivity is linked to two crucial moments. The first concerns the consequences of the dehumanization of the human and liberation of the animal within, since in its slogans and measures the revolution goes beyond human rights toward more-than-human rights (Timofeeva, 2013), thus embodying an original posthumanist drive to create an all-encompassing human-animal-plant proletariat beyond sex, race, gender, and species (Žižek, 2016, p. 57). The second concerns a special mode of social reproduction where care—a concern for the new world—and care work mobilize all living beings to construct the future. This transforms life itself into one that extends beyond the accessible horizon of the "now" into the not-yet embodied. To liberate the animal from nature, to free resources from it and to instill a "caring attitude" not only toward humans but also "toward every pood of coal, toward every pood of bread" (Lenin, 1974, p. 372); to liberate the woman from the burden of childbirth and childrearing; to socialize the care of society itself—these became the central aims of care work oriented toward the future. However, what went wrong in this communist attempt to provide all living beings with care? Something that everyone desires and to which even today the theorists of more-than-human projects still aspire?

Ukhod or Care?

The brochures on care for nonhuman proletarians tell us the story of interspecies relations that unfold between workers in their combined reproductive labor. Most importantly, it involves articulating the direction of practical care and prescribing, in the form of explicit instructions, what it ought to be. In the language of brochures, care is articulated through two notions: *ukhod*, a practical form of care, which is conventionally translated simply as "care"; and *zabota*, which is akin to "concern." Care *(ukhod)* for children and Soviet workers, along with concern *(zabota)* for their well-being, is not at odds with care and concern for the social conditions of animals, such as hens, cows, and their calves. *Zabota* and *zabotit'sya* are used in the texts in the sense of concern about providing the best living and feeding arrangements for those being cared for and raised: "care to ensure *(zabotit'sya)* the chickens' water is clean" (Bukraba, 1934, p. 19). The "care *(zabota)* of the attending personnel" should focus on preventing colds (Stepanov, 1936, p. 36). Meanwhile, "caring for someone" *(zabotit'sya o)* or "showing care" *(proyavlyat' zabotu)* for someone is used to describe bonds among animals, especially in the context of caring for offspring, as evidenced by biology lectures for schools under the same title (Anuchin, 1924), as well as books on beekeeping: "The worker bees take care *(zabotyatsya)*"; "their care *(zabotlivost')* for the brood is astonishing" (Korablev, 1934, pp. 82, 88). Thus, to care and to tend, as well as to experience concern for each other, can be enacted by various productive kinds of beings.

Care, in both its practical *(ukhod)* and ethical *(zabota)* expressions, reaches its highest stage of development in *zabotlivyi ukhod* ("gentle care"), understood as the culmination of attentiveness and concern for the present condition of all productive species in the world. Bees, tobacco, and pigs—all require gentle care. This is especially evident in relation to prenatal and postnatal care for humans, animals, and their newborns, where concern for the birth of communist society is articulated through *gentle care* in its highest expression. Here the distinction between "care for a child" (Skryabin, 1927) or "care for a woman in labor" (Igumnov, 1926) and pregnant animal females becomes blurred: "Gentle care should be given to pregnant cows, sows in gestation, piglets from autumn-winter farrowing, pregnant sheep, and mares in foal" (Dorofeyev, 1934,

p. 25; Konge, 1926). Otherwise, a woman, or a dam, typically due to inadequate postpartum care, becomes irritable, unbearable, and unable to continue agricultural labor.

Gentle care must be given to all working proletarians and peasants with equal attentiveness. In practice, this care should be universalized for everyone in the form of prescriptive norms and tabular schemes. At the same time, it should be oriented toward constructing communism. In this framework, inadequate care is considered sabotage and counterrevolution. However, communism has not yet arrived; it remains only on the horizon. So, for whom or what do these different creatures provide care when they exceed the targets of the 5-year plans? What is the ultimate direction of their care?

Indeed, care possesses an inherent orientation—it is directed toward *being-in-the-world.* This does not imply coercion or compulsion; rather, it points to care's own need to be grounded in the world, or in the worlds of the various beings that share this earthly existence. This becomes all the more evident when we turn to projects that relocate care into an interspecies dimension. For instance, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, in engaging with permaculture to develop a more-than-human speculative ethics of care, effectively grounds this notion in practice (Bellacasa, 2017). She defines care as deeply tied to material practices, while at the same time remaining a composite of affective attachment, a complex moral and ethical stance, and the question of proper distance—or non-fusion—between the subject and the object of care, and, at times, even the choice not to care at all (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 5). Donna Haraway, likewise, writes of earthly chthonic ones who care for one another across species and family bonds in troubling times. For her, care means "to practice better care of kinds-as-assemblages (not species one at a time) [. . .] making kin and making kind (as category, care, relatives without ties by birth, lateral relatives, lots of other echoes)" (Haraway, 2016, p. 103). In both cases, care appears as deeply bound up with the ontology of beings: it opens the human toward the other and toward the worlds inhabited by diverse entities. At the same time, care is inseparably connected to narration, thinking, and their materiality.

