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Beyond coping? Alternatives to consumption within a social network of Russian workers

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Abstract
Research on the post-socialist lived experience of the working poor often focuses on reciprocity and economic survival. It is equally important to examine how social networks facilitate self-provisioning and mutual-aid practices for non-subsistence consumption (decorative, non-utility items) in the face of material want. The ethnography presented here of manufacturing workers in a Russian province shows how self-resourced homemaking and decorative practices, after MacIntyre (1981), constitute an 'internal good' – a social activity valued for itself as much as the domestic production it results in. This good is important for workers' mutual recognition as providers and their status as sufficiently resourceful subjects suitable for inclusion within a social network – itself an important resource for the working poor. The network provides opportunities for alternatives to consumption outside the market economy. Worker identities at work cannot be detached from those at leisure and at home, and even the meaning of the workplace is problematized by its special place within the network.

Keywords
Russia, (post-)socialism, precarious workers, working-class communities, consumption

I had visited Sasha's tiny flat in the small 'urban settlement' I call 'Izluchino' three hours bus-ride south from Moscow many times, but at some point I stopped thinking too much about quite how the family of two adults and two children managed with less than 25 sq. m. of living space. A Russian flat of any description

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is for its owner an ongoing project in the utilization of all dimensions.[1] Sasha's flat is a former dormitory for migrant workers partitioned to create a tiny one-bed flat with miniscule kitchen and bathroom, each two metres by two. The family of four sleep in the single living space of 14 sq. m.[2] The ongoing project of creating a habitable space for the family occupies a central place in the organization and planning of domestic life.

A second child had arrived shortly before the family had received the 'flat' after older relatives had petitioned the main ex-Soviet enterprise, which still controlled housing stock in the late 1990s.[3] Once they had moved in, Sasha had measured up quickly, skilfully making from scratch bunk beds with built-in shelving and cupboards that fitted snugly into the corner of the single living space. The couple's own bed is similarly a bespoke pull-out affair as they could not afford the imported sofa beds on sale in the region capital. In any case a fold-up double would cost Sasha two months' wages. 'Why not save up?' I ask him, already knowing the answer. Everyday bills accounted for nearly half the wages of the 36-year-old fork-lift driver, 'and I'd like to eat in the meantime while waiting for that sofa bed I don't need', he says with characteristic dry humour.

Most of the workers at the cement factory, the biggest employer in town, live in similar accommodation and maximize space utilization by constructing 'do-it-yourself' furniture, often from materials 'recovered' from work, or scrounged from others. The homes of all workers I met contain examples of do-it-yourself skill engendered by necessity – all the families are on low working incomes.[4] At the same time these domestic spaces showcase the workings of a specific kind of social capital, the fruit of networking and skill-exchange, evidenced by the pride of place given to handmade decorative elements. Within the particular social network of workers studied during three periods of fieldwork from 2009 to 2011 the focal point in the cramped apartments is given to hand-built tropical aquariums. This practice of decoration and the skill with which it was accomplished is constitutive of an important internal 'good' and emblematic of a more wide-ranging alternative practice to conspicuous consumption within the formal economy.[5] The good produced is internal to practice because it is the result of mutual recognition of the value of domestic production that replaces consumption; it is also bound to the satisfaction and esteem deriving from this activity, valued for its own sake – for its sociality (Knight, 2008). People like Sasha, who prides himself on his 'folk' resourcefulness, are also keen to replace manufactured and shop-bought elements essential to the functioning of the aquariums with their own, including filters, heating elements, etc. The practice of building a biosphere capable of sustaining tropical fish (not shop-bought, but home-bred and swapped between friends and neighbours) is dependent on cooperation between members of an extended social network.

The symbolism of life's fragility in the aquarium is not lost on informants. Arguably the aquarium is a luxury item that might for other social groups simply function as another status symbol marking the middle-class home. However, for the working poor of Izluchino it is not only a symbol of self-sufficiency and resourcefulness in the face of general lack, but mirrors the difficult

caring and providing role they perform – sustaining life in a harsh economic environment. Such practices are often gendered too: as breadwinning work has become a less dependable source of social reputation for men, DIY can be seen to compensate them in terms of providing some kind of *productive* autonomy lost from the workplace.[6] The meanings ascribed to this process of furnishing and decoration, and the social mechanisms by which it comes about, are the focus of this article. The practice of 'made-do', 'do-it-yourself' ingenuity using 'found' and other materials that is sustained and given impetus by a self-defined social network of the working poor sets the research presented here apart from recent previous analysis of decoration in the post-socialist domestic sphere (Drazin, 2001), consumption versus self-provisioning (Czegledy, 2002; Ries, 2009; Vann, 2005) and individual and household responses to market capitalism (Humphrey and Mandel, 2002; Patico and Caldwell, 2002; Round et al., 2008).

