2

Blue-Collar Personhood After the Factory

Sasha is much plumper than I remember him. He is not tall and now has a very round, moon-like face, so does his brother Vanya. But I recall his infectious laugh, his enthusiasm for everything and his muscular, spare frame ten years ago when he had only just started at the cement works after he quit the army. This is what small-town life does to Russian men, I am told. They go to seed more quickly even than women. A diet of potatoes and pasta, alcohol and cigarettes, sitting out the long-winter nights in a pokey flat, short bursts of activity followed by sleeping in the cab of the fork-lift—anywhere at work where you can hide. All of these aspects of life mean that at 35, men like Sasha are portly, wheezing and looking older than their years. We're talking about his work history: all the places in the town he's worked in, all the workshops he's left. I make the mistake of using the term 'worker', and then the even worse *faux pas* of explaining that I'm interested in the 'working class'. However, this is serendipitous as it provokes Sasha—usually a rather taciturn person—to launch into a long exposition of his personhood:

> What do you mean 'working class!? I've worked at all the production lines in this town at one time or another, but I draw the line at shady businesses

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J. Morris, *Everyday Post-Socialism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-349-95089-8_2

> [*sharaga*]; I'd rather go out gypsy-cab driving. If the place has no social insurance or they're paying cash-in-hand then it shows they are a mickey-mouse outfit [*khaltursbchiki*]. If it was easy enough to pay a decent wage, and more besides, 20 years ago, then why not now under your capitalism? And really, everywhere is like that now, unfortunately, even the cement works, even the Steelpipe. It's all about 'have you done this, have you cleaned up the forklift park? The little bosses like to tyrannize everyone, trying to lord it over us [*povelevat'*] and picking up on the stuff that's unimportant. Even at the lime kiln these days you have to watch your back as everywhere there are narks [*kliauzniki*] who will grass on you to those Romanians[1] to get ahead. I was always considered a first-class worker [*peredovik*] by everyone. I can put a matchbox in place with my forklift but will I ever get on the Board of Honour for it?

Finally returning to the label of 'worker' that had provoked this long reflection in the first place, Sasha tries to define who he is now, and from whence emerges its anchoring interpretation of everyday life as the search for habitability. This part of the talk is worth repeating:

> Me … I'm just a simple citizen—I can go out among the people. 'Socialize?'—No, we just spend time together like normal people. I'm just a bloke, not a 'worker'. Those who know how to work know many other things besides and so won't lose out. They can do things with their own hands. They get a satisfaction from it—that they did it themselves. I suppose it's a kind of inner happiness [*dushevnyi pod'em*]. You've just got to try to do it! Don't be afraid, someone will see and try to help you if you are prepared to help yourself. […] This is where I'm comfortable, my habitat [*sreda obitaniia*], and I this is where I will stay.

At the time (2009) I made little of Sasha's comment on habitat and comfort, but as time went on I encountered more folksy and class-based resourcefulness, valuing of such activity for its own sake, and most importantly, the striving for 'habitability' more generally. The work and degree of success in making life 'habitable' despite ongoing insecurity became one of the key categories by which people in my everyday Russia made

[1] Used as a derogatory term meaning German supervisors in this instance, but more generally any foreign supervisors.

Photo 2.1 The importance of mutual aid: 'someone will see and try to help you'. Typical yard work between friends (Image courtesy of Alyona Kudriavsteva)

sense of their lives and their uneasy dwelling within postsocialism, 25 years after the end of the Soviet period (Photo 2.1).

This chapter focusses mainly on Sasha, and to a much lesser extent on Andrei, one of his sometime 'workmates' introduced earlier. Both of them are 'exemplary' blue-collar informants: between them they've worked in most of the workshops and enterprises in the town and beyond. They have both considered themselves and been acknowledged professionally by their workplaces as '*peredoviki*'—'first-class' workers valued for their productivity and sense of responsibility.[2] This chapter also makes use of other encounters with male workers in these blue-collar enterprises, as well as from the men and women in their social circles. An important

[2] The 'first-class' worker category is an inheritance from the Soviet period used to describe those workers who were most productive and who received commensurate reward such as getting to the front of the housing waiting queue more quickly.

element of sociality in Izluchino that may not be readily apparent is the significant intersection and overlap between work 'confrères': those who have a mental investment in an in-common working identity. I adopt this term from Burawoy and Lukács (1992) to indicate friendships and acquaintance: a kind of comfortable familiarity beyond the confines of the workplace that endures over time and makes for much casual socializing. The 'helping out' that Sasha describes above is one such sign of this, complicating any attempt to disaggregate strong–weak ties between people, or define the nature of a get-together between workers as 'leisure', 'self-production', or mutuality.

Often, workers may talk about each other as 'mates' (*priiatel'i*) outside the workspace, rather than'friends', a term they reserve for more intimate relations. It has to be said, however, that 'friend' ('*drug*') is a word rarely used nowadays. Nonetheless the status of *priiatel'* or, among younger workers the slang term '*patsan*' ('lad'), may indicate a significantly more frequent rate of social intercourse, in the garage, at the dacha, drinking beer in the park, or even after work in the now quiet workshop. This is what Sasha has in mind in the above quote about 'helping out' significant others to whom he has an attachment by virtue of a mutually-recognized status as more or less trusted blue-collar confrères. Such status is produced and reinforced by the compressed social geography of the town. People frequently re-encounter each other as 'working-class' persons even after a strictly collegiate relationship has ended and a person moves to another enterprise. This happens daily in the pie-shop or donut-kiosk queue (there are only two locations selling workers fast food in a town of 15,000), in the parking lot for the works buses, or the park through which most of the workers have to walk from the buses to their homes, and numerous other places.

To explain the making of habitability among workers like Sasha, this chapter is structured in the following way. First, it explores the world of the enterprise–employee relationship. Like that of the 'old guard', Ivan and Galina from the previous chapter, the interpretations of the current labour regimes in the Russian factory are also coloured by socialist-era expectations and their inherited 'moral' values for younger workers.

At the same time, younger workers lack economic capital in the form of housing,[3] meaning they are in a more precarious position regarding day-to-day living costs and are less likely be satisfied with tokenistic echoes of social wages offered by the enterprise. Zavisca (2008) highlights the widespread sense of unfairness felt by postsocialist generations at the failure of housing policies to deliver. In this sense ordinary people's critique of the status quo is even more incisive. Their keen sense of injustice to their class is honed by their own experience Nonetheless, their youth makes them more willing to take risks in trying out different enterprises and more ready to articulate a sense of disempowerment as workers based on concrete aspects of the present production regimes than in terms of a mythic past. At the same time a certain normative sense of the dignity of labour remains embedded in a particularistic understanding of the past inherited from the preceding generation.

