

## NEW MEDIA

# The Soviet and Post-Soviet Anthroscenes: Speculations from Cheburashka to Khokhulya

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to investigate the representation of and presence of non-human animals through the framework of new media theorist Jussi Parikka's conceptualization of the "Anthroscene." Additionally, an examination of Marxist-Leninist thought concerning both environmentalist policies and practices of early childhood education is essential to formulating a well-rounded understanding of the innate political nature of these anthropomorphic representations and, in turn, how the treatment of animals, both domestic and wild, are considered reflexively by the Soviet state and the current Russian Federation through both a Soviet example (*Cheburashka* the abstracted and unspecified mouse-cat-primate creature) and a more modern environmentalist mascot (*Khokhulya* the Russian desman), both of which are duly reflective of their political contexts and social imaginings. Through an analysis of historical contextualizations and the modern *mascot* representation of the animal as a means of either social or philosophical change as well as practical environmentalist aims under the new capitalistic system post-1990s, *Cheburashka* and *Khokhulya* respectively serve to articulate and exemplify a comparison between the ideological functions of both economic systems within the broader field of animal and early childhood media studies.

**Keywords:** New Media, Parikka, Anthropocene, Animal Studies, Soviet State (USSR)

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### The Desman and the Brown Mouse

The symbol of the animal has long been applied and reapplied in both revolutionary media and cinematic propagation, as well as its corporate decay—its remains are scattered across a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing world. Recently, the

Nature Ministry of Kaluga Oblast in the Russian Federation invented a regional mascot entitled “Khokhulya” (*Хохуля*), resembling an endangered Russian desman (*выхухоль*): a semiaquatic mammal inhabiting the Volga, Don, and Ural river basins resembling a common shrew in order to promote environmentalism in the region, located in the central zone of the East European Plain. This is not an entirely new phenomenon, as anthropomorphic critters have long been associated with a kind of distinctly Russian (or Soviet) nationalism, namely, Cheburashka (*Чебурашка*), a fictional creature conceived by Soviet writer Eduard Uspensky in his iconic 1965 children’s book, *Gena the Crocodile and His Friends* (*Крокодил Гена и его друзья*). While Khokhulya is relegated to niche internet virality on specific corners of the internet, Cheburashka served as a cultural template for Soviet children, brought to life through claymation and even in more recent computerized adaptations. Therefore, a natural comparison can be drawn between the Soviet and post-Soviet anthropomorphic models and their physical engagement with space and memory, specifically within the context of post-industrial media archaeology theory when applied both to communist and socialist economic and industrial models and in the wake of the Soviet Union’s monumental dissolution.

The end of the Soviet Union in 1991, as a response to a perceived political stalemate and backsliding economic growth, led to a festering cultural and emotional stagnancy. The generation raised on Cheburashka in the late 60s, 70s, and 80s with films and television programs such as: *Gena the Crocodile* [*Крокодил Гена*] (dir. Roman Kachanov, USSR, 1969); *Cheburashka* [*Чебурашка*] (dir. Roman Kachanov, USSR, 1971); *Shapoklyak* [*Шапокляк*] (dir. Roman Kachanov, USSR, 1974); *Cheburashka Goes to School* [*Чебурашка идёт в школу*] (dir. Roman Kachanov, USSR, 1983), as well as more recent adaptations, including a 2023 semi-live-action version directed by Dmitry Dyachenko. Occasionally hailed as the “Soviet Mickey Mouse,” Cheburashka served as both a politicized aspect of many people’s childhoods but also a notable emphasis on kindness and principles of collective humanistic relationships being a necessity between diverse peoples, despite differences in appearance, place of origin, and so on, retrospectively emulating Marxist-Leninist ideals of collaborative and inter-cultural exchange. In Lenin’s work, “Dogmatism and ‘Freedom of Criticism,’” published in 1901 in *What is To Be Done?*, he writes:

We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies, and we have to advance almost constantly under their fire. We have combined, by a freely adopted decision, for the purpose of fighting the enemy and not of retreating into the neighboring marsh, the inhabitants of which, from the very outset, have reproached us with having separated ourselves into an exclusive group and with having chosen the path of struggle instead of the path of conciliation. And now

some among us begin to cry out: Let us go into the marsh! And when we begin to shame them, they retort: What backward people you are! Are you not ashamed to deny us the liberty to invite you to take a better road! Oh, yes, gentlemen! You are free not only to invite us but to go yourselves wherever you will, even into the marsh.<sup>1</sup>

This perspective monumentally illustrates and defines the dogmatic and determined principles that the Bolsheviks would seek to emulate. Namely, they would strive wholeheartedly to achieve an idealistic future rooted in the unity of the proletariat even in the face of tremendous adversity, identifying the perceived backwardness of the oppressive and ostracizing bourgeoisie class. The consistent moral value attributed to the Cheburashka filmic franchise is the importance of being “in the company of others as opposed to benign lonely,” idealizing the notion of the “*субботник*,” which refers to voluntary work undertaken on Saturdays in Soviet culture.<sup>2</sup> Though associations of work and life are intertwined, the symbolism of collective achievement and prestige in Soviet infrastructure and process remains consistent throughout most Cheburashka-centric television series and films.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Anthroscene and “Factory Culture”**

The question then arises—how can an animal be so critically intertwined with the realities of industrialization and the growth of factories and what I shall term “factory culture” in tandem with the cautionary rhetoric of media theorist Jussi Parikka’s conceptualized “Anthroscene”?<sup>4</sup> The historicized memories of anthropomorphized creatures, be they wholly fictional or somewhat inspired in truth, are simultaneously inhabited by the creatures who, in turn, continue to shape and redefine the remains of their fictional counterparts. Anthropomorphized subjects of their industrialized environments, particularly residential urban strays, must be understood and quantified as equally important contributors to the Anthropocene and notions of deep-time in media archaeology. Their media significance in commercial products, social media, and their lives spent among the technological rubble left behind by human development serve as symbolic signifiers of humanity’s media history, and, under capitalist conventions, it, in turn, influences the commercialization of urban livelihood and dynamics. Given the inevitability of physical decay, should Parikka’s re-conceptualization of the Anthropocene as *Anthroscene* through a media archaeological framework be re-examined to accommodate the importance of animal life and representations in tandem with the human tendency to anthropomorphize as a means of solace within the constrictions of a late-capitalist post-Soviet political system, particularly within the context of urban life and its non-human residents?