Methods and field-site

Ethnographic materials (recorded and unrecorded interviews, participant and non-participant observations) for this research were gathered in winter 2009 and summer 2010 to winter 2010/11. Prior to that I had spent many extended summer periods in the field. Both participant observation and semi-structured interviewing were conducted in a variety of settings: sometimes at work, frequently in the spaces of domesticity and leisure – summer houses, vegetable plots, park benches and vehicles. I lived for much of the time in workers' homes. I was also able to try my hand at some of the trades and practices of informants such as welding automobiles and constructing double-glazing units on a shop-floor. Long-term interactions with 50 informants living in Izluchino in the Kaluga region of Central European Russia are formative of the bulk of the materials. In addition to anonymizing workers' names and jobs, various minor details pertaining to the identity of the settlement have been obscured or changed.

The sequential sampling of all fieldwork materials approached methodological 'saturation' (Small, 2009): in reviewing notes and coding responses a large amount of repetition was revealed both in narratives of work and non-work practices and even in specific story events used by people who did not know each other. All the stories about making furniture resemble each other (using the place of work as a resource), as do narratives of involvement with the informal economy (the necessity and moral right of stealing goods from one's employer for use in self-provisioning, the necessity of moonlighting). Finally, the reasons people give for their lack of labour mobility, a phenomenon well-known to scholars of post-socialist economies (Friebel and Guriev, 2000), are remarkably consistent: personal pride and domestic arrangements prevent men seeking lucrative work in the regional centre or Moscow.

What is an 'urban' settlement such as Izluchino and what does it mean for the formation of a blue-collar social network to live in one? Because of the siting of a major machine factory after the Second World War, Izluchino grew rapidly.

The contrast in housing stock shows this; a small number of wooden houses remain in the centre, but the vast majority of inhabitants live in blocks of flats, mainly built by prisoner labour. The settlement served a single state employer and one of the chief problems with this 'monotown' model that became evident after the demise of the Soviet Union was the closely interwoven nature of civic and cultural life with the economic logic of the urban space. The 'single company city' (Alexander and Buchli, 2007) entailed a large corporate role in the many para-state systems of welfare and patronage: housing built and maintained by the factory organization, and leisure, health and other amenities partly funded from the same source. After 1991, such towns were dealt a triple blow: a haemorrhaging of jobs, often over a protracted period, a concomitant loss of finance for infrastructure and social benefits that had made living in such impromptu settlements worthwhile, and wage-arrears and labour-hoarding by surviving enterprises – preventing workers moving away (Friebel and Guriev, 2000).[7]

Due to rapid industrial growth, many inhabitants were born outside the region. Because of its geographical location in European Russian, and employment opportunities, Kaluga region, as before 1991, remains one of the biggest beneficiaries of internal migration in the Russian Federation.[8] In terms of everyday life, settlements like Izluchino could be said to have less civic identity than established towns. Little attention was paid to creating a town-space and infrastructure suitable for the needs of a high-density development. Then and now, civic, leisure, and consumption-orientated amenities do not bear comparison with 'old' towns. Unlike the district-centre town about 20 km away, Izluchino has many unpaved spaces, large abandoned brownfield sites and almost no street lighting between its arterial roads. It had a civic building housing a theatre stage, but this is partly in disrepair, as is a large secondary school complex. Its communal canteen closed down some years ago. There is a small open-air market once a week selling local produce, and a dozen or so shops, dominated by small businesses selling mainly foodstuffs. Many families, regardless of their current economic status, maintain a small wooden village house and private vegetable plot outside the town. This, as in many if not most small towns in Russia, gives the settlement an 'urban peasant' identity (Czegledy, 2002). Even those who have no plot come into daily contact with local produce through their social network and therefore have some understanding of the significance of self-provisioning.

Everyday life in small-town Russia

This article examines everyday experience of working-class people in the Russian provinces. It contributes to calls for researchers to engage more meaningfully with local actors to bring out the specific meanings of the post-socialist everyday (Flynn and Oldfield, 2006; Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008). It is also informed by Moran's argument that the 'quotidian can help to make sense of contemporary political culture, with its particular notions of the relationship between the market, the public sphere and "ordinary people"' (2005: 3). Similarly, it emphasizes the

agency of ordinary people in the 'making do' manner de Certeau (1984) describes: their capacity to use the spaces, tools and materials at hand to at least in some degree short-circuit the power-relations that bind. In particular, this article contributes to work on post-socialist spaces that reveals habits and experiences that undermine the reductive view of change as part of an inexorable and unidirectional 'transition' (Stenning and Hörschelmann, 2008: 9). Like similar work (Humphrey, 2002; Kaneff, 2002; Stenning, 2005a), this article provides evidence that many of the factors influencing people's narratives and practice in terms of how they respond to new social and economic realities, including changes in consumption, can be traced back to pre-reform dispositions that remain important despite economic 'transition' – these include the importance of the informal economy, the legacy of self-provisioning due to shortages in the socialist era, and social capital derived by virtue of membership of a blue-collar social network. The latter can be seen to persist and gain greater importance after the demise of the socialist-era enterprises that gave rise to it. In the spatially compressed housing, leisure and quotidian existence of Izluchino, maintenance of one's membership in such a network can be as simple as exchanging pleasantries on the way to work or comparing prices in the queue at the Saturday market. Whether or not the two men dressed in overalls and stopping at the crossroads (there is only one) still work in the same factory is immaterial to their sense of network 'membership'. Often one party has remained working in Soviet-era inheritor industries (cement, machine repair, extraction) while his some-time confrere or distant kin-relation has moved on to own-account work, utilizing a stock skill like welding; alternatively he may have disappeared into the informal economy solely doing odd jobs here and there. Even in the latter case mutual interpellation remains: both men 'qualify' as practical self-sufficient subjects who 'work for a living', unlike 'them' – the white-collared, the non-technically educated, the representatives of power and the ruling 'party of swindlers and thieves'.