This makes for a particular kind of dissatisfaction and disquiet. The so-called 'churn' ('*tekuchka*') or labour turnover—understood as one of the most significant problems in Russia by labour economists—should also be thought of as a figurative 'agitatedness'; the high mobility of labour among Sasha's cohort is a substitute for the impossibility of 'voice' or 'loyalty' in the enterprise—to adopt the famous terminology of Albert Hirschman. There are no other choices for individuals faced with crisis within an organisation. 'Exit' from poorly paid blue-collar work in poor conditions and without significant benefits is not an option to most workers who remain 'trapped' in a cycle of short-term employment with similarly moribund enterprises. However, it is ironic that increasingly the employers themselves adopt an overly culturalist explanation for 'churn'. To them, Russian workers lack labour discipline because they are stuck in a socialist-era mindset of misrecognition of the enterprise–employee relationship as paternal.

To illustrate this conundrum, this chapter presents one of the most popular employers in the town. Felix Saraev is the director of the firm Steelpipe, fabricating steel and plastic pipes for the gas industry, and boss

[3] Due to the nature of social housing linked to enterprise employment there was always a high level of 'owner-occupier' flats in industrial towns, but this should not be seen as making their residents 'housing rich' (Stenning et al. 2010: 129).

of Andrei and formerly of Sasha. Sasha displays a 'conflicted' working identity that combines a morally normative understanding of the rewards of work inherited from the socialist era mixed with a sophisticated and sceptical interpretation of the neoliberal present. Similarly, Saraev's understanding of labour is equally marked by conflictedness and contains both longstanding and deeply culturalist assumptions about Russian labour's unsuitability for the neoliberal project. At the same time he appears to accept wholesale a rhetoric of self-governmentality and individualization. Russian workers are seen as inherently peasant-like, averse to working above a subsistence level of provision. Equally they are called upon to do what 'everyone' is capable of: to employ micro-technologies of self-improvement and strive for the sake of bettering their relative position in the labour market. Saraev's rhetoric is somewhat in contrast to his actions: his case is a classic illustration of the necessity of continuing enterprise paternalism in smaller Russian firms.

The chapter then turns to Sasha himself, linking his moral arguments about 'bad' production regimes to an enduring debate on the expectation of Russian workers for 'autonomy' in work. Sasha moves between employers to avoid production regimes that do not allow expression of a 'level of freedom' of action. This is contextualized using the work of Sergei Alasheev (1995a, b) and other Russian sociologists and social historians of the working class. They identify a wide arc of practices and dispositions in production that are evidence of a longstanding interpretation of work as a space offering the potential for autonomy for workers and peasants alike. Sasha rejects the more regimented labour regime in the foreign car plant. He regrets leaving the slower paced and less exacting space of the Steelpipe workshop. But by this time it is 'too late' and informal work as a taxi driver has become his primary occupation. Nonetheless the socially embedded nature of the blue-collar identity endures; indeed, survival and the making of life habitable depend on being able to call on others through this shared identity as a deserving other—a confrère after-the-fact. The 'creativity' and 'initiative' that Alasheev and others find as part of the socialist-era inheritance of the Russian working class has become even more important for Sasha after leaving formal employment—not least because he has less income and less access to normative forms of consumption. Thus 'after' the factory he is more reliant than ever on

Photo 2.2 Confères after-the-fact. Workers move on, but stay friends and call on each other (Image courtesy of Sergei Lavrov)

blue-collar confrère-ties to 'help out'—whether in fixing his car, or building his dacha, in leisure activities of fishing and hunting that overlap with self-provisioning, or purely 'aesthetic' activities such as making decorative fish tanks or craft items (Photo 2.2).

Workers Coming of Age in the Late 1990s When 'Nothing Has Changed, Yet Everything Has Changed'

When I first met him in the 1990s Sasha had recently returned from duty as a conscript soldier. Later he worked as one of the first professional 'contract' soldiers in the Russian armed forces: '*kontraktniki*'. As he had survived the 'baptism of fire' of conscription,[4] he had decided he could

[4] His and other male informants' tales of extreme hazing and poor conditions of service are not unusual.

survive anything. After this relatively well-paid work he had returned full of confidence to the town. He married and his wife gave birth to two children. Sasha at first seemed relatively happy with his forklift work at the cement works. As he put it, 'it was like nothing had changed, despite everything changing, in politics I mean,' underlining experiences of delayed economic transition in the town outlined earlier. But despite saving up there was no way the young family could have afforded a flat in the private sector. Thanks to the efforts of his father who petitioned the main enterprise director, the family were allotted a one-room converted flat in a block that had been a hostel for incoming migrant workers in the 1980s.

I had visited Sasha's tiny flat many times, but at some point I stopped thinking about how the family of two adults and two children managed with less than 25 square metres of living space. A Russian flat of any description is an ongoing project in the utilization of all dimensions for its owner. Sasha's flat is from a former dormitory for migrant workers, partitioned to create a tiny one-bed flat with a miniscule kitchen and bathroom. The family of four sleeps in the single living space of 14 square metres. The endless task of creating a habitable space for the family occupies a central place in the organization and planning of domestic life.

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's 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 works, the biggest employer in town, live in similar accommodation and maximize space utilization by constructing 'do-it-yourself (DIY)' furniture, often from materials gleaned from work or scrounged from 'somewhere'. The homes of all workers contain examples of do-it-yourself skills engendered by necessity—all of the families are on low working incomes. 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. In a number of homes the focal point in the cramped apartments is given to hand-built tropical aquariums. This practice of decoration and the skill with which it is accomplished is constitutive of an important internal 'good' and emblematic of a more wide-ranging alternative practice to conspicuous consumption within the formal economy (Morris 2012b).

After a while Sasha was able to scrounge enough wood panelling and insulation material from work and beyond to fit out the 'roomy' gallery balcony (*lodzhiia*) attached to the flat which then served by turns as a playroom for little Sofia, a homework study for his older son, a shooting range for Sasha's airgun, a clothes drying room, a space for salting and drying fish, a painting studio for Sasha's wife Tanya. 'Without this space I don't know how we'd live,' she said one day. We looked out at the beautiful autumn day as she set up her easel to paint the view from the fifth-floor. Beyond the bust of Lenin standing in front of the post office, the riverscape stretched for miles, bound on each side by dense forest. The balcony was a space of refuge for all the members of the family in this cramped 'apartment'.