At its core, such an approach to care, as ontological interdependence that sustains the world and the ecological relations shaping it, derives from Martin Heidegger's (1927/2001) account of care in *Being and Time*. Heideggerian care is directed *into* the world and, at its core, can be interpreted as speculative and more-than-human. As Magdalena Hoła-Łuczaj (2018) mentions in her book *Radical Non-Anthropocentrism: Martin Heidegger and Deep Ecology*, according to Heidegger, the human being does not affect the entities' identity but rather constitutes the condition of possibility for their disclosure in being (Hoła-Łuczaj, 2018, p. 233). The disclosure of being by the human unfolds in thinking that leads beyond the human itself, establishing a radical non-anthropocentrism.[7] It is precisely thinking that makes it possible to envision forms of interaction in the world among beings that have not yet been disclosed (Hoła-Łuczaj, 2018, pp. 233–234), including forms of care for the world and for the beings that inhabit it, even those not yet known. In this sense, any care for the world is not only a practical embodiment but also a speculative one, that is, continually rethinking and reinventing (disclosing) new relations within itself.

Heidegger offers a rigid structure of care that unfolds as *Sorge*, *Besorgen*, and *Fürsorge*, or "care, concern, solicitude," respectively (Heidegger, 1927/2001, p. 157), and represents one of the modes of being-in-the-world. Care makes evident the impossibility of not caring, being the ontological condition of those who inhabit the world. As I noted earlier, Heideggerian care is sustaining; it points to being-*in*-the-world. Here, "in" signifies *pflegen*, which means "to take care of" or "to look after something." This is also rendered by the Russian words *ukhod* and *ukhazhivat'* (Heidegger, 1997, p. 54). *Pflegen* is not to be understood only spatially, but rather as a mode of dwelling: a world that is inhabited, familiar, and populated. As we read in John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson's translation: "'In' is derived from *innan*—'to reside, 'habitare,' 'to dwell' *(sich aufhalten)*. 'An' signifies 'I am accustomed,' 'I am familiar with, 'I look after something'" (Heidegger, 1927/2001, p. 80).

The verb *pflegen* here does not carry an independent meaning. One can care for, and this should be understood implicitly, only something one is physically close to. There is a pre-understanding of what care entails. *Pflegen* emerges as a point of closure, an ultimate meaning that does not require clarification. It represents strictly practical and material immersion in the existing, helping to connect care to the world as it is; therefore, care is concerned with ensuring that it continues to be with the preservation of what exists, that is, the maintenance and reproduction of the ontological order.

Joan Tronto (1993), the author of *Moral Boundaries*, "still one of the most influential works on care and a landmark piece of feminist political philosophy and ethics" (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 4), recognizes Heidegger's philosophy as a major exception to the rule of Western thought when she calls it perhaps the first work to acknowledge the necessity of care for living human beings who are born, live, and die (Tronto, 1993, p. 182). However, Tronto writes that one should not follow Heidegger uncritically, since his notion of "care" is closer to "concern" than to "care" (Tronto, 1993, p. 207). In her view, this detaches the question of care from its concrete material practices and leaves the politics of care outside the realm of material social relations. "Concern" and "care" must stem from concrete lived experience, which Heidegger's notion of care, according to her, fails to recognize. At the margins, Tronto also asks why, in discussions of care, we have so long referred back to Heidegger. She notes that she will not engage with the specific meanings of *Sorge* (Tronto, 1993, p. 207). Yet, while acknowledging the concern for mortal beings in Heideggerian care, Tronto understands care as:

> everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair "our world" so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Tronto, 1993, p. 103)

And this is, in fact, a rather Heideggerian definition of care, since it is directed into the world in which the human appears as open to the world and different worldings, being a sustaining force through care and concern for the world. Bellacasa likewise takes this definition as the starting point for her project of speculative more-than-human care and ethics, where human remains the origin of "the delicate task of broadening consideration of the lives involved in caring agencies" (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 2).

In the Soviet brochures on care for productive species of animals and plants, care is articulated almost solely as practice, labor, and world-making, where its orientation exceeds the bounds of Heidegger's notion of *pflegen.* This material appears to address socialized care for the world and more-than-human beings, deeply engaging the imagination in rethinking care. Yet it does not allow us to fully invoke the idea of care for the world or concern for a better interspecies future within a reality marked by the mode of existence being-in-the-world. Perhaps one possible reason is that care unfolding here as a deeply practical, material, and social activity gestures toward the future world—not yet disclosed, not yet at hand—without grounding itself in a concrete locus within these reflections. Its orientation is toward the production of a new place, a new *topos*, rather than its sustaining and reproduction, a world that draws in a wide variety of beings. Here, *pflegen*, translated as *ukhod*, points not to being *in*-the-world but rather beyond it—to a mode of production that transcends gender and species divisions, as the birth of a communist future that is always already on the horizon but not yet tangible.

For Future Use

By 1922, Kollontai's ideas were regarded by the Party as utopian or misleading, largely because of her unconventional interpretation of the sexual question and her understanding of love as a collective and socially significant act (Novikova & Ghodsee, 2023, p. 74). As she mentioned,

"Essentially, love is a profoundly social emotion. Love is not in the least a 'private' matter concerning only the two loving persons: love possesses a uniting element which is valuable to the collective" (Kollontai, 1977b, pp. 278–279).

Kollontai provides grounds for interpreting social care as a necessary emotional practice; she does not merely speak of feelings of love or care, but rather links them to social and economic structures, treating emotional relations as collectively significant. In this context, affect and the transformation of the world toward more just relations, or, as its very birth, its production, become fundamental moments of care.