As the Soviets came to experiment with the merging of social individual life and the country’s rapid industrialization by the 1920s, the issue of differentiation within

the working class became a relatively consistent source of contention between party members. Party leadership made an effort to maintain an identifiable and consistent social homogeneity in order to prevent members of the working class from segregating themselves politically based on their individual backgrounds or occupations. The conflicts of the older generations who had previously worked before 1917 in industrial fields and the newer generations who had formulated their early identity around Marxist-Leninist ideologies were not homogeneous, as some workers, due to a combination of factors, were, quite simply, more experienced in their respective fields and were more accomplished craftspeople. Reports show that older workers perceived the incoming generation in the late 1920s as “uncultured, unskilled, and politically illiterate elements who knew little about the history and discipline of the factories.”<sup>5</sup> However, such new members were not truly unfamiliar with industrial work and were nonetheless subjected to repeated incidents of discrimination and harassment in the workplace. As industrial power developed and stabilized in the wake of such tremendous political and structural change within the country, there was a need for social stabilization between proletariats. How could one balance individual discipline and the demands for productivity in collective labor? Additionally, the question arises of how workers, even beyond the contexts of the Stalin period (1922-1953) of the USSR and later generations, served to immortalize their participatory experience in collective labor.

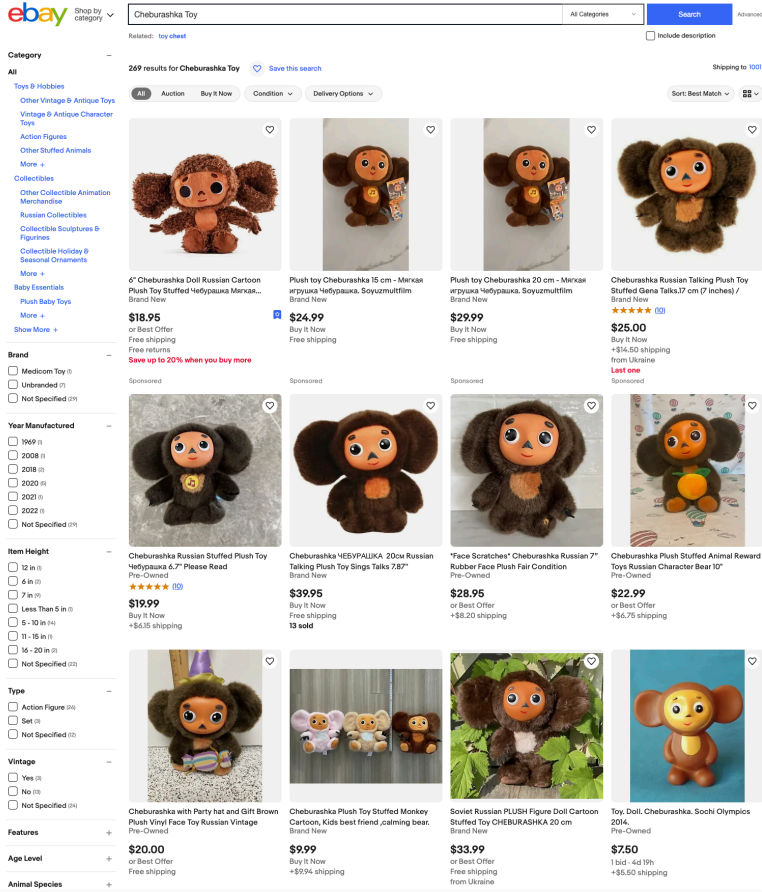
The “Anthropocene,” in its traditional geological definition, is identified as a marked time when human activities significantly impact geological development to constitute a distinct change, highlighting the species’ collective influence on the formation of the planet’s geological strata. In a subversive reimagining of a traditionally geological concept, Parikka came to redefine this scientific concept as his very own “Anthroscene” in his 2014 manifesto, conceptualizing the geological underpinnings of media art in tandem with scientific-technological planetary developments as “paleontologies that deal not only with the earth but the earth after the appearance and effect of modern science and technology.”<sup>6</sup> He further wrote that underground and submerged realities are the most intriguing components of this “Anthroscene” and, subsequently, the technological and artifactual remains of the tangible. With ongoing urban redevelopment projects across many major cities globally underway, abandoned, unowned, or outdoor animals, be they feral or domesticated, transform themselves into ghostly, liminal creatures of technology and media’s past, interacting with or living among literal urban garbage. Furthermore, stray animals or urban wildlife have transformed into what Marx rightfully identified as a living, animated commodity,<sup>7</sup> capturable on camera and potentially anthropomorphized by the humans who engage with them daily. This behavior on the part of their human neighbors rapidly accelerates their decay into archaeological artifacts and are prone to reinterpretation and reutilization as a result of, as Hertz and Parikka describe, a kind of “planned obsolescence,”<sup>8</sup>

which is inherently ethically flawed framework when interacting with sentient, living creatures.

### The Issue of Subjectivity

Animal environments are, therefore, shaped by “purely subjective realities”<sup>9</sup> akin to humans, though human perception and anthropomorphism of animals have natural limitations under this praxis. Animal life, therefore, becomes an object of the city and the urban environment amid rapidly expanding, globalized networks of biopower. Philosopher Michel Foucault describes this kind of lifestyle as “the right to make live and let die,”<sup>10</sup> although this biopower controls and reproduces life, shaping it across a network of dispersed, diverse domains. Technology itself is not a matter of time or linearity, but through its own time, it operates, functions, and establishes its sense of monumentalism and symbolic significance. A most intriguing phenomenon regarding Cheburashka’s distribution and reception includes the wide array of homemade dolls available from online sellers across the modern Russian Federation and other post-Soviet states in the modern age. Notably, most of these dolls have no synchronous or regularized representation or physicality—they are the products of homemade crafters or other sellers local to a region, town, or community. For digital consumers and browsers of Soviet memorabilia, many of whom reside in the geographic and social West, these dolls possess a charmingly homespun look, arguably evoking sensations of *anemoia*,<sup>11</sup> a phenomenological experience that is described as a feeling of yearning for a past one has never before experienced.

The archaeological legacy of Cheburashka, be it tangible dolls or digital ghosts for sale on sites like *eBay*, are, per the traditions of media archaeological theories, experienced as an ongoing, self-referential phenomenon of memory, digitizing and self-digitizing on an immortal virtual plane. Media archaeology, as an emergent science in itself, remains unequivocally monumental, not based on narrative, focusing on “technological conditions of expressions than on the content of media.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in the context of animal concerns and welfare, there is a question of maintaining relationships between animals and humans even in the midst of massive global infrastructural changes to harvest materials to, in turn, generate new media. In these animals’ worlds, Donna Haraway writes that multi-species interactions can transform into “face-to-face mutually opportunistic and affectionate relationships with critters who are no more and no less alien presences on this land than [one’s] human household ... becoming worldly just as much as any other entanglements do.”<sup>13</sup> The oddness of modern characters, such as Khokhulya, the Russian desman, is of note here—many critics of the creature have found him aesthetically unpleasant and even rather uncannily frightening. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in tandem with a sharp uptick in poverty, the Database of the Russian Federal Agency of Game Mammal Monitoring, which consists of up



**Figure 1.** Screenshot of various Cheburashka dolls available for sale on Ebay—many of these dolls were handmade and not mass produced, and are typically sold by sellers based in Russia and other post-Soviet states.

to 50,000 transects monitored and updated annually, showed a strong decline in population growth rates of eight documented large mammals.<sup>14</sup> Efforts to promote endangered representations of wildlife as mascots, such as in the case of Khokhulya, are evidence of a broader environmental struggle that federal subjects of the modern capitalistic Russian Federation must come to grapple with in the coming years.