While initially finding meaning and satisfaction in the routine of the cement works and, particularly, in the renewal of acquaintance with many schoolmates after his absence when he served in the army, Sasha found that the extremely low wages at the works did not keep up with inflation and slowly he began to understand the reality of a blue-collar life with a family in 2000s Russia. The pilfering of construction and production materials and the use of an extended social network of trustworthy confrère workers was instrumental in 'obtaining' ('*dostat*'—a revealing word in itself) all the major and minor things needed to 'fit out' ('*otdelyvat*') the flat. This was the classic socialist-era case of the compensation for low wages given, or more likely, taken, in pilfering and gleaning of materials (Haraszti 1977; Alasheev 1995b).

'The important thing is to be able to make something,' Tanya said referring to her husband. 'It doesn't matter if he does go and have a couple of drinks in the garage. It is enough that he knows how to provide for his family, even if it isn't in money.' Again, while not referring to the

making of habitable life, Tanya used the word I have so often heard before and since: that something was 'enough'. 'Living' came later on, with the balcony, a once-in-a-lifetime camping holiday in neighbouring Smolensk region, ownership of a car, a few snatched summer days at the 'dacha' (in reality little more than a two-room wooden and cinderblock cabin).

Tanya was a kindergarten teacher and her very small wage helped lift the family out of what otherwise would have been near abject poverty. Despite having a higher education, in 2009 her wage was around 20% of the average blue-collar wage in Izluchino (which was between 14,000 and 16,000 roubles a month or c. $500).[5] The pay gap experienced by educated and uneducated women alike, in particular, was such an embarrassing subject that people avoided speaking openly of it. Later Tanya would get a different job as a teacher, but the pay in the school was also very poor and eventually she returned to the kindergarten as a senior educator, and finally received what she, without apparent irony, considered a 'living' wage of just over 5000 roubles a month, or less than $140. That she considered this a living wage was due to the structure of household earnings and expenses. With this 5000 roubles she could, as she put it, 'easily' afford potatoes, cabbage, frozen herring and a few other essentials—maybe even tomatoes later in the summer. Her strict housekeeping and management of her own wage meant she also bought chicken pieces to make stew from once a week. This was a luxury her in-laws seemingly could not afford. It was telling that this seemingly minor choice of purchasing chicken pieces was a source of conflict with her mother-in-law Masha, who saw it as spendthrift activity, at least at first.

[5] These figures refer to basic pay '*oklad*', although this word is rarely used officially. In some enterprises and public bodies employees still looked forward to automatically receiving their 'top up bonus', or '*premiia*'/'*nadbavka*'. But increasingly throughout the 2000s (particularly for those in municipal employment) many found that routes to getting extra pay were circumvented by administrative flouting of Federation labour laws. One trick that particularly rankled was to arrange matters so that the employer could argue that an employee was working a weekend through choice and therefore not entitled to double rates, merely a different day off. For kindergarten workers, like many others, a complicated system was in place. Basic pay was often extremely low. Work experience, education level, time with company and category of duties all attracted a 'coefficient', or percentage payment of the basic.

Workers After the 'Workers' State': Labour Turnover and 'Individualizing' Production Regimes

The cement works and its related operations remained the major employer in town, so it was natural for Sasha to go there for a job. However, his first work there in the later 1990s was very physical, dangerous and dirty. Very soon after Sasha arrived, the profitable part of what had been a single Soviet-era enterprise was hived off to a Moscow group called Cementex. The extraction and production of cement and other building materials was now separated from the less profitable 'industrial' production processes that remained as two other companies, Steelpipe and Polymer. The 'machine' part of the enterprise—actually a repair business for rolling stock—was consolidated as part of a Kaluga network of firms. In addition, many other smaller companies disaggregated as inheritor concerns also appeared. Soon, Sasha was not stuck for choice and moved on to Steelpipe, where Lyova, his father, had also worked and would return to after leaving the municipal welding team.

It is important to reiterate a point made earlier about how the frequent switching of employment from one enterprise and back again in the course of a few years was not unusual. Employers still 'hoard' labour (Commander et al. 1996; Friebel and Guriev 2000; Clarke 2002) in case of the need to shock-work production orders but also because it is cheap and there is always a 'layer' of unreliable workers who need to be replaced. Driving a forklift was not in itself heavy physical work but requires supreme concentration and skill not to be a source of danger for others. Good drivers are always in demand somewhere. The switching of work place becomes part of normal everyday life for workers too as they search, increasingly in vain, for the perfect employer who will combine the socialist-era-inflected thirst for social protection (explored in the previous two chapters) with good pay and conditions (likely only to be found further afield in Kaluga among the bigger foreign owned concerns like VW, Volvo, Lotte and Samsung, to name just a few). It is a contradictory and confusing situation: there is a plentiful supply of labour (keeping average wages down), but a never-ending thirst for work-

ers, particularly the more skilled and reliable. Kaluga Region has always attracted younger and skilled workers from other regions, and yet the demand for internal labour migration is never sated. At the same time the enculturation of socialist-era workers means that worker satisfaction is never possible, and contributes to the endless 'churn', explored in detail in the following text.

Sasha was already getting a reputation among his confrères in the mid-2000s as a bit of a 'flyer' (*letun*) although he himself reserved this word for others. 'Why can't he just sit tight?' said Grigory, with whom he'd worked at the Cement in the early days. But as Sasha pointed out to him: 'you've got your own flat and no kids.' Sasha 'flew' quickly from Cementex to Steelpipe; he was outraged by one particular incident that stuck in his mind at Cementex: an example of a change towards a more 'individualizing' and managerialist approach to shop-floor relations. He had been caught asleep in a quiet area of the plant during the nightshift and had got into a conflict with a foreman over it:

> I can load a lorry with bags of cement like I am stacking matchboxes but it doesn't cut me any slack. I could do it with my eyes closed. But if I'm on a night shift, finish with three hours to go, and then have a sleep in the back they act like I'm some kind of thief.

He left Cementex to do some forklift work in Kaluga for the turbine factory then returned to the town as his children were growing older and his wife returned to work. He needed a job closer to help out with child care. He went to work for a very small cable production factory but the pay there was rarely supplemented by bonuses. The dual system of wages is a source of endless calculation, anxiety and dilemma for workers. At one place the 'basic' (*oklad*) may look respectable, but there is a dearth of 'bonuses' (*premiia*)—usually received for fulfilment of particular contracts and paid to the worker only on completion and delivery by the enterprise to the client. This was the problem with the cable maker. Sasha returned once more to Steelpipe, by which time his father had already moved on to the municipality. But here, despite the reasonable *oklad* of 16,000 roubles plus regular bonuses and not inconsiderable social ben-

efits, Sasha made the 'fatal mistake', as he put it, of letting the money offered at the Frunzensky[6] car plant near Kaluga 'get into his brain'.