However, by the 1930s, the "woman question" in the USSR was considered resolved: gender equality had been officially declared (Andreeva, 2022), and the roles of social reproduction were accordingly regarded as equally distributed between the sexes—and, as some brochures suggest, perhaps even between species (Anuchin, 1924; Dorofeyev, 1934; Skryabin, 1927). In this sense, Kollontai's conception of care, envisioned as a free, creative act oriented toward the world to come, breaking with violence and abolishing domination, became detached from concrete state practice due to her forced resignation from the government and expulsion from the Central Committee. It should be noted that, in her position, Kollontai never advocates for a particular form of care. Instead, she describes it as primarily a matter of *educating* women: women and the beings around them are to be educated in how to move beyond capitalism and patriarchy toward collective care, where the very understanding of maternity as a social obligation acquires new meanings. As Ferguson expresses Kollontai's central point: "Housework and childrearing in their estimations are necessary labor, but they are necessary to *life*, not to the workings of *capital*" (Ferguson, 2020, p. 68).

In the USSR, however, the women's question was resolved only on paper, and in 1936, the abortion ban was reinstated (Rossman, 2020, p. 78). This nullified the entire revolutionary feminist attempt to rethink the foundations and aims of social reproduction, as well as the very notion of care on which it had been built. The feminine, liberating, affective, and revolutionary aspects of care disappear from discussion and practice. In their place comes practical collectivization and concern for the shortage of green mass and living matter. Communism requires social material and a working force for industrialization, and it is the task of all proletarians to create it through their labor and care, entering diverse relations with more-than-human others. As we will see in practice, described in brochures on the care for nonhuman proletarians, capitalist processes are masked as communism, leaving behind only a revolutionary pathos. When the redistribution of social reproduction between genders and different forms of living beings comes to a head, "it does so equally by reorganizing and devaluing all of people's life-making activities, most of which have been the tasks assigned to women" (Ferguson, 2020, p. 2).

My argument is that by the 1920s and 1930s, what we might call the idea of interspecies inclusive care—which seeks to liberate oppressed human and nonhuman proletarians by moving beyond the given world—was replaced by what agricultural and animal care brochures refer to as *ukhod*. The party line transforms the very relationships that constitute care in its practical dimension. The party line becomes a care protocol from which the emancipated woman, as well as the interrelation of care, affect, and love, are excluded. I would argue that this destabilizes the notion itself by drawing out its literal meaning: *ukhod* is etymologically bound to spatial movement (Vasmer, 1987, pp. 252–253). The movement described in the manuals, all grouped under *ukhod*, characterizes a straight-line progression from the past to the future, from socialism to communism, and from neglected livestock to collectivized animals, plants, and machines:

> One must think not only of today, but also of tomorrow, for it is necessary to meet the growing material and cultural needs of workers, collective farmers, and all those who labor in the region and throughout the Soviet Union. (Dorofeyev, 1934, p. 45)

A vivid example of critical reflection on such a practice of communist care is offered by the works of the Soviet writer Andrey Platonov. Having himself been a land reclamation and electrification engineer in the 1920s and in the 1930s actively reflecting on collectivization and its material consequences for living beings and the land, he created an entire constellation of characters preoccupied with an overwhelming care for communism. Caring for communism functions as the very premise of communism, denying self-concern and postponing what is called humanism and the human to the future—quite literally, *For Future Use's Sake* (1931), as Platonov titles one of his novels. This embodies a kind of humanization of the future at the expense of dehumanizing the present, in the gesture of deferring life for more appropriate utilization.

Platonov's *Chevengur* (1926–1928), one of the most remarkable Soviet novels about the construction of communism and socialism and a profound critical reflection on this process, presents care in its practical and material unfolding (as *ukhod*) in its most literal embodiment—in an unceasing movement. In *Chevengur*, the characters, themselves without a fixed home, keep shifting trees, houses, and roads, as though performing *ukhod* as literal displacement. In this constant relocation lies their expression of collective care for the construction of communism. To better illustrate this idea, I draw on the description of a brief episode that recurs in diverse variations across the work. When the main revolutionary, Kopionkin, asks, "Why are people moving houses about and carrying gardens around in their arms?" He is told: "Today's a volunteer Saturday [. . .] People made the journey here on foot. And now they're eager to live in comradely closeness [Russian *tesnota*—K.N.]" (Platonov, 2023, p. 242).

In this episode, Platonov captures the central organizational aspect of *ukhod* as the mass relocation of labor power, initiated by the People's Commissariat of Agriculture to increase organic mass and workforce in areas where care was insufficient. In the end, however, such *ukhod* produces nothing but crampedness, which substitutes for living mass. The very notions of *ukhod* and labor are driven by Platonov to the point of absurdity: labor is completely transformed into *ukhod*, becomes inseparable from it, and in this sense ceases to be a source of workers' exploitation. In *Chevengur*, labor is replaced by Subbotniks[8]—unpaid, socially useful nurturing of the surrounding world, carried out voluntarily in non-working hours, to live in comradeship and crowding, as the Chevengurians themselves note.

Similarly, the understanding of love and care for the other as a socially significant practice is rendered literal, even to the point of radical literalism. The absence of love and attachment between animals and collective farmers during the period of collectivization and the dispossession of individual households is noted ironically by Platonov in *The Juvenile Sea (1932)*. The author describes fat, well-fed cows from villages where an unscientific way of life prevails. Although these cows die from eating large unpeeled potatoes, they might have fared much better under the individual care and maintenance of the kulaks.[9] In contrast, on the scientifically organized Collective Farm No. 101, where socialist animal husbandry depends on calculated care, the bond between humans and animals is replaced by tables and feeding norms. These norms are presented in brochures as highly individualized—calculated for each head of livestock, each calf and piglet, and even, if necessary, for each root vegetable (Shiman, 1939). As Dorofeyev (1934, p. 54) advises: "One should not use the norms mechanically but rather take an individual approach to each calf." Surreally, the figure of the zootechnician Visokovskiy—who at first "loved livestock as such," "saw in every animal not only its weight and productivity, but also its subjective mood," and "bred animals for the birth of offspring, not for slaughter" (Platonov, 2011c, pp. 185, 223)—later comes to embody this new mode of care, grounded not in affect but in tables. Yet here, attachment gives way to training and habituation to labor. In other words, affective and emotional bonds are replaced by the formation of labor relations between working subjects, rather than by an individualized approach to breeding so-called "meat geniuses."