Thus nominal 'normative' worker status – working in industry and drawing a regular wage from such work – is less and less relevant to inclusion in the blue-collar network. The 'second' or 'informal' economy continues after socialism to be of crucial importance to households in meeting needs that the market cannot provide (Verdery, 1996). Such practices may also echo behaviour associated with pre-urban livelihoods, for example in the case of town-dwellers valuing an ongoing attachment to the land and the making visible of this in everyday life (Czegledy, 2002). Finally, the recourse to practices that circumvent or even avoid some market consumer behaviour may relate to 'the expectations aroused' and then dashed 'by the nature of transition discourse itself', which promised a direct route to a mass-consumption paradise but delivered unimaginable (to ex-Soviet citizens) social inequality (Flynn and Oldfield, 2006; see also Humphrey, 2002). At the same time, paradoxically, the socialist-era legacy of fostering the 'right' to consumption and increasing living standards (Verdery, 1996) may be seen as contributing to the impetus for the post-socialist working poor to seek alternative solutions to maintaining a materially 'adequate' existence while remaining 'inadequate consumers'

(Bauman, 1998: 38) whose practices take place more frequently outside the formal economy.

In addition to bringing out the everyday of post-socialism, the current research tries to move beyond an inevitably reductive portrait of the economically marginalized inhabitants of Russia as 'just coping' with their lot. For many economically disadvantaged people in Russia daily life is still, as it was for most of the 1990s, dominated by economic imperatives of just getting by. However, such an admission should not preclude looking at some of the practices *beyond* coping even by some of the most marginalized people such as workers in 'rural-urban' settlements. Practices that arise out of necessity and precarity may point to more enduring responses to ongoing inequality and the problem of social reproduction. Indeed, practices are often valued for their own sake as much as the marginal economic benefit they provide.

Finally, micro-level research can provide a number of insights into theoretical debates within and beyond the post-socialist context around class identity, alternatives to traditional consumption, and subaltern agency, as well as 'theorizing up' (Bebbington, 2003, quoted in Flynn and Oldfield, 2006: 10) from place-based studies towards thinking, however tentatively, about particular issues of macro-scale. This is possible because decorative practices by workers are both dependent on and are part of the structure of the social network and formal labour arrangements themselves. People create out of DIY work a hierarchy of value for non-utility and 'luxury' items such as home aquariums. This valuation of home-related production is embedded in social and cultural evaluations of worker skills and the ability to provision and keep a household. Contra Bourdieu, rather than external aesthetic norms, the engine of this practice is shared involvement with and recognition from socio-economic peers, the satisfaction that comes from an agent performing a complex task well for its own sake (the internal good) and the use-value its production creates.

I conceptualize the intersection of worker identities on and off the job as an 'extended network of practice' where economic capital is mainly defended and maintained, but sometimes developed too, and within which domestic-orientated production and practices play an important role. Such a network is dependent on mutually recognized skill identities, such as those of welders, electricians, and mechanics. It is extra-institutional, in that crafts and competencies – initially tied to employment – extend out and are constitutive of other areas of identity and everyday lived experience. This is possible thanks to the compact spatial nature of the field. In a small town with a few manufacturing employers, skilled and semi-skilled workers soon build up a loose network of quasi-friendship support ties, regardless of the often itinerant and precarious nature of formal work. While harking back to relatively cohesive socialist work collectives, the post-socialist dispersal of productive forces, withdrawal of the social state and the enterprise's paternalism add more of an urgency to the significance in daily lives of a web of support that is class-based. A network is therefore of a spatial, socio-economic,

and practice-based/practical nature. In particular, the fact that affective ties are grounded in mutual recognition as blue-collar workers means that such networks are largely 'horizontal' rather than bridging class or professional affiliations.[9] This approach can be compared to similar work on social networks under post-socialism that stresses their bounded nature (see in particular, Ashwin, 1999; Dunn, 2004, on industry; Patico, 2008, on the teaching profession), but stands somewhat in contrast to more generalized research on reciprocity, such as Ledeneva's (1998), which shows how ties enable access to resources outside the normal socio-economic reach of individuals and recall greater opportunities for social mobility that pertained under socialism.