Increasingly, men younger than Sasha (in his mid-thirties) were going to work in the special economic zones (offering enterprises tax concessions and infrastructure support) near Kaluga where many foreign concerns had set up. It was easier for younger men without commitments as there was a long commute of an hour or more each way on the uncomfortable and stuffy works buses. A miserable experience in summer and winter alike.[7] Not only that, but what if little Sofia should fall ill, who would collect her from kindergarten? Who would do homework with Misha his 8-year-old son? And then there were the lost opportunities for the 'perks' at Steelpipe: scrounging the scrap material and pilfering diesel fuel from the lorries, not to mention 'drinking Friday',[8] when Saraev the director let them sit in the nice heated bus in the crane yard and have drinking parties in winter and barbeques outside in summer after work. Then there was the loss of the Steelpipe facilities. People used these for making DIY items for the home. There was also the inspection pit there that all the lads brought their cars to when they needed the sills welding. Nonetheless, Sasha reflected that things at Steelpipe were changing too, and not for the better. It was certainly true that there was more autonomy at shopfloor level there than at the cement works, and certainly he would not return to the 'Cement' (as it is known) after his experience of the 'snitches' and the micro-management there summarized in the opening quotation of this chapter. However, the higher pay offered at the car plant was too much of a temptation, despite the 'risk', as he saw it, of working for a foreign company some distance away from the familiar production habitat of Izluchino.

However, after only a few months he had quit the car plant. Sasha had told anyone who would listen about landing a job there and so I

[6] A pseudonym for the district where the foreign plant is. I have intentionally obscured the identity (and nationality) of the car plant here for obvious reasons.

[7] It should be borne in mind that the average daytime air temperature in Central Russia varies by around 50 degrees centigrade over the year from daytime –20 Centigrade on many days in the winter, to +30 Centigrade for prolonged periods in the summer.

[8] A joking play on words among workers produced the neologism '*pitnitsa*', a combination of the words for 'drink' and 'Friday', and indicating the compromises made by the paternalistic employer to keep the workers happy.

expected him to encounter at least some social opprobrium from his kith and kin (his work-life was the subject of discussion both in his presence and absence). After all, the wages at the plant were about 30% higher than the average in Izluchino, and the benefits significant. However, most of his circle was sanguine. Working with foreigners wasn't for everyone and in Kaluga too. That's a long way. Perhaps it wasn't for Sasha. Even if he was a '*peredovik*' at the Steelpipe, it was a different matter going to the car plant. Privately Sasha's brother said, 'Sasha isn't the kind of person who is going to change the way he does things, even for you foreigners.'

And so the rather earnest explanations began. To anyone who asked, and many who didn't, Sasha put across his argument to his confrères that as he saw it, no self-respecting *working* person could put up with the *supposedly reflexive, yet regimented,* environment of the car plant. Expecting to be put on the assembly line straight away, he found that for the first few weeks he was put in with a mainly female auxiliary team unpacking parts. What rankled most was that they even had to strip the protective polythene coverings from wooden crates and open them themselves. They also did cleaning jobs and taking away waste. What an insult! He had 'put up with this', understanding it to be a test of his willingness to subordinate himself to the needs of the plant. However, once he had made it on to the assembly line he found life there no less difficult. 'Those Romanians, they stick their nose into every detail of what's going on in the line.'

Sasha objected to having to continually account for his actions, when, as he saw it, he was just getting on with the job. Ironically, he decided to leave the plant because of an episode where he was subject to scrutiny and rebuke due to his effective 'self-regulation' in production. When on the assembly-line, he shadowed another worker, who quickly showed him the relatively limited repertoire of repetitive tasks on their part of the line—fixing parts of the exhaust system to the underside of the chassis. This task involved repeatedly moving back to a work bench a short distance from the line to select the correct sized fixings for the next section of piping which were seated in a colour-coded polystyrene mould.

Sasha recounted how he had been very surprised at the detailed training sessions he had gone through before starting on the line (including video instruction) despite picking up what to do more quickly from the shadowing. He also found it remarkable to see how much the foreign managers through their interpreters had stressed adhering to the production-line protocol in terms of the very specific ordering of tasks. At the same time, training discourses repeatedly emphasised the importance of initiative and adaptability—the company wanted workers who could 'teach themselves' and work on multiple parts of the line at short notice.

Sasha saw a quick production shortcut in breaking the particular protocol of under-chassis work. A couple of weeks into the assembly line job he began loading his capacious blue dungarees pockets with the exact number of each of the bolts he needed for two chassis mountings. He could balance his compressed-air gun in his right hand while selecting by feel in his pocket the correct sized bolt with the other hand. This reduced the number of trips to the work bench and avoided messing about with the fiddly polystyrene mould, speeding up his work.

Sasha had found a kinaesthetically-intuitive short-cut but messed up the accounting and checking procedure—essential to the effective replenishment of the parts to the line by other workers. The telling-off he received when observed by the foreign line manager was mild, but it confirmed what Sasha already had learned from the initial task he'd been given at the beginning of his work at the plant: shop-floor culture was not actually about being 'reflexive', but subordinating oneself to preconceived notions of orderly enterprising. 'You have to do it their way or it is wrong. Even if you've worked it out yourself and you are right!' The relative autonomy associated with the socialist workplace that led to worker-centred 'fixes' for specific production problems was perceived to have been lost. It is interesting that he and others conflated this with their preconceived notions of European hypocrisy, lack of emotional warmth and misplaced sense of superiority of production regimes generally. A contrasting, but not conflicting account of work in the foreign-owned car plants in Kaluga is given in Chap. 6—by those workers more willing to conform to what they still consider to be relatively 'alien' production regimes.

The Employers' View: Lumpen Workers in a 'Niche' Between Neoliberalism and Paternalism

But Sasha's tale of churning woe did not end at the car plant. Somewhat shaken in confidence after his abortive foray into high-tech multinational vehicle production, Sasha returned, quietly, glumly even, to the 'Cement' again, where he had started in the 1990s. He worked as a forklift driver here, but within six months had left the works for the second time. His resistance to being given 'filling-in' duties on top of his fork-lift driving led to him being punished with more unsociable shift hours and enforced (unpaid) leave during the increasing seasonally slack periods associated with the global downturn from 2009. Since his previous employment, Cementex had made 'changes' to production relations at shopfloor level. The emphasis on unbending and inflexible labour discipline was emphasized by one of the executives I interviewed there in 2010:

> You have to cut out the dross that's left over …. I mean, there's a certain amount of lumpens from before …. It's like we're starting over from scratch in some ways. At the same time we're not going in for anything fancy. We leave that to you in the West. After all there is only so much you can get out of our native workers. It's not like you can succeed with the more specialized products—particular powder mixes, and so on. The production base, I mean in terms of human capital, just isn't there.[9]

But at the same time there is a 'left over' residue of paternalistic thinking even in his labour management approach:

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[9] The executive's comment echoes the narrative of the company's website and press releases which stress the new company as rising from the 'ruins' of the old. There is a contradiction in the valuing of the 'qualified older cadres' at the same time as saying that some of the 'human resources accumulated during the Soviet period were no longer suitable or needed'. At the same time the company is praised in the local and regional press for its progressive 'social policy' which includes the building of a block of flats in the town for 40 families of the 'veterans and first-rank workers [*peredoviki*]'), out of a work force of over 1000. The practice of giving housing to workers only after they gain the status of 'first-rank' based on productivity, is a direct inheritance from Soviet era practices. This first block of housing built for workers in 25 years was expected to lead to other employers doing the same, but due to the economic downturn after 2009 the only housing built in the town was for private purchase.