Affect and attachment disappear, leaving only a socially significant goal: the increase of living matter, which evokes labor as interspecies sex, reflected also in the Soviet science fiction of that time.[10] Here, we are dealing with homosexual male sex (Chehonadskih, 2023, p. 208), as direct as the party line, yet queered through various labor conjugations, while the woman remains relegated to the service staff in this relation—a milkmaid, an animal feldsher, or a swineherd. First, the process of world-birth was meant to be collective; now, it merged instead into the image of the proletarian man impregnating the universe.[11] Reproduction, according to this masculine model, is now displaced beyond the female body, extending to animals and plants as a whole.

The Soviet queer, intertwined with the concept of social reproduction, is linked to the doctrine of tektology, the "universal science," developed by Alexandr Bogdanov between 1913 and 1922. This thesis builds on my earlier essay, co-authored with Nikita Sazonov, *The Great Plan for the Queerification of Nature* (2024). Reflecting on Soviet labor theory, we observed that tektology conceives of revolutionary processes as permeating the entire universe. The reality, in this view, is always active: it incessantly generates and organizes new entities—forms, species, and objects. The organization itself is understood as an activity grounded in a chain of "conjugations." Bogdanov borrowed this term from biology, where it originally referred to the joining of two independent cells to create a proto-embryonic form of sexual reproduction. In his tektological framework, however, the scope of conjugation is vastly expanded: biological sexuality becomes a metaphor for the workings of the cosmos as a whole. Human labor, Bogdanov suggests, is essentially a sequence of such conjugations—different in scale but not in kind from cellular fusion or animal mating (Sazonov & Nikitina, 2024, p. 76).

In this perspective, care becomes a laboring conjunction, a friction between proletarians aimed at increasing the living mass and workforce for building communism. Affect disappears from relations between people, giving way to an *anti-sexus* (Sazonov & Nikitina, 2024, p. 80), where mechanical satisfaction produces nothing, gives birth to nothing, except strange conjunctions between the masculine and the nonhuman. Communism thus turns into an unattainable better future, in which the good life itself is deferred, in Platonov's phrasing, "for future use."

Proletarians in Care

I began this text by turning to the idea, articulated in communist brochures on the care for agricultural animals and plants, that all living beings under socialism, especially those inhabiting the kolkhozes, demand excellent maintenance. The brochures established that care serves to eliminate the senseless violence of nature toward various living beings. The primary goal of care, as emphasized in multiple manuals and educational texts, is to increase livestock productivity. In this framework, the concept of the workforce explicitly extends to agricultural animals and plants, treating them as laborers. We also further concluded that care, above all in its practical unfolding as *ukhod*, is a laboring conjugation, where the connection with a tool or another being is understood as a hybrid copulation, an interspecies sex aimed at increasing the living mass of communism. Let us now, in this final section, turn directly to how care is practically manifested, what concrete actions it entails, and what consequences it may lead to.

Care is a Struggle Against Substandard Care

Its primary characteristic, therefore, lies in the requirement that it must be good, proper care (Kolkhoznomu konyu obraztsovuyu zabotu i otlichnyy ukhod, 1934). From this premise, care unfolds on a massive scale and encompasses supervision, nurturance, guardianship, and maintenance. Meanings such as "to preserve" (*berech'*), "to labor and grow" (*obrabatyvat'*), "to treat gently" (*laskovo otnosit'sya*), "to correct (a condition)" (*popravlyat' polozheniye*), or "to improve"

(the condition of soils, meadows, forests, breeds, and cultivated plants and animals) are woven into the notion.

But where does the demand for "good care," equally good for everyone, actually lead? In practice, "good care" is always an intervention—an attempt at control and management—that interferes with the very process of care itself (Mol, 2008, p. 84). In this sense, "good care" is never fully attainable. The danger lies in the fact that it has neither end nor limit: its definition can be easily devalued, and it is here that the ambivalence of care becomes apparent—as a practice that risks turning oppressive or violently transformative of the other. "Good care" imposes unclear demands on care workers. As Bellacasa reminds us, discussions of "good care" are never neutral: the work of care can just as easily be carried out within, and on behalf of, worlds that we might consider unacceptable (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 6).

Yet the literal linkage of communist care with forward movement—movement that should recognize no limits—can only be tied to an equally unlimited notion of "good" care. This also helps to explain why exemplary communist care entails "struggle" (*bor'ba*) against wrecking and wreckers, against weeds, as well as against the decline and exhaustion of living beings. If care is neglected, it signals counterrevolution. Struggle becomes impossible, everything is depleted, falls into decline, and is overrun with weeds: "Both natural meadows and those created artificially, if left to themselves, gradually become wild, fall into decline, and eventually turn back into the wastelands from which they were formed" (Sevitov, 1925, p. 3).