When presenting Parrika’s conceptualization and theory of the “Anthroscene,” an oversimplified understanding of animals as kinetic beings with agency and objects of capture, documentation, commercialization, and, subsequently, congruent decay alongside the technological objects they inspired is a potential epistemological outcome. The question of cats,<sup>15</sup> perhaps some unique examples of urban animal characters,<sup>16</sup> frequently comes up in such discourses of intersections between the rural and feral and the domesticated and familiar, often psychologically substituting for the role of the “baby.” This identifiable pattern and “its extension beyond

the mother-infant relationship context” does speak “to the efficacy of baby-like appearances in eliciting alloparental care and may explain why [people] feel the urge to hold and care or anything that resembles a baby.”<sup>17</sup> Finally, as Parikka writes in his piece on media zoology, humanity must be able to conceptually interweave on a material level concerning geopolitics<sup>18</sup> and potentially ecologically unsustainable practices under certain geopolitical conditions.

### **Animal Theories of the Earth**

The idea for a human-influenced archaeological epoch was initially proposed by the geologist Antonio Stoppani, who formulated that humans would be responsible for and, thereby, initiators of a specific geological period in Earth’s history. In his 1873 work, *Corso di Geologia*, he described how “such layers derived not only from earth’s prehistory but were attributes of a planet unearthed by human technologies and then covered with the ruins of those inventions.”<sup>19</sup> The deep temporality combined with the spatial and temporal is elaborated in James Hutton’s *Theory of the Earth* (1778), which describes how the strata signify the existence of profound temporalities under layers of granite. Hutton proposed this essential theory of radical immensity and a promise of change: “All is predetermined as part of a bigger cycle of erosion and growth.”<sup>20</sup> Archaeologists, therefore, have the unavoidable task at hand to contend with “paleontologies that deal not only with the earth but the earth after the appearance and effect of modern science and technology.”<sup>21</sup> While non-humans also experience the epoch of human activity, there will remain inevitable remnants. Hopefully, later archaeological remembrance of animal influence on human life and livelihood through technological waste remains. Interwoven in technological discourse are concerns for animal welfare, proposals for extending ethical considerations, and inclusion of non-humans in urban environments in certain contexts and conditions.

Cinema and, subsequently, all media must be considered more than spectacle or technical monstration; instead, they must be considered a complex ideological network and machine that manipulates time and space. Through the utilization of these factors, “ethical and political attention to animal realms of perception, sentience, and meaning-making” can, therefore, shift cinema studies to media studies and “animal capital” to “animal worlds.”<sup>22</sup> Focusing on the material production of what will become a massive conglomerate of minerally made consumer items cluttering the future fossil record is essential to media archaeology. It is driven by a sense of entrepreneurial, borderline-optimistic attitude and “seeing the world in terms of material and immaterial malleability.” The history of technology can provide a story of media, even unintentionally. Statistics about minerals themselves can provide a narrative for media’s development, as the West’s global imperialist demands for raw minerals have resulted in “the increase since the 1990s in the consumption of indium, peaking in 2008; the growing numbers for import and

consumption of silicon since the 1950s; a similar increase in consumption of rare earth minerals since the 1950s.”<sup>23</sup> Unused media does not necessarily become a sedimented layer of fossils for media archaeologists to excavate. However, it remains “abandoned, forgotten, stashed away, and yet remains a toxic materiality that surpasses the usual time scale we are used to in media studies.”<sup>24</sup> Such devices, therefore, become less about the time of use than the practices of disuse and, in turn, the development of systems for recycling or to further obfuscate the sites of disposal from the collective public or state image. The mining industry, in particular, has likely some of the most negative environmental impacts on modern-day Russia, as emissions from manufacturing, electricity, gas, and heat supply account for roughly 84% of emissions across the nation,<sup>25</sup> resulting in further conflicts between social movements, indigenous peoples, provincial and national government and administrative bodies further complicate and exacerbate this already volatile field of resource (and waste) production.<sup>26</sup>

Media technologies are, in essence, a long story of experimentation with different materials, much like the work of medieval alchemists, from glass to selenium to copper to selenium; an understanding of these geological processes is essential, especially their waste products. The transistor-based tech culture would only be conceived with the energy acquired through accusatory processes developed and established over time. The mapping of an animal as a media form, referring to the animal as a “relay station of perceptions and sensations,” is inherently politicized and connected to physiological and experimental investigations of humans as a “perpetual system.”<sup>27</sup> More explicitly, technological norms and systems are always designed to accommodate human beings and animals; therefore, they undergo a mutation process to survive within the artificial limits established by their technological and heavily polluted late-capitalist environment. The co-determination of media and nature relates to the way that earth minerals and resources are inherently essential for media devices to eventually become media, as well as how humankind’s relationship with the Earth is “mediated by the epistemological framing of advanced media.”<sup>28</sup> Media participates in earth minerals’ archaeological and geological extraction processes, further perpetuating this production cycle and arguably requiring the intervention of the endangered mascot form to anthropomorphize the potential harm of further development. The extension of life to its inorganic processes stems from Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy that life consists of an array of dynamic patterns of variation and stratification, posing that geology is far more dynamic than static dead matter. While the intensities of the Earth’s geological history may have been, on an archaeological level and especially within the context of deep-time studies, fixed or locked into place, the geophysical narrative of history remains turbulent and, at times, violent. Deep-time geologists operate on a vast, almost unimaginably large linear scale greater than the timescale of human presence, plants, and other archaic microorganisms. The essential concept of the





**Figure 2.** A promotional image of Khokhulya the Russian desman posing next to a Kaluga Oblast-officiated sign that reads, “Here stands a [pathway] ...in honor of the 75th anniversary of the great victory over the Nazi (lit. fascist German) invaders!”