I mean, people are queuing up to work here. We have showers, we have a cafeteria and the works bus is new; it is important we pay attention to general human values [*obshchie chelovecheskie tsenosti*]. There are a lot of psychological moments in dealing with Russian workers that are inherited from the Soviet times. The workers say they don't care about better conditions, 'all they care about is the money', but that's not really the case. 'If you build it they will come', isn't that from a film? I mean when you put in a nice new shower block (it is dirty work after all) that actually makes a huge difference because according to the old Soviet factory psychology, a human being is nothing, it is all about output. We did the minimum to show that this is not true, that we care about the workers on some basic level that is understandable to them. Like last New Year we gave microwave ovens as prizes in a dancing competition at the works party in the *DeKa* and had a buffet. This had meaning you can't overestimate.

Similarly, take the case of lorry drivers stealing diesel fuel. They think this is their right. And you have another psychological moment. I was driving through Obninsk with the Production Director and we saw one of our drivers siphoning fuel out of his cab. It was funny really. What are you supposed to do, fire him? If we did that we'd have no workers. No we just give him a fine. He's selling it for 6 roubles a litre [20 US cents] and we fine him 10 roubles for every litre he 'uses' above the allowance for the trip.[10]

Between employments, Sasha had been doing some unregistered 'gypsy' taxi driving with his brother for ready cash while the family scraped by on Tanya's teaching salary. He returned to taxiing after leaving the Cement. Occasionally he would work for a season as a night watchman at one of the guarded garage complexes where the local well-to-dos keep their expensive foreign cars. He even worked for a happy year as a personal driver for the sales director of a local dairy producer. Slowly but surely though, before he turned 40, Sasha had seemingly given up on permanent waged work.

Since 2012 he has been making do with the taxi driving, which we catch up with in the next chapter. It is perhaps telling that soon after he

[10] Similar to Sasha's experience at the car plant, due to the content of the interview, I feel obliged to anonymize the manager and obscure aspects of the enterprise despite the informant giving full permission to use the interview material with full attribution. Some of the issues around the dilemma of the researcher in deciding whether or not to obscure or anonymize material given with no restriction on its use can be found in Chap. 7.

left the Cement, his brother—whose personality was far more cheery—had followed him. Vanya's narrative was uncannily similar to that of his brother's. Although there was little love lost between them and at times they barely spoke, their production biographies—along with a number of other informants of similar age—were quite similar. Vanya was about eight years younger than Sasha, had worked for a private security firm for years before going to the Cement, but he too had left after not more than a couple of years there.

Shortly after Sasha had left Steelpipe, I interviewed its general director Saraev. His perspective at first appears relatively similar to the Cementex executive's. In my conversations with him I was able to ask him to reflect on the actual examples of workers known to us both, including Sasha and his father. Saraev articulated a relatively clear view that some workers socialized according to Soviet-era norms were unsuitable and incapable of 'work on the self':

> Before, the state had this huge social guarantee. As well as pay there was the problem of providing housing, kindergartens and schools […] How did our settlement grow: first they built the schools and housing and people came with their families, […] The infrastructure had to work, there was no free labour market as such. You're tied to your place of work; if they've taken you on there is a place for your kid in the kindergarten and if you move, well that's a big risk. Then in the 1990s it was supposed that because of the remnants of that system there wasn't sufficient mobility in the population. But this is not true anymore.
>
> There is mobility, but the mental setup stayed the same. Those people who then were 30–35, now they are 50–55, then they were able to function [*deesposobnye*] –capable of working, in their working sunrise—and now actually, the sun is going down. These people are trapped. They cannot function as we need them to, but they cannot move. Then there are younger workers who lack labour discipline completely. The HR department even has a name for it '*tekuchka*'—job hopping, or 'churn': someone comes, doesn't like it and leaves. But that's more of a problem at the Cement. We're not like that here. We don't take on those people, I mean with that mentality.
>
> I have a theory of the niche. These people, as much as the older ones, occupy a Soviet niche that they can't vacate because they cannot compete in a different environment. Like a fish out of water they will die.

At the same time, Saraev's enterprise is characterized by significant social paternalism that is strongly reminiscent of the Soviet enterprise's social wage. Private medical care is discretely paid for *peredoviki*. During the summer refitting period, when the factory is closed for two weeks workers receive full pay (the norm even in multinationals is reduced pay). A very involved set of social and cultural events is subsidized throughout the year.

Andrei, the welder remarks: 'Saraev knows how to put on a spread! He knows how to look after the good ones and keep them!' Illustrating once again the compressed social and production geography of the town, he, like Sasha, had worked for some time at Steelpipe even before Saraev had become General Director (in 1999). Emphasising the importance of being 'respected' [*avtoritetnyi*] as a worker, Andrei speaks of how hard work is rewarded at Saraev's firm. There is a sense of cohesion [*splochennost'*] in the collective due to locally reasonable pay, conditions, timely bonuses, but most of all the sense of 'care' [*zabota*] that emanates from the Director, both towards the quality of the work produced and also the workers. Andrei points proudly to the prominent certificates and medals displayed in a frame on his wall, awarded to him by Steelpipe for his first-class work and 'care for the quality of production'. He remarks, 'we got a bonus for that job and a choice between a food dryer or a microwave oven.[11] That was a nice touch, but it's the certificate that shows I am valued.' While this may sound clichéd, it is little different from the notions of value in work and *by* the enterprise of the worker that Alasheev found in his Russian research dating from 1993 (1995b).