Care is a Set of Techniques

In the brochures, good care is presented as management, as a question of maintaining the human–nonhuman being in working condition. Thus, care inherently contains a certain degree of necessary violence, physical manipulation, and biocontrol, all of which are tied to the *shaping* of the animal's body for labor and its maintenance within the conditions of a socialist farm: cutting sharp teeth and horns, castration, culling or eliminating infected or disabled animals, trimming ears and tails, removing superfluous digits, and other procedures. This is achieved through particular care techniques *(tekhnika ukhoda)*, such as zootechnics, agrotechnics, and zoohygiene. The latter encompasses nutrition and the maintenance of bodily cleanliness, as well as an appropriately calculated workload (Stepanov, 1936, p. 36). The question of how much proletarians should work and how much benefit they should contribute to the collective is specifically important for zoohygiene, which, in practice, doesn't differ from *human* work hygiene or occupational health, providing animals with clean and bright space, fresh air, and feeding according to standards with good-quality food (Katuntsev, 1928, p. 19).

Care Prevents Animals From Being Exploited and Turned into Tools and Machines. Yet Even Machines Receive "Human" Treatment When Properly Cared For

Horses are not machines; they cannot be ruthlessly and thoughtlessly exploited, claims Samuil Krever, describing care for horses as helpers in farming and defenders of the country (Krever, 1936, p. 3). At the same time, machines themselves—tractors, tools, "Fords"—often, like animals, require similar "living" treatment (Drezeman, 1935; Gavrilov, 1923; Isaev, 1929; Krokhalev, 1926; Ognev, 1939). It is interesting that in manuals and brochures on the care for machines and guides for livestock care, there are often phrases that unify these categories, such as "due to improper care" *(iz-za nenadlezhashchego ukhoda)*, "due to careless handling and use" *(iz-za nebrezhnogo obrashcheniya i ispol'zovaniya)*, "breaks down" *(lomayetsya)*, "becomes unfit for work" *(prikhodit v negodnost')*, "suffers dangerous damage" *(poluchayet*

opasnyye povrezhdeniya), and "premature wear occurs" *(nastupayet prezhdevremennaya iznoshennost').* The classic "breakdown" of both a machine and an animal links them together, making their existence visible and requiring attention. But does this breakdown, in this case, liberate them? Does it make them subjects?

Care is the Elimination of Suffering

Krever's manual for horse care and Stepan Krasnoperov's pre-revolutionary brochure for bee care, which was reprinted nine times, offer humans to become animals in their tendance for others. "The human kind of takes over bee duties," becoming an extension of the bees' labor and intellect (Krasnoperov, 1918, p. 42). A Red Army soldier merges with a horse, a gentle and timid animal susceptible to diseases and thus requiring special attention and tenderness (Krever, 1936, p. 46). These brochures have in common a belief that, under the human gaze, animals should not be in pain, fear, or discomfort. And those who tend to them should understand the wordless needs of the care object and thus must, in a way, become a part of it too. However, the boundary between humans and animals in the texts is vivid and builds on the animal negativity: "they are not humans," "they are not fully autonomous and demand care," and this is the reason humans should be taught how to understand them (Orlov, 1925, p. 19).

Care is an Experiment Because it Must Always Strive to Improve

To remedy the machine or animal breakdown, new actors emerged in the socialist agricultural system—adjacent professions such as auto- and zootechnicians—as subjects of zoohygiene, equipped with specialized tools for lubrication, cleaning, inspection, measuring, storing, protecting, sheltering, and repairing. Yet, the instruments and instructions of care were still not fully invented and were in the process of being developed and tested in practice. Kolkhozniks tinkered with them and conceived; thus, converted plowshare seeders, improved ventilation ducts for cowsheds, new types of feeders and arrangements for animal living spaces, suspended cages for chickens, and numerous other experiments came to light (Gerken, 1922; Katuntsev, 1930; Kitaytsev, 1938; Sukhomlin, 1934).

Particularly, diverse agricultural "home-made innovations" are described by Vladimir Shiman in the brochure on crop care, where the experiments of Stakhanovites with engineering solutions, sowing tools, and fertilizers are specifically discussed (Shiman, 1939, p. 11). The manual mentions Trofim Lysenko's father, who devised a method to fertilize winter wheat and achieved a yield increase of 10 centners per hectare—now he advises this invention to the entire Union.

There is also a heartfelt story about Stakhanovite Chalova nursing a sick beetroot in 1938: "We fed it, watered it separately, cared for it as if it were ill. And it recovered" (Shiman, 1939, p. 53). As if these "masters of the harvest" and the country's "best milkmaids," with their monstrously hybrid tools (devices for the udder used to pump air; mating stall; ridge-cutting plows; milking machines; ear tags, automatic buttons; tattooing pliers; equipment for semen collection and artificial insemination; nose ring), could not help but create, could not help but respond to the responsiveness *(otzyvchivost')*, namely, readiness of animals and plants for education and cultivation[12]; and could not help but build communism using whatever means were at hand.[13]

Care is Socialization—the Creation of a Unified Collective

The care concept largely stems from the conviction that living beings cannot be left to themselves (Shiman, 1939, p. 6). They must become a part of the working society. The socialization of

animals and plants involves incorporating them into a unified organism with more-than-human zoological and botanical hygiene and veterinary requirements. This care for the population is manifested by distinguishing between the healthy and the sick and placing the latter in isolation or eliminating them. Care is an integral part of the "unnatural nature" constructed by humans. Without it, the order humans bring to the fields or forests cannot survive. It is cultivation, in the literal sense of the word, the relocation of animals and plants into the realm of human society and culture. But being a political action—one that secures a place in the state through ideology and mobilizes nonhuman agents for class struggle—*obobshchestvleniye* does not grant animals subjectivity or any rights and freedoms, other than the hope for care and a bright space "with large windows, like in human houses" if they are productive workers. If not, they are destined for slaughter, then: "Only livestock being fattened for slaughter should be kept in dark spaces" (Lomov, 1931, p. 33). The incorporation of the nonhuman being as a laboring unit into the communist body feeds on its "responsiveness" (Balanda, 1951, p. 7). Yet this is a mute responsiveness, as the result of such inclusion and *hailing* into the collective body, and induction into nonhuman proletarianship, does not make the animal, machine, or plant a political subject. On the contrary, it places them in an even more ambiguous and disadvantageous position, where care transforms into even greater infantilization of the nonhuman and its enslavement.