I examine public-facing social identities and privately-orientated dispositions as mutually informing: it is not productive to look at worker subjectivities in terms of 'Dmitry: welder, grade five',[10] asking him questions about how the dynamics of inclusion within the world of work form his identity. Sherman argues that in understanding how workers are (re)constructed under neoliberalism it is important to 'connect worker subjectivities on the job to class identities or entitlements outside' work (2007: 263). The cases presented here may help in moving us away from the categorization of workers experiencing post-socialism in narrow social terms to a more nuanced understanding of how worker status is claimed and maintained – how it extends well in to spheres of sociality and domestic space.

Taking the workplace back home

Dima-the-plumber (32) fixes pipes in three blocks of flats in town. In the evenings, when he is not tending his vegetable plot or fixing up his car, he offers his services and equipment to ex-colleagues, and friends of friends: his workerly social network. I accompanied him on one trip; we got a lift with an intermediary, 'Slava-the-forklift', who knew Dima as a neighbour – one of the loose group of workers who drink beer in the yard of the block of flats – the 'bench work' (Kideckel, 2004) that supports network identity.

Slava works at a small plastic pipe fabricating plant with Grisha who had bought an old car the winter before and had been getting around to fixing it. The floorpans had completely rusted through while it had stood in an unheated garage. Grisha-the-cutter had heard of Dima-the-plumber's skill as an all-round welder. In fact, Slava had paid Dima to install a new heating system in his home. Now Grisha asked Dima to weld the floorpans of his decrepit car for a sum to be agreed on seeing the car in situ. Compared to the usual moonlighting opportunities, a car job was barely worth the effort. This was a triangular network relationship – a favour to a 'mate's mate'. Slava (intermediary) explained to Dima (plumber) that Grisha ('customer') had '*avtoritet*' at the plastic pipe plant, meaning a worker with on-the-job prestige for his attitude and skills. This term appears in many conversations with informants. Boris, another plant worker active in the

informal economy, when pressed to define exactly what '*avtoritet*' meant, associated it directly with '*vzaimoviruchka*' – mutual aid, both on and off work:

> It's not a question of self-respect, but of being able to show that you can do a job properly. Professionally-done work is its own reward and you get more work from it [in the informal economy] [. . .] We're not a collective; these are work *priateli* [between friends and acquaintances] who know they can look to each other outside work too. [. . .] It's actually nice that people come to you outside work for help – they phone you up and check how you're doing.

To 'get on' at work, and gain access to worker-to-worker resources one needs '*avtoritet*', which is more than just a friendly attitude and connections. Similarly, although '*avtoritet*' is instrumental in one's relationship with the boss, it is far more useful in facilitating movement throughout the extended network of practice: it serves as a filtering mechanism in terms of allowing evaluation of peer suitability for assistance and favour exchange. This mutually-evaluative mode is why a model of 'significant strangers' is insufficient to explain these social ties. Dima-the-plumber, himself an avtoritet in the employ of the local authority, was far more amenable to this little welding job – hardly worth his while – when Grisha's qualities as a worker were described and then witnessed by him.

Grisha's prestige with his boss was also particularly significant as his workplace served as a temporary repair garage for his car. Grisha had not called in a favour, but merely politely asked his boss to use the premises after hours. When we arrived he had already constructed a wooden cradle to hold the car on its side: there was no inspection pit from which to work on the chassis. Dima was surprised how easy the job had been made for him and immediately spied the stash of vodka and pickled herring on an upturned barrel in a corner. These attempts at 'prepping' the job were a clear 'hailing' of Dima and changed his attitude to reward.[11] It would have been churlish to ask for even a few hundred roubles (c. £5) for the work. Grisha made some polite protests about already having the money to hand and of having to pay for good work done, but Dima had switched into 'proud craftsman' role, vehemently rejecting any further mention of money. He did the job in 20 minutes and gave Grisha a go on the arc welder at the end so he could get a feel for it. That left plenty of time for an extended period of acquaintance over numerous glasses of vodka. This was the reward, not for the job done, as everyone had an equal share in the repast, but for the creation of the internal good: the successful negotiation and extension of network resources. A complex set of practices were present in this encounter: off-job skill performance to peers, avoidance of the formal economy (paid mechanics), utilization of the space of daytime subordination for one's own purpose, and the continuing sustenance and growth of the mutual-aid network. Homo-social life continues to be partially constructed in relation to the workplace (Stenning, 2005b); even where men lack formal work, the network relating spatially to work is sustained.

The welding story was hardly a case of workers learning skills from one another; it was unlikely that the recipient of this service would be doing welding on his own any time soon. But, as I later found out, Dima *did* receive something in exchange for his work. When he found out that Grisha had that rarity: a good internet connection, Dima asked him to download and burn to DVD a film he wanted. This ongoing communication and exchange shows that the network relationship had persisted. Exchanges symbolic and real had taken place, as well as expanding the 'directory' of providers and services of the extended network. However, the most important 'calling card' is clearly that of prestige, connected to shared status as 'workers' rather than the formal-economy metaphor of 'customers' and 'providers'. Prestige and trust, along with their absence, communicates itself through the network to others, even those in quite different employment/sectors. Twelve months later when I encountered Dima again, he had utilized the social network to upgrade his skills, learning how to spot weld: a semi-automated process used in automobile construction. This involved travel to a 'Western-style' automobile repair shop some distance away. His prestige was again crucial to this example of assistance because of the risk to his acquaintance at the shop: the equipment was expensive and easily damaged, and again, the 'training' had to take place outside of working hours, this time without the owner's knowledge.