Saraev complains about the 'social burden' of such activities and indicates that this 'duty' is partly imposed by the municipality: it is only due to his charity and social wage provision that he is able to avoid conflict with the district politicians (he is a municipal councillor). However he then says that only paying lip service [*pokazukha*] to expectations of paternalism is not possible. In the relative absence of the social state, the enterprise cannot avoid 'embodying [*voplotit'*] elements of the state' even

[11] Food dryers or dehydrators were an expensive but useful item for processing self-provisioned mushrooms, fish, meat, fruit and berries. They were a sought after commodity. Many people improvise their own using heating elements; bought models with built in electrical heaters ran into the thousands of roubles.

now. He reports that through social work with the community a 'dialogue' of a kind emerges and something like the old-style respect for the enterprise is possible. This in turn reduces labour 'churn', as with respect is earned 'merit' [*zasluga*]. Saraev's focus on values and a moral normativity within production is not so far from the 'mentality' of those workers who he accuses of being stuck in their Soviet niche. Perhaps their habitats and sense of habitability are not so far from each other after all.[12] The last words on Saraev go to Andrei: 'he who respects is respected by all.'

Autonomy, Personalization and Independence in the Russian Factory

But how does one square this with Sasha's response to the car plant and, to a lesser extent, with Steelpipe's 'new' more intensive production regime? If Andrei illustrates the more responsive side of younger workers to the neoliberal call for work on the self and flexibility, then Sasha stands as a representative case of the '20% or so of those workers who cannot move out of their niche', to whom Saraev refers. At the time, based on the number of interactions with workers who have frequently changed workplace, this estimate of Saraev's seems like an understatement. In any case his resort to the language of social Darwinism and sociobiological perspectives is unsatisfying. Similarly, Sasha's focus on the neoliberalizing aspects of production regimes feels like only part of the story; after all, there are elements of his professional biography that mark him out as a *peredovik* too. Andrei's evident satisfaction with the paternalistic elements of workshop relations at Steelpipe serves as a clue.

The lack of correspondence between Sasha's 'actually-existing' production initiative at the car plant with his interpretation of the superficial and demeaning sense of flexibility demanded by the 'new' production regimes—particularly in foreign owned firms—deserves further explication in the context of his earlier socialization as worker and actual experience there. Even if never experiencing the socialist-era shopfloor, his formative

[12] Nikula and Tchalakov (2013) stress that hybrid regimes of paternalism and flexible labour remain possible, while Clarke (1995) indicates that for many enterprises paternalism proves impossible to abandon.

experiences at Cementex (although increasingly negative) and elsewhere brought him into contact with people and practices that owed much to the Soviet factory. In particular his talk of what was 'good' about his early work experience related to narratives of the personalization of tasks (as detailed above), the flexibility of their fulfilment (in time, in particular), and the relative autonomy he had as a forklift driver. As he said later after his abortive try out with the car plant, 'I should have stayed with Saraev. At least there you could get on with it in your own way, at least to a degree … at the same time as being one of one's own (*byt' svoim chelovekom*).' This qualified and social understanding of 'autonomy' needs to be explained in terms of the difference between the individualization of work under 'newer' production regimes, and the 'personalized', or personhood-orientated 'independent' nature of regimes that looked to the past (Alasheev 1995a).

Practices of incentive and discipline in Soviet factories were 'personalized' (Morrison 2008: 135; cf. Collier 2011: 106) but not 'individualized'. Negotiations and bargaining on issues which materially affected workers, such as bonuses, piece-work rates, overtime and so on, were highly personalized, in that individual brigade leaders and managers exercised a large degree of discretion (Morrison 2008: 139) based on personal relations of favour within teams rather than management's assessment of individuals' output or objective measures of value. In addition, like in other socialist labour contexts, Russian workers had some degree of autonomy on the shop-floor (Alasheev 1995b). Aleksandr Prokhorov (2011: 218) takes this thesis further, arguing for a strong form of 'grass-roots solidarity' where management are at the mercy of workers who are united in feelings of alienation and subordination (*podchinenie*). Individual workers were always willing to cover each other within a team and were not subject to the same surveillance and subordinating imperatives of today's workplace. In a recent summary of the Russian forms of the adoption of neoliberal production regimes, the accent is particularly on increased control over workers, an intensification of the work burden, and a general tightening of the work day's regime (or timetable) (Kagarlitskii 2008; Levinson 2007). At the same time Clarke (2007) has argued that the subordination of production to the law of value means line managers have fundamentally changed from being representatives of collectives (the traditional Soviet role) to agents of management.

Under socialism the piece-rate norms were low (where they still existed) and bonuses for completed work were paid as a matter of course (Morrison 2008: 138), regardless of the quality of output varying between individuals. Even good teams often contained below-average workers in terms of productivity, whose individual contribution, or lack of it, was masked by the overall team return. The new imperatives of subordination of all aspects of the production process to constant monitoring by multiple levels of supervisors *beyond* the immediate production unit, and the unrelenting pressure from such authorities for workers to become flexible and regulate themselves to the *supervisors'* understanding of the imperatives of the production world is now cause of much resentment for workers like Sasha.

For a number of workers of Sasha's age or even younger, analogous experiences of what were interpreted as 'new' forms of labour discipline were strongly correlated with feelings of shame and a lack of self-esteem. This was in contrast to narratives where the socialist-era was mythologized as providing a shopfloor experience that might have been physically harsh, but, as Sasha said, allowed one to 'be one's own person'. This understanding of socialist-era working personhood clearly related to a complex patina of work-based camaraderie, only enhanced by the gallows humour of men in poor working conditions; a certain specific form of autonomy at the level of the shop floor (variously described by informants as 'they just let us get on with it'); the more 'personalized relations' within work teams generally that acted as a buffer against managerialist practices (Temnitskii 2011). Now even in the most traditional of production-scapes, workers socialized in terms of socialist-era shopfloor values encounter a 'new' imperative to self-regulate in contexts where work is already demeaning (due to conditions or pay). At the same time they experience a new form of micro-level surveillance from intermediary managers, whether workers resist or comply with this imperative.

Even in the smallest and tightest-knit of worker teams, the expectation to become subordinated units of production is keenly felt. I witnessed this at first hand with a brigade (team) in a different workshop owned by an Italian firm making materials for sale to the domestic hardware market. An expected delivery of raw materials did not arrive and my informant Georgii's brigade was then rebuked by the foreman of another

brigade for not immediately setting to a number of routine tasks, such as resetting lathes, cleaning equipment and bringing in raw materials from an outside store—mainly duties that were primarily the responsibility of auxiliary workers. The foreman went to find the shift manager and Georgii's men quickly set about making themselves look busy. When the supervisors returned, an empty delivery truck suddenly arrived and all hands were called on to load it for another brigade. Another argument ensued, this time in another team as a worker complained that the loading work meant he had to leave his temperature-critical fabricating work, delaying its completion. Later Georgii discussed the incident:

> They expect us to be everywhere at once and still deliver the product before the deadline. The supervisors are like hornets, they just buzz around and distract you. But if I had complained today, they'd write me up in the report and that would be my bonus gone anyway. […] It is ridiculous sometimes the lengths they go to to find something for you to do. They can't stand it if you don't look busy. I mean it is the good teams that suffer like this if they work well and finish quickly. They've even tried to give us brooms to sweep out the shop when everyone knows there's no point. The shift-supervisor is a real bastard, in front of everyone he says to us [brigade leaders] can't you use your damned initiative and find something constructive for the team to do […] The point is the supervisors are just nobodies, they're informants. We're the ones that do the work, they do nothing, just watch us the whole time. They shouldn't be able to talk to us like that: we're a team with status; the boss knows we always do a good job.'[13]

Georgii's frustration echoed the understanding of the 'worth' of 'status' workers shared by Sasha and Uncle Lyova. The following day, one of Georgii's workers quit because of the incident. He explained to Georgii in far earthier terms that he couldn't be bothered with the hassle anymore. He was one of a number of informants who, like Sasha, eventually 'left' formal blue-collar labour altogether for the informal economy and are discussed in the next chapter.