Anthropocene is inherently, undeniably, environmental. It must be environmentally understood to be adequately defined by the “technological condition.”<sup>29</sup> Media archaeologists must conceptually weave together an understanding of geopolitics and ecological practices in their media work to understand resource depletion and, of course, its impact on the other lifeforms residing alongside humankind, especially animals and other organisms at risk for extinction or significant population decline. Therefore, the relationship between geology, Earth, and art remains significant—it is “fundamentally conditioned by the existence of inorganic life” and remains “expressive in an ontological sense” without human interference.<sup>30</sup>

The Saint-Petersburg Russian Society for the Protection of Animals was founded in 1865, shortly after the Emancipation Reform of 1861, in which Tsar Alexander II formally abolished serfdom as an early organization that had voluntary association remained active among the Russian Imperial elite, who were engaged in a “wider program of nineteenth-century Russian selective cultural internationalization known as “Westernization”—a term describing the varied efforts of a subset of the Russian elite to “improve” their country by bringing it firmly into the western family of nations.”<sup>31</sup> Although ideological Westernization remained a long-standing objective of the Russian elites, the historical achievement of Ivan Pavlov’s (1849-1936) experiments on canines highlights a later Soviet development of the act of relating the animal to oneself and the field of human psychology. Later, Vladimir Durov (1863-1934), an accomplished and iconic figure of the Russian circus,

published his own methodological handbook for training animals, which centered on a method of rewards and encouragement, believing that “the infliction of pain on animals only created resistance and led to refusal of cooperation.”<sup>32</sup> However, he also believed that he could communicate with his pets and circus animals to a degree bordering on ‘telepathic,’ and his methods have been deemed somewhat pseudoscientific, albeit well-remembered and often recognized as even uniquely Soviet.

### **Animals and the Iconographic**

Animals have been essential in the history and practice of the moving image and its development, from the proto-cinematic studies of animal motion by Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey to the love for cute animal videos on shorter-form video platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. It is in this enigmatic realm that Khokhulya primarily resides. To photograph and transform an animal into a media object requires a unique chance encounter or heavily controlled and meticulously coordinated capturing on film. These animals, incapable of communication with their captors, highlight a kind of “poignant passivity” that defines their simultaneous power and weakness of this *techne*, as “the photographer can easily mistake the inability to captivate the animals as the power to do so.”<sup>33</sup> As Laura McMahan writes, “there is arguably something special” about the recent cultural movement that shapes the interrelations between animals and the moving image, which is, in part, “because of a fascination with moving images of animal life that dates back to the proto-cinematic studies of Muybridge and Marey and persists today in the proliferation of wildlife television programming and animal videos online.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the archival, testimonial, and indexical nature of photography, cinema, and social media tells of human desires to document, preserve, and enjoy as recreation, with the survival and perpetuation of species that presumably drive animals to thrive in urban landscapes. There may be alternate ways to understand the disappearance of animals and liminality through the urban context by analyzing the presence and influence of stray cats in media and street photography, as “the effacement of animals may not be the most appropriate way to deal with the photographic animals or animals whose images have been archived, copied, and repeated via the *techne* of photography,”<sup>35</sup> reflective of Cheburashka’s misfit origin story as a stray in his own right, as depicted in an early scene in *Gena the Crocodile*.

Undeniably, the practices that maintain the unsustainable state of technological development and networks violate ethical standards and have been a cause for humanitarian concern since their beginnings. The political economy of capitalism has direct media archaeological impacts, especially in its presentation and establishment as a “methodology of lost ideas, unusual machines, and re-emerging desires and discourses searching for elements that set it apart from mainstream technological excitement”<sup>36</sup> while still, of course, appealing to modern economic

demands or ecological contexts and limitations. Cats and the cat-like, humans, and other urban species have lived together since the dawn of the urban environment, and their long history has resulted in a complex social, ecological, and ethical scenario. A growing number of research studies portray cats (and cat-like creatures) as well as other stray or feral animals living in the urban environment as a potential danger, a *predator*, a depletor of manufactured, man-established resources, or even *disease-ridden*. Simultaneously, stray animals may sometimes make up the personality or cadence of urban life, resulting in an overwhelming ambivalent, sometimes conflicting, attitude about animal presence in cities,<sup>37</sup> further obfuscating and blurring the lines between the beloved domestic creature (*домашние любимцы*: lit. “domestic favorites/pets”) and the pre-revolutionary human-like familiar (*любимцы*: lit. “favorites”), while the creatures outside of the household were identified as tools (*ручной*: lit. “manual/by hand”) and regarded for their functionality in industrial and farming life.<sup>38</sup>

### Anthropomorphizing Labor

Additionally, consideration of the non-human act of labor must be addressed regarding animal presence onscreen and in the media. The uniquely dynamic nature of cinema’s simultaneous visibility and invisibility is central to the “exertions and flows of cinema in general and the various laboring bodies that shape it.”<sup>39</sup> However, it is also important to note that animal labor is often repressed and challenging to see or quantify in cinema and media archaeological analysis. The transformation of materials in knowledge and practice has always corresponded with modern capitalistic values, characterized by the regulation of these materials and their eventual metamorphosis into operational, technological devices that undergo a “regularization of processes of material reaction and metamorphosis.”<sup>40</sup> The media culture of systematized electronic waste management also differs from tangible, *real-world* objects, and practices of sorting and preservation lie in the realm of traditional museum culture, which had previously been a framework to establish the treatment of consolidated archaic objects—however, media archaeology and urban analysis, especially in the field of animal studies. At the same time, the real-life landscape can document results from meticulous combinations and formulations of earth minerals stratified to uphold capitalist convictions and conventions, namely, upholding systems of class, power, and even oligarchy<sup>41</sup> through this mass urbanization. While media waste may be an unavoidable reality, it is also a sign of societally planned obsolescence, which, as a concept, can only be implemented under modern capitalist systems and economic models. Another element in understanding the effect of media obsolescence is environmental and ethical, as extracting such dangerous materials is almost exclusively achievable through extremely oppressive labor laws. This global flow of waste is often from Western post-industrial countries to post-colonial Asian and African nations, in turn,



**Figure 3.** Photograph taken in Pripyat, Ukraine on September 18, 2016, depicting a faded poster with Cheburashka cartoon in the Jupiter Factory (завод Юпитер), Pripyat, an abandoned city in Chernobyl Exclusion Zone via Stock Editorial Photography.

reveals “the twisted logic in which media objects affect the lives of people after their use” and “how they intertwine with flows of consumer objects.”<sup>42</sup> Social scientists in academia have historically represented the Soviet Union as a place that is dirty and in stark ideological and physical opposition to the *advanced* West. However, this does not entirely encapsulate the broad experiences and consequences of the USSR’s rapid industrialization and scientific accomplishments. Throughout the Soviet bloc, raw materials were scarce and difficult to come by. Many industries were established to collect and reprocess recyclable materials for reuse, labeled by the socialist government as “secondary materials,” handled under the authority of the State Committee for raw materials and technical supplies, later carried out depending on the volume and properties of each particular kind of waste. For example, wastes from textiles and clothing were widely utilized for the production of non-woven materials, such as “floor coverings for houses, materials for road construction in the marshland and in the extreme North, warming material for clothes, heat and sound insulation for motor vehicles and caterpillars” with a total output of “about 90 million square [meters]” of recycled and repurposed materials.<sup>43</sup> Notably, Cheburashka and other anthropomorphic creatures were also symbolic inhabitants of these Soviet factory worlds [Fig. 3], propped up to boost morale and positively and collaboratively emote a broader production culture.