'Someone will help you out'

Although I spent time observing workers *at* work, many observations took place at home. 'Work' frequently intrudes into the domestic sphere, reinforcing masculinity as sited in labour, practical skill and breadwinning. It also legitimates men's domestic interaction with wives and children in a space that is often strongly gendered as feminine.[12] Boris-the-pipe-fabricator kept his toolkit in pride of place in the hallway in its own special wooden box with a decorative lid. I learnt that Boris and his sons had made the box that summer from salvaged wood from his factory. The backgammon set he was using with his eldest son was also made using materials from work. As I was leaving he indicated the tool box, explaining why he left it by the door: 'What's important is that this box is my bread and butter. And my family need to know that.'

Boris showed how leisure and the domestic sphere intersect with work and particularly the extended social network connected to worker status: taking pride of place in his very cramped one-bed flat were two aquariums, one larger than the other. Only if you looked carefully could you see these were DIY jobs with tin-foil-wrapped plywood lids. It wasn't Boris's idea to make these: the idea and skills came from his ex-work mate Misha (30, paper-cutter and packer), something of an authority on fishkeeping. Importantly, this practice was not only about building a fish tank; it was also about a display of practical skill, mutual assistance, exchange of information and know-how. The bigger the aquarium the more difficult the cutting and epoxying of the acrylic glass sides of the tank – invariably workers relied on the help of others in actual construction. This type of production is then

connected to reinforcement of both social capital (in the form of worker and network resources) and cultural capital – the work as marker of beautification in worker homes. When his wife had left to buy potatoes, Boris confided that he had relied on his ex-work mate's help in sourcing materials and explaining detailed instructions for the construction of these tanks. This exchange offered up another insight into the gendered meaning of DIY: where work could no longer be relied upon as a site of male autonomy and control over productive processes (Morris, 2011) and the attendant satisfaction, the focus for the fulfilment of such needs fell increasingly to the domestic sphere.

Sitting in his gypsy cab on a snow-swept street, Misha talked at length about the practicalities of making fish tanks and the reasons for doing so. An 'ordinary' person, a bloke ('*muzhik*'), can 'do many things and so won't lose out', he said, avoiding the word 'worker'. This was in response to my asking how his work skills were connected to proficiency in fishkeeping. What was important was a thoroughly practical grounding in life: 'if I can cut rolls of paper that are as thick as your arm, then why not acrylic glass; any normal person can do it' (looking askance at my obtuse questioning). He added: 'why buy something when you can do it yourself, or find out how to do it from books? Try to do it, don't be afraid of failure, someone will help you out', he said, indicating the importance of the network of 'skilled hands'. Later, Misha showed me his cramped apartment whose main room was dominated by a 180-litre tank. A 'normal' person, he explained, was someone who had to do manual work from a young age. The fishkeeping was partly a pretext for socialization and networking: 'you can call on someone and ask them how to do something – maybe you already know but want to check and anyway it is enjoyable just to talk about things – it helps you to think through your own ideas'. Performing status as a provider with the skills to turn to anything if need be was key: 'It's important that people can see I can make something with my own hands. Anyone can see we made all this ourselves [indicates furniture].'

The resulting 'internal good' was also highlighted in the satisfaction obtained from a complex job done thanks to drawing on nonmarket materials and network resources. Equally important was the recognition provided by peer 'experts' of the localized practice (Sayer, 2005: 115). 'I get an inner satisfaction from [making the] tank.[13] It comes out of feeling good about my habitat and being in it', said Misha, returning to an uncomfortable question I had put to him earlier: why not describe himself as a 'working man' and be proud of that qualifier? He called himself a 'simple citizen', 'a normal bloke', not a Muscovite who 'doesn't know how to spend money, but is only interested in earning it'. His turn of phrase was marked by class in a sociolinguistic milieu where the term 'working class' is conspicuous by its absence, devalued after decades as handmaiden to state ideology. Misha linked the making of the fish tank, the productive practice that arises from the socio-economic and gendered peculiarities of the social network, as constitutive of his 'habitat', in Russian literally: 'surroundings of habitation'. This blue-collar habitat evaluated and recognized Misha's efforts at homemaking that drew on

network resources. Within the habitat it was practice to seek advice and assistance from others in matters as diverse as where to collect suitable pebbles for the aquarium from the local river (smoothness and chemical composition are important for fish health), what density of sponge to use with the home-made physical filter (the kind for washing cars is fine), what kind of old ceramic plates can be broken up to serve as a medium for the biological filter (it's important to avoid certain glazes). Resourcefulness outside the formal economy was important to network practice and in constituting its internal goods.