[13] This quotation and the description of work at the car plant are partly derived from Morris (2012a) where they are discussed in the context of workers leaving to the informal economy.

'Wit and Skill' After the Factory

Despite the sense of precarity experienced by workers in the 'new' production regimes of familiar factory contexts, it is worth returning to Andrei's and Sasha's interpretations of the continuing 'good' that allowed them to carve out a sense of habitability in work and being valued workers at Steelpipe. In particular the affection of the worker for work and the site of production that Alasheev posits as an important compensatory mechanism under socialism (and in the 1990s) may appear naive or misplaced. They deserves more explication in relation to the postsocialist case. Even for Sasha, 'after' factory work, elements of affective value for labour are carried over into other spheres, particularly DIY practices that do not stem from economic imperatives. They too are an important site of the making of the lifeworld habitable, even after it appears no longer possible to find a homely niche in formal work places in Izluchino.

Sergei Alasheev (1995b) spent a long period of fieldwork observing workers and talking to them in a ball-bearing factory in the early 1990s. He found many workers 'lived to work': they worked overtime for free, felt a sense of personal responsibility and connection to their workshops over and above duty, and could only achieve a sense of self-realization through identifying themselves with work. This was as true for women as men. Alasheev also details how moral stimuli (certificates and insignificant awards) were highly effective and showed that the dedication and devotion to work was genuine.

Alasheev's informants interpret blue-collar work as a labour of love that workers invest their personhood in fully. It is inseparable from their socially meaningful and embedded sense of self. Materials are poor quality, machines are poor, and senior management is poor. Not only that, but in the early 1990s Russian factories were rapidly emerging into the global economy after 70 years of isolation. Workers therefore have to become 'ultra-flexible' due to these particular challenges of production regimes—often even the foreman is completely at the mercy of the skilled worker (1995b: 94–95). The result is highly personalized delegation to skilled workers who work autonomously as they develop the knack to maintain obsolete machines and output. It is not therefore surprising that

'pride', self-respect and a sense of dignity in labour—if only in a highly context-specific way—developed in the late Soviet period.

In some respects Alasheev argues that this state of affairs continued into the immediate postsocialist era (his fieldwork was completed in 1993), and there is a slender scholarship that echoes his findings today (Temnitskii 2011), as well as numerous episodes from the life stories and observations of work in the Steelpipe, Polymer, and other smaller places that suggest the pace of change is very slow indeed. Galina's case in particular bears this out. She 'loves' work, the workplace and her co-workers. Primarily because of the sense of autonomy and micro-power over her immediate working environment that she has, even as the factory moves closer to oblivion, which she is powerless to halt.

In the light of an affective interpretation of production relations, Sasha's story starts to look different. His unhappiness with change in Steelpipe and his experience at the car plant are connected to the earlier development of a personhood where he self-identified and received recognition as a *peredovik* worker. In fact he and Andrei had both obtained housing as relatively young men through this status. They were rewarded directly or indirectly (through the intercession of other respected workers) by the last 'Tsar' of the monotown. Similarly their wide and relatively varied social networks of confrères were at least partly the result of the work-based respect they had earned at the enterprise. Despite their coming of age as workers only in the 1990s, it is useful to think of their personhoods as workers as affectively inflected in the way described by Alasheev. This interpretation is made more compelling by seeing Sasha's long search for a habitable space in work not merely in terms of 'autonomy' and a lack of surveillance. It is also worth combining the perspective of more recent scholarship that indicates a longstanding production culture of the right to 'independence' in labour for the Russian worker (Temnitskii 2011) with observations of the way Russian working-class spaces are marked by a sense of 'inheritance' (Walker 2009). There is an array of ethical and embodied dispositions comprising a particular 'structure of feeling' that the enterprise-dominated urban working-class town and city creates (ibid.). David Byrne (2002, in Strangleman et al. 2013) has similarly proposed a specifically 'industrial structure of feeling' that inhabits the deindustrializing community in the West. This

can be the presence of overwhelming markers of inequality and stigma (Strangleman et al. 2013: 12), but it can also surface as forms of feeling that continue to bind.

Izluchino's 'close-knit, horizontal networks of social ties' (Rose 1998, in Walker 2009: 533) mean that the ways of work, its skills and socially-achieved practices, are incorporated into the young worker's personhood. In a sociobiographical sense they are 'inheritors' of the sum of what it means to be a worker for the preceding generations. By referring to the work of both Raymond Williams and youth studies scholar Phil Cohen (1997), Charlie Walker comes close to proposing personhood among young people in industrial communities as a propertizing experience of class. Unlike Williams' critique of the city's view of the country, the intergenerational inheritance of the young Russian worker throughout the 1990s and beyond is not 'a myth functioning as a memory'. The rhythms, bodily techniques of work and class, are re-embodied in the young. They continue to be socialized and enculturated by the total social institution of the enterprise-settlement even in decline. This combines family, educational institutions, peers and the industrial urban dowry of space itself that, for better or for worse, shuts out the presence of most other avenues for self-affirmation except blue-collar work.

Walker stresses changes to this inheritance, at least at the level of youthful expectation of escape from blue-collar work and aspirations for white-collar work. But in Izluchino, the horizon of possibilities remains largely structured within the modalities of blue-collar life. The ex-monotown remains something of an 'island' (Nielsen 2006). This is witnessed by Sasha's peripatetic, yet repetitive and predictable work biography. At the same time this state should not be seen as 'entrapment'. Personhood as a performance is more than the sum of its social parts. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Sasha's evident pride in the resources of his classed identity can be extended into other spheres of life, such as self-provisioning and DIY. And this is where the culture of initiative and independence posited by Temnitsky as part of the genesis of Russian labour history is illuminating. Tracing the autonomy and 'spontaneous initiative' in the execution of task based work, despite a history of forced labour, Temnitsky builds a picture of how a 'particular *level of freedom* … in the carrying out of tasks and the labour regime' itself (2011: 36), was

inscribed in the very development of a working class in Russia. This was partly due to the late adoption of the factory model of industrial work in Russia and the necessary adaptation of its form to a peasant culture. Over time a negotiated, personalized form of labour relations set in (Temnitsky 2007).