Care is the Education and Cultivation of Organic Mass

The process of maintaining someone or something in working condition extends the idea of communist upbringing as a tool for implementing care on a global scale. In this discourse, care denotes a moral duty of proletarians to transform and reconfigure the world. It is particularly remarkable that, in his book from 1939, *Care for Crops*, Shiman makes it clear that the goal of care is "the formation of organic matter *(veshchestvo)*, for which we cultivate our plants" (Shiman, 1939, p. 5). Organic matter is what unites all living beings into a shared existence. Shiman identifies signs of organic matter growth in the "lush, fleshy greenery of cultivated plants that reaches the waist" (Shiman, 1939, p. 53), which will later transform into the "fleshiness" of animals and humans and ultimately into a collective fleshy existence that unites everyone into a single organism. As in the case of Shiman, the concept of "education" *(obrazovaniye, vospitaniye)*—of organic, also green, matter or mass—is understood in a very peculiar way: education merges with biological and cultural processes, where nature and culture are inseparable from each other and constitute the very process of cultivating a "cultured" plant. *Vospitaniye* is both the cultivation of an animal or plant and nurturance: "In the task of raising *(vospitaniye)* healthy and strong young livestock" (Dorofeyev, 1934, p. 10). Thus, *obrazovaniye* ("education or formation") is also a form of construction: both on the organic level (such as the formation of bones in pigs) and as *pre-obrazovaniye*—the transformation and mastering of nature.

This is what care means, which involves acting upon cultivated plants and (domesticated animals) to achieve the highest yield or productivity, to increase living matter. Continuing the ideas of increasing living matter and green mass, Shiman writes about the "useful work of leaves," the responsiveness of plants as openness to agrobiological re-education, and their transformation into cultivated and robust varieties. Notions described by Shiman, such as "masters of high yield," "responsive plants," and "energy of tillering," as well as statements like "care for millet must be widely mechanized" (Dorofeyev, 1934, p. 18), along with various mechanical devices for sowing, fertilizing the land, and feeding the crops, fit into a broader picture augmented by conjugations of mechanized sex, the result of which transcends organismic boundaries. It creates bonds between Stakhanovites and cultivated plants, hoes, and the limbs and organs of the cultivators. However, this unleashed sexuality, essentially vegetative, encompassing conjugations with a wide range of actors, reveals that plant sex surpasses any attempts to constrain it.

Care Averts Bends

Konstantin Shuvaev (1931), in his book *A Socialist Livestock Farming*, considers collectivization and socialization of animals during the period of the second 5-year plan as an inevitable process for the creation of a "living machines production department." Collective farming is viewed here as a zero-waste system, where "[. . .] the processing of crop products, including waste and by-products from this sector, through living machines (cattle, pigs, sheep) [. . .] yields valuable foodstuffs [. . .] and creates a raw material base for the light industry" (Shuvaev, 1931, pp. 5–6).

In turn, the pig-machine, the cow-factory, and other living machines will return their waste to the soil as natural fertilizer. Socialization and mechanization are aimed, on one hand, at benefiting the collective society: increasing the productivity of individual animal-machines through proper care, free from excessive "bends" *(peregiby)*. On the other hand, they are directed at combating unnecessary, senseless violence, and the *peasant perception* of animal and plant beings, as well as their enslavement.

Let us note that "bend" *(peregib)* is a neologism coined by Stalin. As Maria Chehonadskih notes in her book on Bogdanov and Platonov, it carries a dual meaning—both spatial and ideological (Chehonadskih, 2023, p. 182). In spatial terms, it refers to bending or altering an object. One might even call it a forced alteration, since *peregib* often implies a transformation of the natural landscape: widening rivers, reversing their flow, plowing the land, and constructing factories and industrial plants. However, *peregib* also has an ideological meaning—a transgression or violation of the party's general line. The only thing that must remain unchanged is that line, its horizon.

The term *peregib* also refers to the extremely brutal treatment of animals by peasants. Referring to this phenomenon, the manuals speak of beatings, of cruel treatment, of reckless hatred toward animals, and of their torture in hard labor. However, in the course of educating peasants and eliminating "bends" and suffering, the animal, as kulak Semen Vereshchagin describes in Platonov's short novel *For Future Use's Sake*, "become[s] something no longer quite livestock, no longer quite a thing." Trying to grasp the basics of collective farm literacy, he adds: "I've never read anywhere that it's forbidden to torment horses—so I guess it must be allowed." However, with the advent of manuals and literacy, he now falls "under a new law on the preservation of livestock" (Platonov, vol. 2, 2011b, p. 296).

Care Forms the Animal and Fosters the Development of its Brain and Soul

The brochure *Caring, Not Beating Urges Work and Milking Capacity* by Orlov, which I referred to earlier as an ideological model for agricultural care, contains an interesting materialist approach. The author proposes emancipation for animals through useful labor, which develops their brain, the principal tool of social progress. Expanding on this thought, Orlov writes, "And the owner of animals must remember that brain activity has the same significance in life for both humans and animals. The brain activity is the soul of both humans and animals" (Orlov, 1929, p. 22).