Domestic production as an internal good

An extended network of practice describes how the social circulation of skills and informal standards of production for decorative and functional domestic objects such as furniture and fish tanks arise. What then of the significance of the practice and 'goods' themselves? One way of thinking about the implications for market-orientated consumption of their creation and their creators' dispositions toward the formal and informal economies more generally is to use the model of 'external' and 'internal' goods developed by the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, whose work is influential in discussions on the ethics of consumption and market economies. There are two reasons for utilizing this theoretical framework in thinking about productive cultural practices. The first is that MacIntyre's work and the subsequent debate has led directly to linking different types of 'good' to differences in practice – especially practice that is not reducible to economic-contractual relationships but which is nonetheless important to people in their daily lives. The second is that the workers encountered in Izluchino repeatedly drew attention to the very distinction made by MacIntyre and his interpreters, here chiefly Keat (2000, 2008) and Sayer (2005): between internal and external goods and the practice that produces them. MacIntyre defines 'practice' as:

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to [. . .] that form of activity. (1981: 175)[14]

The act of making a fish tank (not the physical object itself) is an internal good in that it is constitutive of the practice of the network exchange of skills of workers. The 'excellence' in doing the work and satisfaction with the job done, the skills gained from others in the community and the recognition by peers of one's competence in this practice, give rise to the internal good. The internal good cannot exist outside the practice of the network. Buying a fish tank from an aquarium shop does not create an internal good, although the use-value of the home-produced and shop-bought aquarium is the same. External goods, by definition, are realized outside MacIntyrian practice, though they can sometimes be a by-product of that practice: say, a monetary prize or fame that attends being good at a sport.

The focus in this modelling of social interaction on use-value rather than exchange-value is for good reason. Sayer (2005) uses a class-grounded discussion to update the model of internal goods and MacIntyrian practice and to re-orientate accounts of social life away from a cultural capital approach towards a more nuanced appreciation of the importance of 'lay normativity' – the everyday reasoning people use for doing things that may trump economically-determined behaviours. In my example, that would mean accepting the interpretation by Russian workers that their reasons for making fish tanks are as much to do with the internal good of doing something well, achieving the satisfaction of the accomplishment and the acknowledgement of one's peers, as accumulating cultural capital that elevates the household status above those of others and closer to that of a putative middle-class.[15] As Boris put it, 'I can't see myself actually buying an aquarium if I had the money. That's not the point of it. Just being able to go to a shop and take one off the shelf would make it meaningless.' This is clearly a reference to the *practice*, rather than the use-value, of the end product.

Without denying that a disposition of self-providing and provisioning is 'dominated' (Bourdieu, 1987: 41) in the sense that it reveals an economically marginalized positioning, in the social context of the Russian 'margins' this does not then mean that a working-class person is necessarily self-defining 'in terms of the dominant aesthetics' (p. 41). Similarly, although the DIY practices observed may well be part of an overall structurally-dictated 'disposition' due to one's 'material conditions of existence' (Bourdieu, 1977: 72), that does not mean that practice, even though it arises from material want, precludes the kind of judgements inherent in lay normativity. These are judgements that militate against exclusively socioeconomic explanations for behaviour and which speak to 'complex social activities and relationships' (Keat, 2008: 2) as much as class domination or social mobility.

DIY production as a type of surrogate consumption

Looking at productive practices in terms of their relationship to the market economy and consumption may illuminate further the issue of internal goods and extended networks of practice. If two of the most important external goods are money and power, consumer goods are often defined as intermediate goods (Keat, 2000). This is because they may facilitate the creation of internal goods (such as equipment allowing the practice of a sport or pastime). An anthropological observation made by Keat is that although consumer goods are acquired within the market domain, the 'realisation of their value often takes place in *non*-market (non-economic) domains' (2008: 6). The example is given of the sharing of food at home with friends. Keat then expands the example to talk about the important role consumer goods play in activities such as 'home-making'. Money is clearly needed to produce many internal goods that we all value. This leads to the observation that market and economic relations can be observed to increasingly intrude into the domains of historically non-market practices over time (Keat, 2008). In Keat's view this potentially compromises consumer goods' value in allowing one to

engage in non-market practices, whether tending an allotment or playing a sport for pleasure.

To explore the implications of this Habermasian problematic is beyond the scope of this article except to acknowledge that it is at the very least dubious to generalize about the economic as separable from other activities, however mundane or seemingly non-market orientated. Despite the context of Russia's market transition where economic activities 'have become ''disembodied'' from other kinds of social relationships' (Keat, 2008: 7), the market is not necessarily experienced in purely economic terms (Humphrey and Mandel, 2002; Kaneff, 2002). By the same token the economic imperative extends beyond the market – witness the widespread cultivation of private vegetable plots thus reducing expenditure on food, the exchange of skills, favours and other practices of the working poor. The result is a penumbra effect where socialization is simultaneously in and out of the shadow of economic and market concerns. This is especially so among economically marginalized Russians who have to count every rouble, but who nonetheless seek social connections and experiences that are not reducible to seeking economic advantage. The extended network of practice model supports this view. A loose network of people, economically disadvantaged, pool their skills outside the market to obtain consumer-good substitutes and the basic 'necessities' of domestic life, but just as importantly, internal goods.