Media materialism can cover both insignificant glass or plastic particles to larger broken or outdated tech units, and understanding these can determine a new understanding of how these media forms materialize. Therefore, Parikka's application of Haraway's term "medianatures" is most appropriate, referring to how Haraway established an argument about "naturecultures," which is defined loosely as "a continuum of the material semiotics and production of nature as deeply embedded in the cultural."<sup>44</sup> Media ecological theory is vital in its own right and has the undeniable animal influence to thank for its uniqueness and challenging ethical significance. Parikka summarizes this idea by applying Donna Haraway's notion of "medianatures." These "medianatures" challenge philosophers, film theorists, and academics to think of nature and culture as incorporated and intrinsically bound together through a "topological continuum."<sup>45</sup> Understanding medianatures across ecological spheres is essential to analyzing the current political economy of the new material forces influencing digital culture and its development, as influenced by dialectical materialist thought as the original praxis of the dominant, intended Soviet ideology, defined through laws such as "(1) the behavior of a system of interactive forces, (2) the pattern of which is with the advent of some critical increment so modified that a novel set of laws is exhibited, (3) which set, furthermore, includes the contraries of laws which have been exemplified in previous states of the system."<sup>46</sup>

### **The Feral Creature: an Alien Other**

In the 1980s, French psychoanalyst and political philosopher Felix Guattari raised a question about the various spheres through which we need to work to understand the constitution of the contemporary politico-aesthetic constitution and their ethical significance.<sup>47</sup> In the pluralization of worlds in media formats, particularly of a cinematic<sup>48</sup> nature, there is a kind of privileged representation of animals as objects of use, as the potential creative adheres to the "very gambit of biopower (as identified by Wolfe in his engagement with Foucault)" and "through modes of durational attentiveness"<sup>49</sup> these animals are consumed by the mechanical unit. Theoretical studies tend to assume that stray cats, the most straightforward example of animal-urban dynamics, are an *alien* species, even coded as or directly identified as invasive. However, despite their exceptional predatory skills, invasive species ecology remains flawed in its dismissal of media influence on the perception, treatment, and livelihood of such stray, roaming, or wild animals. Khokhulya, in particular, is modeled after a Russian desman, which is both an endangered and simultaneously strange, elusive creature that some may argue lacks a certain degree of aesthetic appeal. Despite his human-like behavior and apparent feud with Losyash (*Лосяш*), an elk who operates as an additional mascot for the Kaluga region, and internet debates regarding whether Kapa (*Kana*), a water droplet, is truly in a mere secondary role to Khokhulya, the desman, and his wildlife friends have nonetheless taken to platforms such as TikTok, creating a reel to the Friends TV-show theme



and “putting an end to any rumors of rivalry among them once and for all.”<sup>50</sup>



**Figure 4.** Kapa the water droplet antagonizes Khokhulya by pulling his tail at a community educational event.

Parikka’s conceptualization “medianatures” describes the intersection of media and nature, explicitly including animals and ecological depletion, emphasizing the intersections of these issues and rejecting any dismissal of the importance of these intersections. The production of ecological knowledge has always been “entangled with mediatic concerns,”<sup>51</sup> and access to knowledge and information remains an important consideration. Collaborative work between humans and animals is necessary to ensure health and diversity, enhance wildlife habitats, and ensure the quality of life for the creatures residing within urban life’s boundaries. As Haraway writes, “No easy unity is to be found on these matters, and no answers will make one feel good for long.” However, she also notes that “there are vastly more attachment sites for participating in the search for more livable “other worlds” (autres-mondialisations) inside earthly complexity than one could ever imagine when first reaching out to pet one’s dog.”<sup>52</sup> Additionally, cybernetics,<sup>53</sup> the science of communications and automatic control systems in machines and living things, remains an essential context for the realization of animal studies, especially in entomology and agriculture, backed by an emphasis on psychological, perception, and social aspects of a natural, undomesticated animal life even in the face of

artificial and radical physiological changes as a result of heightened pollutants. As established in Robinson and Knight's *Cybernetics, artificial intelligence, and ecology* (1972), it may be inevitable that

...Industrial use of excessive amounts of limited natural resources and concomitant overproduction of pollutants and waste products will, it is hoped, lead to a real diminution in the disruption of our ecosystem. The survival of the biological species including mankind is dependent on such action. But there is more. Man and animal will continue to be exposed to a variety of substances not encountered during their evolutionary development, and continuing efforts must be made to determine whether such materials are capable of causing genetic alterations reflected by permanent changes in physiological and/or behavioral characteristics. Subtle, easily missed changes caused by long-term exposure to low concentrations of pollutants, contaminants, and substances ingested voluntarily for other purposes can be particularly dangerous.<sup>54</sup>

Even if there is a concern for animal welfare, the management of communities of animals living in city environments must be realized, and a preferred outcome must be established. However, the cat's welfare remains pertinent and pressing under these conditions. When contending with these animals, some things must be taken into consideration, namely, "the interest of feral cats as an independent population/culture" and how these interests can "be reconciled with the needs of different groups of urban residents."<sup>55</sup> When domestication becomes an impossibility, these animals become incorporated into the fabric of urban policy, and the maintenance of communities becomes necessary to maintain urban life for humans and animals alike. Media ecology transports the theoretical academic agenda regarding animal and ecological studies to media and film theory, as it is "a zoographical writing of media studies from an alternative perspective of animals, energy, resources, and waste."<sup>56</sup> An ecological comprehension of political economy, ethics, and aesthetics must be established in an approach borrowed from the theories of Félix Guattari to broaden animal research and enhance its relation to the materiality of media. This approach provides an expanded mode to map specific cultural techniques and epistemological objects, extending a focus from just animals as individuals in their own right but demanding a broader perspective on the nature in which mediatic ecology and ecological problems are articulated in the modern industrial era in which capitalism has dominated as the ideological framework of global production post-Soviet decline.