He claims that humans and animals are made of the same material. This means that pain and suffering, as well as affection and love, place them on equal footing. His text also includes an intriguing statement, apparently influenced by a popular and somewhat peculiar interpretation of Marxism. Orlov suggests that the development and education of animals know no limits and that, through labor, animals might evolve into new forms of being. However, socialist animal husbandry does not presently aim at this goal:

> Of course, for the practical purposes for which we keep our domestic animals, we do not need high levels of brain development in them. However, both the work of the horse and the milk production of the cow are closely related to how the brain is trained to send its motor impulses. (Orlov, 1929, p. 22)

At this stage, it is advantageous for humans that animals remain less intelligent. Yet this might change in the future. These quasi-philosophical and "everyday" Marxist perspectives reflect the recognition that an animal, however, much love or care it receives, can never become human. Consequently, animals inhabit a double bind: on one hand, they are acknowledged as laboring actors in a more-than-human proletarian community; on the other hand, their persistent lack of human qualities is reaffirmed (Orlov, 1929, p. 31).

The idea of emancipating animals by recognizing their reproductive labor as socially meaningful resonates with Donna Haraway's (2008) demand in *When Species Meet*: "Taking animals seriously as workers without the comforts of humanist frameworks for people or animals is perhaps new and might help stem the killing machines" (p. 73). Haraway argues that the positioning of humans and animals on farms, in factories, and in laboratories—where they function as technologies of commodity production and of the reproduction of society—must be rethought through the category of "being in a relation of use." Such relations are never equal; however, they can be transformed into partnerships through the sharing of suffering with working animals and through a rethinking of the moral responsibility of human workers toward them. These "relations of use" suggest that within the modern system of production, the exploited position is often interchangeable between humans and animals, who may act as both objects and subjects. Yet the moral responsibility of humans toward those denied "presence" or "face" within a society that mobilizes them for labor lies in finding a way of responding to such beings.

The ethical question of human–animal *response-ability* posed by Haraway is rooted in Emmanuel Lévinas's conception of the face-to-face encounter with the Other, the very existence of whom, from the very beginning, always-already transcends me. She claims that,

> [. . .] human beings are not uniquely obligated to and gifted with responsibility; animals as workers in labs, animals in all their worlds, are response-able in the same sense as people are; that is, responsibility is a relationship crafted in intra-action through which entities, subjects and objects, come into being. (Haraway, 2008, p. 71)

In interspecies cooperation considered through the lens of joint labor, the capacity for ethical response, for sharing suffering, and for moral responsibility must be built not on the self-similarity of the one to whom one responds, but on the recognition of the multiple, individual faces of nonhuman others. Only such an approach, synchronizing "face-to-face, body-to-body subject-making across species," can transform our understanding of interspecies partnership under conditions of capitalist social reproduction, which uses "strategic naturalization/socialization of all kinds" (Haraway, 2008, p. 66).

At the same time, Lévinas's discussion of ethics toward the Other in *Totality and Infinity (1991)* is framed by the question of optics, or the very direction of the gaze when one looks into the face of the Other. This gaze is aimed at the Other's face, while at the same time reminding us that the face is not the Other itself. In his discussion of this fragment on the face and optics, Sazonov underscores the paradox that, in responding to the Other, one sees nothing but the face:

> The genuine response lies in the capacity to see, behind the face, that which cannot be discerned. It is the possibility of finding a way where there is no way. The face is not the answer; it is not a final form. (Sazonov & Nikitina, 2025)

Following this line of thought, we may propose that *response-ability* toward the nonhuman Other might be conceived not as the recognition of a face, but as the recognition of the otherness that

lies behind it—an otherness that can never be encompassed within any epistemological or ontological categories but could instead be accepted only through ethics. Moreover, the very alterity of the Other is not identical to my own, and we cannot be united based on possessing it, nor can we be joined in separation based on our mutual inaccessibility (Sazonov & Nikitina, 2025). Lévinas arguably calls upon us to remain with this rupture, so that the response remains a deeply personal act, which always starts from the very beginning. This prevents the conflation of responsibility to the Other with the agrotechnical "responsiveness" of animals and plants, which, from the perspective of socialist care, are understood as ready for cooperation and conjugations like all proletarians awaiting communism (Balanda, 1951; Shiman, 1939).

Communism, in its own way, rather quickly recognized a face in the most common rural animal—the hen, found even on the poorest farms and regarded as the most ordinary and "accessible" creature. Under socialism, it became the first socialized animal and also the first to undergo collectivization (Platonov, 2000, p. 296). Together with the collectivized sheep, as a sign of communism's arrival, the hen easily detached from nature and entered the artificial environment created by humans. The hen owns nothing; it gives everything to the construction of communism and inhabits its heated poultry apartment (Kitaytsev, 1938, p. 9). Moreover, the hen is endowed with high productive energy, which must be controlled, and the redistribution of that energy (Bukraba, 1934, pp. 17–18) resonates with the broader task of transforming proletarian sexuality into productive labor conjugations. The hen's drive toward ownership and individualism seemingly does not exist, since it would contradict the idea of a sexless union of all living beings and matter in the pursuit of a future humanity.