It is difficult to clearly make a distinction between what is understood as 'just coping' and consumption substitution beyond that level. Often, people engaging in DIY practices are anxious to stress the dual role their production plays in practicality and decorativeness/beautification. For example, the practice of DIY plumbing is certainly born from necessity but extends into the territory of both domestic beautification typical of luxury consumption *and* peer-recognized cultural capital; DIY chrome-plated towel rails and self-installed water heaters are a source of pride and are shown to me with alarming regularity. In a country of climatic extremes where water is usually heated off-site and then piped to apartment blocks, this practice is both practical/provisioning (you never know when supply will be interrupted), and also a signalling of status (resourcefulness on-display, pride in provisioning). Fabrication of technically complex elements and knowledge of heating systems requires access to a work-related network and training from peers. Similarly, interior decoration (shelving, furniture) constructed with waste metal and plastic from the industrial workplace is both functional *and* decorative; it is always given a prominent place in the domestic sphere, regardless of whether it is obviously made of recovered materials. Examples included stacking footstools made of large-diameter plastic pipe with covers made from carpet off-cuts, kitchen and other storage shelving made from polished steel sheeting, knives and other objects – even shoehorns – made at work from scrap pieces of metal, but finished with decorative designs and displayed with evident pride.

For many marginalized Russians then, production in its widest sense remains important; nothing shows this more than their constant relationship with the plot-grown potato (Ries, 2009). The creation of internal goods (the socialized process of

learning, making and communicating the means of home production) acts as a catalyst for further possible retreat from consumption, especially in the face of increasing economic precarity. Because of the social basis of most of this production, it is necessarily outward-looking rather than individualistic, as is often the case with consumption.[16] These are crucial issues in the debate about the meanings of market economies for the marginalized. If, after 20 years of market-orientated political change, average Russians in an average Russia engage in significant hedging of their material circumstances, the meaning of that political change deserves ongoing critical engagement.

Sustenance above 'subsistence' levels

Waged workers, not reliant on informal incomes but faced with increasing precarity and the retreat of the social state in Russia, engage in a variety of make-do practices that depend on the maintenance of an extended network relating to blue-collar status. Self-provisioning extends to items normally thought of as either luxuries, or at least non-necessities. Adkins and Lury (1999) argue against interpreting marginalized identities as a resource for performances of 'enterprise'. Skeggs (2004) in turn concludes regretfully that working-class subjects are always at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing and activating cultural capital. However, in the ethnographic materials presented here, 'worker identity' is deployed as a resource in relation to accessing and participating in both cultural and social practices in an extended network. Moreover, many workers participate in this network because they gain both satisfaction in mutual recognition as resourceful and practically-skilled working people, and gratification in the activities of providing for themselves in common with local others out of meagre material circumstances in a creative way. The latter conforms to the definitions of an internal good as defined by MacIntyre and others.

This article reinforces a commonplace still often overlooked in social research: that productive practices, broadly classed here as domestic decoration, are often related strongly to work spatially and symbolically, for men in particular. Therefore a significant part of worker agency in the cultural and social sphere beyond work is dependent upon access to the workspace and the willingness to mould it according to the needs of the network. This agency is admittedly inherently limited (and 'parasitic' on the formal economy – see Verdery, 1996). Aspects of 'self-sufficiency' are dependent upon access to formal labour resources – whether the shop floor space, surplus wooden pallets, or the training that gives skills necessary for off-the-job work.

I do not wish to romanticize the practices described here. Nothing the workers do gives them an 'exit strategy'. Albert Hirschman's conceptualization of reactions to labour's deteriorating conditions – 'exit, loyalty, voice' – has been widely used in industrial relations literature on post-socialism. For example, Greskovits (1998) posits that loyalty strategies inhibit 'politically destabilizing collective action' against increasingly marketized social relations. If the workers of Izluchino are

'marginal' it is because they do not even have recourse to 'exit' in any meaningful way. There is no alternative employment apart from precarious existence in the informal economy. Exit means more than leaving one particular manufacturing firm, or even sector; it means leaving family and home for Moscow or further afield, which many workers are not prepared to do.