## Biopower and Biowaste

When approached with a comprehensive understanding of resource depletion and a high-tech material scientific approach to media, political and economic struggles and statistics become more critical and obvious. The mapping of biopower globally and in urban, artificial environments is “both an extension of Foucauldian methodology and also something that needs to be thought through specific mediatic and knowledge techniques.”<sup>57</sup> When considering animals and knowledge about animals, technology is used as a medium for education and measuring, remaining instrumental in establishing a relation to ecological resources, described in Heideggerian terms as a “standing-in-reserve.”<sup>58</sup> Specialized units will eventually return to nature as electronic waste, emphasizing these connections between epistemological and ontological devices. This “poetic thrust”<sup>59</sup> of technological advancement towards unearthing raw minerals reduced Earth from a place of mythos, animistic narratives, and overwhelming vastness to modern engineering, science, and technological media systems. Metals such as copper became a crucial, invaluable resource, and many early copper mines were quickly exhausted of resources by the start of the 20th century, even before any popular socialist revolution. New drills were needed to dig deeper; thus, technology utilizing more mineral resources<sup>60</sup> from deep within the planet was developed. Parikka writes that “inside the Earth, one “finds a metallic reality, which feeds into metal metaphysics and digital devices. Besides the speculative stance, one can revert back to empirical material too.”<sup>61</sup> Human labor<sup>62</sup> and urban landscapes also experience and undergo the consequences of earth mineral resource extraction and its resulting media archaeology— ranging from factory work in modern-day socialist China to mining in Africa, the use of these “special economic zones” as a means to creative “intensive free market zones” through “dubious lack of labor protection laws.”<sup>63</sup> If humans are not protected, it can be assured that animals, be they strays or wildlife, are affected more severely by the consequences of mineral extraction and, subsequently, what can be identified, at the very least by Parikka, as potential media-centric exploitation that could, perhaps, be contradictory to conservationist or environmentalist efforts proliferated by the state or provincial government.

## Screening and Digitizing the Animalesque

Animals serve as spiritual embodiments of movement and life but simultaneously are rendered as passive objects, lacking an interior world or a fully operating sense of self and consciousness. The late 19th century witnessed the “articulation of animals and ecology as a relay point where the social was negotiated,” and ideas of human sociability and sociological features could be articulated through its relation to animal worlds, “with an eye towards the psychological, urban, and technological contexts.”<sup>64</sup> Free-ranging feral cats in urban environments are remarkably individualist, with anthropomorphic traits and, some may say, elaborate



personas and personalities of their own. Unlike other animals, they are very different in controlling and subjugating and do not conform to established conventions of cat-like domesticity or domestic associations. The ethologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944) described a concept of the *Umwelt*,<sup>65</sup> or “environment-world,” which has influenced various other philosophers and thinkers on the question of animal influence on human worlds, including Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). By rejecting the Cartesian model of the animal<sup>66</sup> as an instinctual, mindless machine, Uexküll perceived animals as constantly engaged and active in worldly perception and whose perception was based primarily on observing effects in real-life scenarios, essential tactics for survival. With a pre-revolutionary long-term association as Russia being an abstracted site of casual evil and cruelty towards the lower-class serfs,<sup>67</sup> even Americans such as Henry Bergh would be so horrified by the casual cruelty towards carriage horses in St. Petersburg in the 1860s that he would go on to found the ASPCA in April of 1866.<sup>68</sup> This is what makes Cheburashka’s emergence and proliferation throughout Soviet society so significant— as the “Soviet Mickey Mouse,” abstracted and delineated from conventional species-identification, quite literally emerges from a crate of oranges in a grocery store in what is implied to be Moscow. He is loved, given a name and identity, and blessed with a new life and endless possibilities for his self-identification through the values and ethics of a distinctly Marxist spirit.<sup>69</sup> A potentially dangerous facet of animal studies and media archaeology is the



**Figure 5.** Still from *Gena the Crocodile* (1969). Cheburashka being discovered by a shopkeeper in a crate of oranges, unsure of his true origins.

potential use of animal life for utilization by humans in abusive or potentially harmful contexts. More specifically, “the ways in which animal life is bio-politically governed in both material and representational terms.”<sup>70</sup> Animal imagery may be recycled, mass-distributed, converted into an array of products, and, subsequently, back into human capital. Therefore, the idea of “animal capital” signifies “a tangle of biopolitical relations within which the economic and symbolic capital of animal life can no longer be sorted into binary distinctions.”<sup>71</sup> To understand the disappearance of animals in the modern world is to acknowledge that the “spectacle of captivity [has] not yet considered many other aspects of human-animal relationships, which involve human’s integrated existence with pets, the forever invisible slaughtered animals, and other affective poignancy.”<sup>72</sup> Additionally, the advent of screen technologies can provide a technical means of seeing and hearing are the results of meticulous experimentation with minerals and their processes, sharing in an attitude of fervent experimentation, all in order “to make the geos expressive and transformative”<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

From the beloved Cheburashka to the underwhelmingly lukewarm Khokhulya, the Russian desman, animals, and animal-esque symbolism may always have a role to play in popular political landscapes and the symbolics of Marxist revolutionary and capitalist post-revolutionary cultures. Parikka’s “Anthroscene” could be described as “a concept that maps the scope of a transdisciplinary problem,”<sup>74</sup> particularly the usefulness and applicability of the technological solution. He argues that a comprehensive understanding of the humanities could serve as a valuable tool to understand further the significance of the larger scientifically identified and documented Anthropocene and its environmental implications, which remain most important above all else, dictating the course of humankind’s future on this planet. The agenda of media obsolescence and the establishment of vast territories quite literally drenched in toxic residue due to this phenomenon examines transversal links across the semiotic, referring to a comprehensive study of residual matter in real-life urban environments and media. A lack of understanding of non-humans, especially in media, cinema, and archaeology, therefore implies a lack of agency recognition. Through media, branding, consumerism, and marketing, animals transform into moving vessels to imbue life, vision, and capital. Individuals with a smartphone can, for example, photograph a stray cat, a flight of pigeons, a stranger’s dog, or a rat on the train tracks, among others. Photography “may further amalgamate this denotation in the age where almost every human being can easily capture animals... and circulate these images via the online social network.”<sup>75</sup> This simple action, therefore, will inevitably transform the animal into a commodity and symbol, removing the sense of autonomous identity and transforming the animal into something akin to an idea or product for social or political currency.

Media ecology rendered through an animal studies framework thereby recognizes the utilization of the natural organism and nature as a natural resource, forever connecting media's historical narrative regarding its development as an ecological issue. Material ecology is the raw material for hardware and technological units, ranging from archaic cables to cell phones. Simultaneously, it is a unique epistemological framework that can map climate change while providing further resources for ongoing environmental depletion. This material constitution of hardware in terms of production and the material cycle of electronic media technologies will, no matter what, result in material waste—this much is unavoidable. To broaden animal research and enhance its relation to the materiality of media, an ecological comprehension of political economy, ethics, and aesthetics must be established in an approach borrowed from Guattari and expounded upon by Parikka while implementing the socio-economic philosophies most relevant to each society during their respective time. This approach provides an expanded mode to map specific cultural techniques and epistemological objects, extending a focus from just animals as individuals in their own right but demanding a broader perspective on the nature of mediatic ecology and ecological problems articulated and rearticulated in *anemoiac* digital retrospectives, such as Westerners craving their own little Cheburashka doll or ironically re-circulating vaguely humorous images of a semi-grotesque Russian desman suit, that proliferate and re-proliferate popular culture, regardless of their actual popularity and social influence in the broader world.