Ironically, zoological Marx (Haraway, 2008, p. 72), in his first (unsuccessful) incarnation, had already come to the authors of brochures—the zootechnicians, kolkhoz workers, and agrobiologists. He also brought with him the hen of the future, whose life was described by Konstantin Kitaytsev in 1938. In Kitaytsev's vision, the care for hens resembles the management of a multiunit apartment building, where the bird already lives in the coming future, like a human being. Her room is heated, she goes for walks, bathes in a tub, eats vitamin-rich feed, and—like a person—is entitled to a specific number of square meters. In this way, the life of hens in the state farm named *Istok* (from Russian "origin") is described by Kitaytsev as ideal, resembling the kind of socialism everyone dreams of.

However, in Chevengur, all the hens have been eaten. "There are no hens in Chevengur," states the poultry-breeding instructor from the Pochep Land Management Department, who arrived in the city of completed communism to conduct an inspection (Platonov, 2023, p. 323). Thus, responding to the zoomarxist call to "Follow the chicken and find the world" (Haraway, 2008, p. 274), together with the poultry-breeding instructor, we are compelled to admit that the hen of the future was devoured by the proletariat's very care and that even the recognition of its proletarian face could not save the hen.

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Notes

1. The detailed analysis of man's "unnatural" origin through technics, or prostheses, was explored by Bernard Stiegler in the work *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stiegler, 1994/1998).
2. With words about the communist paradise on earth, the Russian socialist feminist and revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai (1918) concluded her article "The Family and the Communist State." More broadly, on the idea of equality in suffering and the necessity of socializing and distributing it among all members of communist society, the Soviet writer Andrey Platonov wrote in his article "Equality in Suffering," devoted to the famine in the Volga region between 1921 and 1923.
3. *Kolkhoz* is an abbreviation of "collective farm." It was a type of Soviet agricultural production cooperative, in which peasants jointly managed farming based on socialized means of production.
4. Ivan Michurin was one of the most prominent Soviet botanists and plant breeders, noted for his contribution to the development of plant hybridization between both closely related and distantly related species. He worked primarily with fruit trees, and many of the varieties he developed were adaptations of southern plants to northern climates that are still cultivated today. Michurin's ideas were actively appropriated by Trofim Lysenko, the leading figure of Soviet agrobiology. This doctrine emphasized the determining role of environmental conditions and nutrition over heredity (largely disregarding the role of chromosomes). It set out two main objectives: preventing "degeneration" and increasing yields. Although later classified as pseudoscience, agrobiology became deeply embedded in Soviet agricultural practice and continued to influence approaches in post-Soviet countries.
5. *Stakhanovite* was the term used in the Soviet Union for a worker celebrated for exceptionally high productivity, named after coal miner Aleksey Stakhanov, whose record-breaking output in 1935 was widely publicized. The Stakhanovite movement developed into a mass campaign of "model workers" that included industrial laborers, collective farmers, engineers, and technicians, who claimed to surpass established production norms many times over. Their achievements were attributed to the rationalization of tools, technologies, and processes. The movement was also promoted as a means of increasing productivity and demonstrating socialist commitment.
6. I would like to thank my colleague, film critic Iryna Marholina, who drew my attention to Boris Barnet's work and shared her insights on the theme of care for agricultural animals as represented in cinema.
7. Hoła-Łuczaj builds her argument on a quotation from *Zollikon Seminars (1959–1971)*: "All presencing is dependent on the human being, but this dependence on the human being consists precisely in the fact that the human being as Da-sein and as being-in-the-world is able to allow beings [like the earth] to come to presence in their already having been [Schon-gewesen-sein]" (Heidegger, 2011, p. 179).
8. *Subbotnik* (referred to by Robert Chandler in his translation of *Chevengur* as "volunteer Saturday")—unpaid community labor, most often organized on weekends outside regular working hours. Emerging in Soviet Russia in the early 20th century, it mixed voluntary and compulsory participation and usually included tasks such as cleaning public areas, repairing or painting communal facilities, and planting trees or flowers.
9. *Kulak*—the Soviet label for wealthier peasants, typically those who hired laborers or engaged in rural moneylending. Beginning in the late 1920s, the government pursued a campaign of *dekulakization*, which entailed the seizure of property and, in many cases, violent repression, including execution or deportation to remote areas.
10. See Soviet novels describing interspecies sex as social reproduction: Yaroslavskiy A. (1926). *Argonavty vselennoy* [Argonauts of the Universe]. Biokosmisty; Girely M. (1929). *Eozoon. Zarya zhizni* [Eozoon. The Dawn of Life]. Izdatel'stvo pisateley v Leningrade.
11. See: Yaroslavskiy A. (1926). *Argonavty vselennoy* [Argonauts of the Universe]. Biokosmisty.
12. In the article "ferations. world: on the cartography of lost scales," co-authored with Nikita Sazonov, we wrote about young naturalists' and Michurinists' stations in the context of the socialization of plants. Lysenko turned this into a doctrine and a belief that social aspects (outer environment—not genes) could cultivate plants, instilling in them the ability to cooperate with humans and other species to enhance productivity. Michurin's teachings also fit into the idea of "educating" animals and plants, establishing schools and research agrobiological laboratories for them.
13. Characters who are constantly crafting or inventing something frequently appear in Platonov's prose (*Chevengur* [1926–1928], *The Foundation Pit* [1929–1930], *Soul* [1934–1935]), revealing the

sorrowful side of such fervent "inventiveness." In reality, human inventions turn out to be "impractical," meaningless, and without application on the exhausted land, while communism transforms into absurdity. These works are cited here with their dates of composition, but none were published in full during Platonov's lifetime.

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