Relevant to the practices of this article, shame as an ever-present aspect of lay normativity is never far from workers' conversations, expressed in terms not of material lack itself but of the inability to make-do, to use the resources of the worker network when available. Avoidance of shame is implicit in the practice of homemaking, even when it relies on DIY and is not comparable in 'finish' to market economy goods. 'Its power is evidence of the importance of recognition by others' (Sayer, 2005: 153). Within the particular normative system of the workers' network, shame could be experienced by a worker who pays for others' labour, or consumes in the formal economy unnecessarily, especially if it means buying a luxury good like an aquarium. None of these worker dispositions give weight to a 'culture of poverty' thesis (Lewis, 1998). 'Helplessness and dependency' do not fit with a set of practices that likely find their origin in paternalistic and communitarian cultural modes that existed in Soviet and pre-revolutionary Russia. By the same token, the historically harsh social environment for the working poor in Russia leaves little space for any other practice than resourcefulness and mutual aid. Verdery (1996) points to a loss of legitimacy due to ongoing shortages after ideology's co-option of consumption as a marker of progress in the late socialist period. Their access to productive resources means Russian workers have always been 'inadequate consumers'; the expansion of informal work and diverse economic practices after the collapse of wages and job security since 1991 has intensified this (Morris, 2011). For the working poor, the promise of transition to a consumption-orientated market economy has proved to be chimerical; they see it benefiting an urban elite with whose world they have no lines of intersection.[17]

It is certainly true that people in Izluchino want some of the same non-utility consumer goods as other people. Lichtenberg (1998) argues that while much consumption is misunderstood as purely status driven, the importance of 'other-regarding consumption' (p. 161) should not be ignored. The communicative function of consumption can show one is not better but 'as good as' others (Lichtenberg, 1998: 161). Like the impossibility of 'exit', workers cannot avoid engagement with the market economy and their marginalization within it. In some respects DIY practices help avoid shame in face of one's peers, set against the universal desire to consume which often has little to do with status (Lichtenberg, 1998). To return to a MacIntyrian problematizing of marketized relations, mutual assistance practices by workers may show how facets of social life usually the preserve of economic exchange can be extracted from that context, and embedded in 'networks of giving and receiving' that can obtain only in the kinds of small-scale community [MacIntyre] endorses, with their local markets and small producers' (Keat, 2008: 12).

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Notes

1. Boym (1994) shows the importance of the Soviet-era domestic space as both a private *and* communal space. Although most of her comments are about communal apartments, her insights about the importance of the carving out of personalized, private domestic space, the symbolic meaning of furniture, and the contrast between public communality, and the 'inner circle' community of friends and relatives welcomed into the home, speaks just as well to many experiences of arranging domestic life in the post-Soviet period.
2. The other $3\,m^2$ of space comprised a hallway linking the rooms. Most flat-owners also had access to balconies – an important utility space for storage, drying clothes and the production work related to self-provisioning (cleaning and drying fish, storing preserves) and decoration (joinery). Messier work such as welding usually took place in garage blocks or at work.
3. Although some lucky families were still allocated housing, by any calculation it would have been decades before Sasha came to the top of the list for social housing. By contrast, in the early 1980s, Sasha's stepfather had been given a roomy $80\,m^2$ flat after less than one year of working in a local factory.
4. At the time of research the official mean income was about 14,000 rubles a month. Most of the workers I met earned no more than this, about £300 at 2012 rates of exchange.
5. My use of the terms 'internal good' and 'practice' is derived from that of Keat (2000) and MacIntyre (1981), and these are discussed in the main theoretical discussion.
6. I owe this point to Stephen Smith. This is not to say that home production is a case of 'non-overlapping spheres of competence' as Gelber describes 19th and 20th-century modes of DIY in America (Gelber, 1997: 67). There are a number of DIY decorative practices that are not specifically gendered in the Russian context. I discuss some of the domestic production of women elsewhere (Morris, unpublished). See also Kay (2006) on the value and ownership of work relating to masculinity.
7. 'Labour hoarding' usually refers to payment in kind and other social assets provided by an employer designed to retain, or prevent, workers from changing employment.
8. *Regiony Rossii: Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie pokazateli* (Rosstat, 2009).
9. Elsewhere (Morris, unpublished) I have discussed blue-collar worker social capital in relation to the term 'meta-occupational communities' (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984).
10. Often Soviet employment and training terminology remains in currency.
11. See Thornton (1987) for a discussion of how sharing alcohol signifies membership of networks of social co-ordination.
12. See chapter six in Kay (2006) on the 'breadwinner trap'.
13. 'Inner satisfaction' translates '*dushevnyi pod'em*'.
14. While seemingly excluding specific skills from the definition of practice, such as bricklaying, MacIntyre includes more general activities such as the 'sustaining of [. . .] households' (1981: 175). Readings of MacIntyre's text, including those by the author himself, have widened his rather high-cultural account of practice (chess, painting, architecture) to include more everyday activities. What is important in the original exposition is that it

is possible to evaluate practice according to commonly understood standards and rules (which can be implicit, rather than explicit), though the practice should not be conflated with institutions (MacIntyre, 1981).

15. For discussion of the origins of the 'socially aspirant' view of working-class domestic provisioning in the British context, see Clarke (2001).
16. There is a persistent linking of Russian identity with anti-individualistic and communitarianism in Russian intellectual history. Boym argues that private and public life have not been held as binary opposites in Russian culture: for everyday behaviour to pass the test of 'authenticity', it has to be predicated on socio-cultural togetherness (*sobornost'*). Privacy is often linked to a negative image of middle-class individualism lacking spiritual worth (Boym, 1994).
17. I owe the development of this insight and the phrase 'inadequate consumers' to Stephen Smith.

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