## Notes

- 1 Vladimir Il'ich Lenin. 1987. *Essential works of Lenin: "what is to be done?" and other writings*. Translated by Henry M. Christman. New York: Dover Publications, 3.
- 2 Juan Valdera-Gil and Francisco Gil. 2014. Ideological socialisation in the childhood: cheburashka. 13 (December 29, 2014), 92.
- 3 In their essay, "Political Animals in the Modern World: An Investigation of the National Animal Symbol," Jintao Zhu and Gregor Ilsinger argue that there are three distinct approaches to understanding the modern definition of a nation. Namely, primordialism, as defined as a natural bond emulated by kinship; modernism, which upholds the modern construct of a nation-state in the modern era; and, finally, perennialism, which dichotomously argues that the establishment and formulation of the nation-state is not a natural part of human nature. The modern Khokhulya similarly emulates these ideals but is generally less aesthetically savory and emotionally compelling in the public eye. (Zhu and Ilsinger 2023)
- 4 Contextualizing Parikka's work through photographic analysis set forth by Dr. Fiona Luk-wa Law's work in deconstructing Hong Kong-based cat street photography (Yuk-wa Law 2017), Lauren McMahon's *Animal Worlds: Film, Philosophy, and Time* (McMahon 2019), and Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet* (Haraway 2008), one can acquire a better understanding of the implications of Parikka's theories on animal representation and commodification in film and media.

5 Hiroaki Kuromiya. 1985. The crisis of proletarian identity in the soviet factory, 1928–1929. *Slavic rev.* 44 (2): 280–297, 285.

6 Jussi Parikka. 2014. *The anthrobscene*. Forerunners. Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 6.

7 Marx defined the “commodity” in *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (1867) as, first and foremost, a wholly externalized object that satisfies human needs. The exchange rate through which a commodity is sold or traded is entirely dependent on given conditions, as determined by immediate human need. The consideration of animal (and human) life as commodified and utilized for its *use-value* is notable here, particularly in the mediating processes between mankind and nature. When referring more specifically to animal life, Marx wrote that, in a broader discussion of the linen as simple Equivalent, that “It is as if alongside and external to lions, tigers, rabbits, and all other actual animals, which form when grouped together the various kinds, species, subspecies, families etc. of the animal kingdom, there existed also in addition the animal, the individual incarnation of the entire animal kingdom. Such a particular which contains within itself all really present species of the same entity is a *universal* (like animal, god, etc.)” (Marx 1981, 26.)

8 Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka. 2012. Zombie media: circuit bending media archaeology into an art method. *Leonardo* 45, no. 5 (October): 424–430, 429.

9 McMahan 2019, 3.

10 Foucault quoted in McMahan 2019, 14.

11 In identifying this presumed *longing* for a past and history that is both comforting and simultaneously *foreign*, it is crucial to note that Cheburashka and its affiliated characters are nonetheless a universally-known and very much beloved part of contemporary post-Soviet cultures.

12 Hertz and Parikka 2012, 427.

13 Haraway 2008, 281.

14 For example, the grey wolf population increased by 150% while the roe deer population underwent a dramatic decline attributed to the “erosion of wildlife protection enforcement” (Bragina et al. 2015)

15 Cat-like creatures are included in this definition.

16 As the discourse surrounding the presence of stray animals in urban environments continues, other feral or wild populations threatening endemic species are not always considered; instead, they focus on the animals most visible in the public eye. These animals become either a tool for modernization or textual configurations prone to human use. Examples of visual animal representations are found in fictional characters, fandom merchandise, branding materials, and real-life animals inhabiting and occupying urban environments. These animals influence media historiography not only through interference with tangible objects, such as residing in abandoned buildings, loitering in cluttered alleyways, or frequenting local establishments, but also by taking on the role of cultural contributors in their own right rather than solely recipients or objects of the spectatorial gaze of humankind. Cheburashka’s broader cultural impact, in particular, is utterly undeniable, as the character “thrived in a world of paradoxes,” demonstrating that “a desire to belong is normal” and that “it is okay to be a little odd” (Richards 2021). Parikka recognized that the photographic lens is not only a material object through which the act of looking is treated as

a souvenir but through which “spectatorship is self-criticized by an increasing awareness of the underlying separation of the performative act of looking and the action itself, especially in the context of animal studies where social change is constantly inspired by the conscious and conscientious advocacy of animal rights and welfare” (Yuk-wa Law 2017, 57).

**17** Marta Borgi and Francesca Cirulli. 2016. Pet face: mechanisms underlying human-animal relationships. *Front. Psychol.* 7 (March 8, 2016)

**18** Therefore, the Marxist perspective on animal life and involvement in domesticity (in all its banality) can be questioned and considered, especially when, during the early revolutionary years, many traditional household pets held strong bourgeoisie associations among members of the Bolsheviks. As described in the dog-training manual, *The Shepherd Dog at the Service of the Kolkhoz* [Овчарка на службе в колхозе], a “Kolkhoz” being a collective farm, identified the importance of prioritizing “working” breeds, primarily German Shepards, referred to using the term “овчарки” (lit. shepherd dogs) to avoid any potential associations with the USSR’s WWII-era enemy (Заводчиков 1952).

**19** Parikka 2014, 6.

**20** Hutton quoted in Parikka 2014, 18

**21** Parikka 2014, 6.

**22** McMahon 2019, 20.

**23** Parikka 2014, 7.

**24** Parikka 2014, 28.

**25** Alexey Knizhnikov et al. 2021. Environmental transparency of russian mining and metal companies: evidence from independent ranking system. *The Extractive Industries and Society* 8, no. 3 (September 1, 2021)

**26** This criticism is not exclusive to the Russian Federation or the USSR. In fact, most industrialized or industrializing countries grapple with the struggles of material production and material waste.

**27** Jussi Parikka. 2013. Media zoology and waste management – animal energies and medi-anatures. In collaboration with Mediarep.Org and Mediarep.Org. Publisher: [object Object], 529.

