In the Stalinist era, the task of representing memory, sovereignty, and history was given to the Soviet water works—canals, dams, and reservoirs. This infrastructure embraced the cultural program of monument making despite its otherwise efficiency-driven role as a utility. In the perceived misfit between traditional monumentality and an object as dispersed as a hydraulic infrastructure, a system of representation emerged that presented a unified image of nature transformed through politics. Whereas the construction site of the canal was violently real, the public dissemination of its cultural value travelled though the mass-printed book to include the media of text, photomontage, drawing, and maps. The propaganda campaign produced an infrastructural monument by amplifying events as they unfolded in the present and constructing scenarios that imaged the future. In turn, these artistic representations influenced all encounters with the reality of the completed infrastructure and, by extension, with the affected landscape. The infrastructural monument synthesized the imagery disseminated through mass media with the real animate power of moving water to formulate a new state geography and, with it, and new Soviet mentality.

The Soviet water infrastructure was a system of dammed rivers and lakes linked by reservoirs and canals that formed navigable connections between the Baltic, White, Azov, Black and Caspian Seas. Built under Stalin, in the 1930s, the infrastructure connected an immense territory for the expedient traffic of goods. It also included dams and reservoirs for the production of nationalized sources of energy and water and drained northern marshlands to move water southward into deserts thus creating new agricultural zones. In addition to these functions, the canal network acted as a monument for the Communist regime by representing and distributing the Kremlin’s power across the Soviet landscape.

In 1947, when the canals had already been operating for more than a decade, a representation of monumentality emerged in the work of Nikolai Mikhailov, a popular geographer. His book *Over the Map of the Motherland* represented the infrastructure through a series of national maps. From the point of view of a geographer, the
northern most geographic border of cultivation into Siberia. The line indicating the limit beyond which the climate was too extreme for the survival of agriculture was simply redrawn to increase the area of cultivable land. By relocating massive amounts of water through the canal infrastructure into new parts of the state, formerly unproductive regions were rezoned for agriculture. The maps under consideration were projecting a fictional idealized geography, where irrigation and electricity could overcome the excessive cold of Siberia. One map marks new regions with bold black arrows where wheat plantations would be expanded. A massive hatched arrow in another map determines where cotton could be introduced in the Azov and the Black Sea regions. Mandarin oranges, Peruvian cherries, and Japanese persimmons had been imported from warmer climates but could now be harvested on Russian soil.

Stalin proclaimed: "Only the creative initiative of the masses can fix the map of fruit-growing... Only the people can create a new geography of horticulture." These techniques were not only reserved for plants and crops, they were also implemented in the migration of water works could be read through their ecological effects. Denying an interpretation of nature as given, he declared that geography could now be restructured by the power of the state:

Scientists of the contemporary West lament: 'Landscape is our irrevocable fate.'— 'No!' we say. 'With our own hands, using well-considered blueprints, we are building our country; we are creating a new landscape.' Bourgeois scientists say: 'Geography is not created, but is born of itself.' — 'No!' we say. 'Building Communism, we are remaking the country with rational calculation, we are changing its geography.'

One map showed regions in need of artificial flooding juxtaposed to marshland regions in need of draining. The plan would bring the excess water from the north to the south to equalize the regions and render them both productive. Giving geography agency, Mikhailov proclaimed: "Water is washing desert regions off the map one after another." A different map depicted the movement of the

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1/4" = 1'-0"
of animals. Squirrels and deer would populate the newly formed climatic zones following the arrows on the map. New habitats and forests would invade former deserts and marshes by occupying an expanded area of the hatch. According to Mikhailov, by 1947 more than 3 million hectares of desert land had been turned into gardens and more than 10,000 hectares of land were drained, turning “the malaria-infested jungle . . . into health resorts and subtropical plantations.”

Lines, hatches, and arrows on the maps were charged with the task of redefining the fate of entire geographic regions, plant cultures, and animal communities.

Mikhailov’s geography illustrated more than the physical mass migrations and expansions of agricultural production. Backed by the infrastructural object and its many representations, geography became the discipline that could best represent the new economic and infrastructural programs of the Soviet state, thereby preserving its legacy in history. Mikhailov was aware of his role as the geographer-historian. He wrote:

The country has changed. And much of what has been achieved by the Soviet State is shown in the geographic map. With its representational language, the map narrates the changes brought on by historic epochs. Not for nothing did Gogol say: “I always wanted to write geography; here, in geography, it would be possible to understand how to write history.”

Tracing Mikhailov’s maps and superimposing them all into a single drawing reveals the scale of the geographic campaign. Because the Soviet Union was understood as a closed system, with a clearly defined border, the geographic signs all fit neatly within its boundary. This drawing clearly shows how the geographic language redefined the Soviet landscape as a monumental construction site. It is a unified image of Stalin’s war on nature, of geography transformed through politics. Mikhailov wrote: “With lines and signs on the map, history draws its path.” Animated through a vast literary-representational campaign, the infrastructural monument became an apparatus for disseminating the power of the Soviet
Monument. Front of wall.

Monument. Top of wall.

Monument. Back of wall.

The prophetic map was its ultimate medium, which alerted readers to the new scale of Communism’s reach across the USSR and beyond.

2. Ibid., p. 196.
3. USSR in Construction 5 (Moscow: OGIS, May, 1933).
7. Ibid., p. 5.

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