The planned economy in the USSR put an emphasis on the spontaneous yet ideologically motivated nature of work at the expense of a lack of the adoption of organizational Taylorism common in capitalism at that time (cf. Dunn 2004: 12–13). Communitarian values inherited from the social organization of village life served as a partial substitute for punitive labour discipline. In the late Soviet era spontaneity and initiative was infused with the 'wit and skill' of workers coping with production in poor working conditions, economic stagnation, and an inferior technological base (Temnitsky 2011: 37). This was reflected in the characteristic rhythms of Soviet work: 'rush work' ('*avral*') often requiring personal sacrifice from the worker interspersed with much slower periods.[14] Indeed this provides another link with the peasant past, which for Izluchino workers is only two generations away (Filtzer 1996).

In explaining the subsistence principle of Russian peasants, the influential early Soviet sociologist Alexander Chayanov argued that they worked hard and intensively up to the point of meeting basic needs and food security but not beyond this. This has uncanny parallels with Sasha's work mentality—rushing the stacking tasks of the forklift, working like a 'first rank' worker in an effort to get the task done. Having completed it he is then free to rest, which is his 'right'. For him this is efficiency, and maximal utilization of his time in the long, boring ten-hour shift. It is also an example of 'independence' and initiative. It is interpreted by new management—inflected by neoliberal ideas of efficiency and self-directedness—as 'laziness', indicating Sasha as part of the 'left-overs' or a residual less productive ex-Soviet worker, a characterization that is both socially Darwinian and Marxian at the same time. Despite the dour reality of the late socialist and postsocialist workshops in which Sasha cut his

[14] While arguably related to the phenomenon of Stakhanovism (Siegelbaum 1990), *avral* was and remains more a function of an economy structured by shortage, supply bottle-necks and technological issues (Filtzer 1996).

teeth, elements of some kind of a lasting sense of autonomy in work are evident in his own words about what the 'good' and habitable aspects of workshop life are for him, regardless of the extent to which they really were operative in his youth. The representativeness of experience is not as important as memory as a resource in the present.

If 'good' aspects of the production regimes Sasha left behind are based on understanding autonomy and 'independence' in work, this also helps explain the way he maintains a sense of a labouring personhood in 'doing things himself'—even after exiting normative production and entering the informal economy. This chapter began with Sasha extolling the virtues of practical skills that were developed within a sociality of confrères, and the socially embedded practice of which persisted even after he had 'got fed up with the factory'.

Sasha refers repeatedly to the DIY practices of making decorative elements for the home from found, scrounged materials, some of which are filched from work places of those 'inside' the system of production, even if Sasha is not. For him the 'inner happiness' and 'comfort' after leaving blue-collar work is related to the longstanding affective reasoning that developed over a number of generations in socialist-era workspaces. The 'non-technological' reality of blue-collar work, where skill and 'wit' is a tangible element in the successful carrying out of production tasks, illustrates another link with longstanding and persistent tropes of working-class life: the 'handicraft' nature of some production owes more to the rural past than the Fordist production line (Alasheev 1995b: 99; Dunn 2004: 12–13). Just as rushing and storm work echo older peasant rhythms of work, the affective meaning of work that in part arises from the 'handmade', DIY necessity of the shop floor must also find its origin in the generalist competencies of the peasant worker who needed a wide range of skills to survive the geographical and climatic reality of rural Russian life. Similarly now, Sasha cultivates a toolbox of skills and connections that involve competencies in building work, mechanics, food provisioning, and so on. At the same time the resourcefulness of the person who does 'handwork', and who seeks to make habitable their environment, is predicated on practices that are held in common and developed through sociality (Photo 2.3).

Photo 2.3 Handmade decorative item (Image courtesy of author)

This returns us to the 'helping out' that Sasha, despite being a rather unsociable type, highlighted as so important, whether in blue-collar employment or a gypsy cab driver on the margins of the formal economy, an acknowledged identity as a deserving recipient of mutual support in developing and enacting the skills of 'DIY'. This competence in handwork may extend to building a house, a garage or mending a car or a lawnmower. It is maintained through the interpretation of self as a competent worker. The personalization of one's habitat: the 'upgradings, DIY projects, landscaping, and more—are signifiers of identity, if not aspirations for class mobility' (Browne 2014; see also Attfield 2000). The competent worker engages in personal production, but that production is not possible without recourse to a mutually acknowledging and recognizable blue-collar personhood. Because only with that recognition will 'help' from others arrive. And without help, facing the ongoing contin-

gencies of everyday life is unthinkable. How else will the car get fixed, the dacha roof get put up, or the bathroom heater plumbed in? One mundane example suffices: we sifted through the Sasha's garage workspace one autumn evening. What was he looking for? Lead weights. Why? To fashion from scratch a ballast belt so that Sasha could effectively go harpoon fishing under the ice in the winter river when the fish are too sluggish to escape. Fishing is leisure, sociality and self-provisioning combined. Where did the lead material come from? How had he managed to rework it into forms that could serve as weights to strap into a wearable belt? He repeated a well-worn phrase: 'an ordinary citizen knows [how to do] many things and so won't lose out.' Adding, 'and there are always people who will help you out.'

Outside the comforting confines of the paternalism of the enterprise with its equally alienating new regimes that bridle the urge for independence, habitability is even more dependent on the 'horizontal social network' of confrères. Sasha can leave 'work' behind, but not the workers. The lead weights were 'recycled' from one of the factories in the town by Sasha's dependable confrères. The next chapter follows him and others as they move into informal work. But it begins with an example of the ambiguous 'garage work'—confrères fixing a car up for its owner. What kind of labour combines the economic, the social and renders the border between at-work identity and off-work identity problematic, at the same time as drawing strongly on the socialization of its participants as workers? It is a practice as much for its own sake that involves homosociality, leisure, self-production (maintaining a car while sharing drinks).[15] But perhaps most importantly, it serves to continually reproduce strong–weak ties between multiple people: the expansion and cementing of a blue-collar male social network through more or less 'deep commitments, intense emotions, and everyday acts of relatedness' (Sanghera et al. 2011: 185).

[15] I am aware that 'maintaining a car while sharing drinks' doesn't really come close to describing the social importance of this activity and its general lack of instrumentality (it may not really matter if much work is done on the car). It might be better to define the practice the other way around as 'sharing drinks while maintaining a car', but even that is not really adequate.

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