**28** Parikka 2014, 540.

**29** Parikka 2014, 26.

**30** Parikka 2014, 8.

**31** Brian Bonhomme. 2010. Russian compassion: the russian society for the protection of animals—founding and contexts, 1865-75. 259, *Canadian Journal of History* 45 (2): 259+

**32** Andy Byford and Henrietta Mondry. 2015. Love, service and sacrifice: narratives of dogs and children in the soviet 1930s. Publisher: University of Melbourne, Department of Russian and Language studies, *Australian Slavonic and East European studies : journal of the Australian and New Zealand Slavists’ Association and of the Australasian Association for Study of the Socialist Countries.* 29 (1): 63–89

**33** Yuk-wa Law 2017, 55.

**34** McMahon 2019, 12.

**35** Yuk-wa Law 2017, 55.

**36** Hertz and Parikka 2012, 427.

**37** While cats (or cat-like creatures) may have a negative association with feral colonies or overcrowded, dirty animal shelters, they simultaneously are an infamously popular tool for capitalist marketing campaigns, such as *Hello Kitty* and even Tony the Tiger, the anthropomorphic tiger mascot for Kellogg's *Frosted Flakes* cereal, or even less well-known examples such as Hikonyan the cat, created by the Japanese local city government of Hikone to promote community unification and dwindling tourism, not at all unlike the mascot Khokhulya. There is no certainty that such objects and the media produced to market these images will eventually conglomerate in a physical, real-world landfill or potentially a digital one, lost to history as a deleted or discarded media symbol. As a collective species, cats or cat-like creatures have a notably popular series of reaction emojis. They have become popular subjects of gifs in informal interpersonal digital communication within the context of phone and text-based interpersonal exchange. Furthermore, the Soviet space dogs— particularly an amicable yet tragic stray named Laika— remain relevant to historical discussion and cultural symbolism. However, Laika the Space Dog was real, and Khokhulya and Cheburasha reside in the realm of fiction and digitality. Whether Laika became immortalized and transformed into a symbol and signifier in her 'second life' is solely up to individual interpretation and sensitivity regarding her tragic death.

**38** Amy Nelson. 2006. A hearth for a dog: the paradoxes of soviet pet keeping. In *Borders of socialism*, edited by Lewis H. Siegelbaum, 123–144. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 124.

**39** McMahan 2019, 104.

**40** Parikka 2014, 37.

**41** By definition, *oligarchy* refers to a small group of people who control a country. In the case of the modern Russian Federation, these oligarchs are members of former Soviet republics who took advantage of the USSR's dissolution and the onslaught of privatization, though it is arguable that their power and control of various industries has been more or less contained under current leadership, especially in the environmental fields.

**42** Parikka 2014, 539.

**43** Staly V Dudenkov. 1985. The recycling of the wastes of production and consumption as an aspect of the environmental protection in the ussr. In *Appropriate waste management for developing countries*, 95–100. Springer, 97.

**44** Harraway quoted in Parikka 2014, 539.

**45** Parikka 2013, 527.

**46** Lewis S. Feuer. 1949. Dialectical materialism and soviet science. Publisher: [The University of Chicago Press, Philosophy of Science Association], *Philosophy of Science* 16 (2): 105–124, 105.

**47** Parikka 2013, 529.

**48** This includes both Cheburashka films and television programs in addition to Instagram Reels, YouTube and TikTok— all of which occupy and perform cinematic traditions by way of narrative, filmic style, and other organizational aspects.

**49** McMahan 2019, 201.

**50** Alexandra Curtis. 2021. Not all eco-heroes wear capes. Russian Life. Accessed April 10, 2024. <https://russianlife.com/the-russia-file/not-all-eco-heroes-wear-capes/>

**51** Parikka 2013, 529.

**52** Haraway 2008, 41.

**53** A more expansive definition of the term is inclusive of the “animal” as an aspect of “machine.” This identification and classification of the term is actually self-referential—circular causal systems have innate outputs and inputs, such as feedback systems, that consistently self—regulate and can be applied to an analysis of both biological and mechanical processes.

**54** Herbert W. Robinson, Douglas E. Knight, and American Society for Cybernetics, eds. 1972. *Cybernetics, artificial intelligence, and ecology: proceedings of the fourth annual symposium of the American Society for Cybernetics, [held oktober 8 - 9, 1970]*. Proceedings of the ... annual symposium of the American Society for Cybernetics 4. New York: Spartan Books, 312.

**55** Filip Jaroš. 2021. The cohabitation of humans and urban cats in the anthropocene: the clash of welfare concepts. *Animals* 11, no. 3 (March 5, 2021): 705.

**56** Parikka 2013, 537.

**57** Parikka 2013, 520.

**58** Parikka 2013, 520.

**59** Parikka 2014, 13.

**60** For example, the Gumyoshevsky mine (*Гумёшевский рудник*), located in the Ural Mountains, had already been exhausted by the 19th century. Other examples of exhausted mining plants includes the Polevskoy Copper Smelting Plant (Полевской медеплавильный завод), which underwent an attempted reorganization into an iron plant after 1870 until being officially shut down in 1923 (via [uralmines.ru/gumeshevshij-rudnik](http://uralmines.ru/gumeshevshij-rudnik)).

**61** Parikka 2014, 14.

**62** Pests, food supplies, hygienic products, and other waste concerns are logistics of urbanity, constituting a regular individual’s daily life. The lives of citizens and societies, however, are never entirely separate from the influence of the animal. The lives of cities and societies were never separate from animal life, always linked on the material level, even if not previously recognized in sociological work. China, as only one anecdotal example of a contemporary urban case study, is understood as the epicenter of the “global chains of production and abandonment of media technologies,” having been designated as a topic of conversation in international politics of trade and labor (Parikka 2014, 27.). The material history of media is expansive and invasive, including the copper industry, which played a significant role in developing and establishing most forms of telecommunications, particularly in its usage in wiring. In cities around the world whose economies depend on at-home production of technological units, especially Chinese cities such as Foshan’s Nanhai District, these “technologies and media materials never die: it is the place where scrap metal gets processed” (29).

**63** Parikka 2014, 540.

**64** Parikka 2013, 533.

**65** This theory of the environment or “surroundings” as a study in communication and signification can also be translated as “self-centered world,” as different organisms and species may have different interior, individualized worlds despite sharing a common broader environment. Jakob von Uexküll was also notable as a founder of biosemantics as

a legitimate research field and the Institut für Umweltforschung (Institute for Energy and Environmental Research).

**66** This Cartesian theory states that animals do not deserve direct concern or care because they do not possess a consciousness that is comparable to a human one.

**67** Although serfdom was legally abolished on the 4th of August, 1789, serfdom was deeply ingrained in Russian culture, particularly in the pre-revolutionary monarchical rule of the various Tsars and would have likely still strongly influenced non-Russian perceptions of the country's 19th century culture.

**68** Bonhomme 2010.

**69** Spirituality is not implied here in the literal or structural (religious) sense. Rather, this discusses what Marx would identify as more of a revolutionary urge—as he writes in the Confidential Communication on Bakunin in 1870 regarding the English, “What [the English proletariat] lack is the spirit of generalization and revolutionary passion” (Marx 1870). The use of this word in translation, although only appearing four times, appears frequently in this text communicates the appropriate meaning of this word in a broader context.

**70** McMahan 2019, 19.

**71** McMahan 2019, 19.

**72** Yuk-wa Law 2017, 55.

**73** Parikka 2014, 38.

**74** Parikka 2014, 26.

**75** Yuk-wa Law 2017, 54.

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