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Informal Economy: Going Underground but Coming Out of the Shadows

A small part of this chapter pertaining to skilled informal tradesmen derives from ethnographic material published previously (Morris 2014), as do some of the materials on DIY practices (2012b).

'"Garage", now that's a topic on its own,' says Sasha's brother Vanya as we change his car tyres over to winter ones in the yard in front of his garage. Vanya is just one of the many car fanatics. In 2009, he still works for a private security firm in Kaluga. He loves spending time in the garage block with his mates just tinkering. Hanging out in garages was probably the most profitable activity of all field research for this book. Messing about in garages has something to say about the nexus of masculinity, generation, sociality, working-class values and identity, and the recombination of informal economic activities, self-provisioning and formal work skills that contribute to making Izluchino a habitable space, particularly for young men.

But let's start with Vanya, his garage and his cars. What does he mean by 'garage'? These are not the steel 'clamshells' found like mushrooms sprouting up around tower blocks across Russia. The garage in Izluchino

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is a brick building built side-to-side with other constructions to form long rows of often spacious workshops-cum-garages. There are two garage territories in the town at either end which between them make up around ten hectares. Like the use of 'sheds' in British and Australian culture—the garage is a masculine reserve devoted to practical activity, often for its own sake. Recently, there has been a movement to give the Anglophone shed culture more of a communitarian ethic which is somewhat in contrast to its culturally specific association with individualistic masculinity (Cavanagh et al. 2014). In contrast, Russian garage use is predicated not on the lone tinkerer, but only men coming together to reinforce bonds of competent masculinity that makes their lives more habitable—the garage can be a cosy space of consociality, whether used as a bar or as a mechanic's shop.

One garage block near the river is made up of ten parallel lines of alleyways almost 200 metres long by 200 metres wide. It is easy to get lost on the dirt paths between the rows, but each garage has a number stencilled in paint next to their welded rusty steel doors. Some have glass brick windows, all have electricity and ventilation pipes sticking out of their roofs, and all were built by their owners, one at a time with help from relatives or friends. Opposite Vanya's garage another owner has added not only a summer 'terrace' of sorts—a room made from steel sheeting and polycarbide glass that stuck out into the space between the garages—but also a pigeon coop to the roof.

What is a garage for? Ironically even in the winter, it is rare to actually find them occupied by a car. In Vanya's case the place is a mess. We first go there to collect the winter tyres for his Lada saloon car. But there is no way we can drive the car into the garage to make the change. It is full of all kinds of, what I think is, junk. 'No, all of this is like gold,' he retorts. There are at least three bicycle skeletons hanging from a wall, each of which has been cannibalized at some point and two long benches full of machine tools and auto parts. Towards the back of this cavernous space there are piles of broken furniture, and a heap of tarpaulins. A makeshift bed and side table indicates that this is where Uncle Lyova, Vanya's father, comes occasionally to sleep off his binge drinking. Nearby is a Soviet-era laminated map of the world, hanging from a nail. Metal shelving contains various tools for use at the vegetable plot and summer house including a petrol strimmer and a dismantled steel wheelbarrow. Hung from one

end of the shelves are all manner of clothes, mainly army surplus belonging to different male members of the family. On the table is an empty bottle of vodka and a string bag full of green cabbages from the plot. On the floor are many empty five-litre water bottles strewn everywhere (used as all-purpose liquid cans).

Like most garages, Vanya's has a deep *pogreb*, an improvised cellar that serves two purposes. It is used as an inspection pit for work on the chassis of cars parked perilously above on wooden planks; it is also used to store potatoes, fruit preserves and sauerkraut. At the beginning of the winter this space might contain 40 litres of sauerkraut and 20 litres of jam in glass bottles and jars. More than enough for a family of four, the oversupply of these self-provisioned foodstuffs leads to an 'economy of jars' in Izluchino mainly restricted to the amusing spectacle of people trying to give away the unused or least tasty produce to extended family and friends towards the end of spring (Smollett 1989). In other words it is more of a mutual gift economy that arises out of an ongoing concern with insecurity. Even though absolute food insecurity has not yet become a reality, its potential is understood to be real. The memories, both of wartime privations and the need for self-provisioning in the 1990s, live on. The contingent acts of household insurance 'just in case' give way to 'altruistic' and ritual mutualism. The presence of food is why an improvised ventilation system in the garage is so important. Vanya has hooked up a computer cooling fan to a ventilation grate high up in one wall. From his friend who worked at the Polymer shop, he's scrounged about eight metres of plastic piping, which he has installed so that damp air from the base of the *pogreb* can escape through the roof, rather like a toilet soil pipe. We collect Vanya's winter tyres and drive back to the yard where his flat is and switch them over in the chilly open air. Vanya can't be bothered to take the summer tyres back and they end up on his apartment's tiny open-air balcony until the following year.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, it looks at the garage as a socially masculine space for workers. These spaces see the performance of masculine resourcefulness and 'competence', but these qualities intersect with class-bound understandings of space in terms of the need for mutual respect as worker-persons. The meaning and valuing of the space rests on a shared identity as 'worthy' worker-others. This is similar to the 'respect' older workers were able to gain through work. Many of these younger

workers, while they may have initially built an identity as 'worthy' in the same factories as their older relatives, now increasingly maintain this worthiness in non-work contexts and contingent practices.

At the same time, as an entry space to informal work opportunities, the garage resembles a liminal space, but rather than signalling a change in social status, works to reinscribe pre-existing identities as 'deserving' workers and bearers of moral worth. The informal economy is then examined through the case study of an underground workshop making plastic windows. In addition, 'gypsy' unregistered taxi driving is explored. The former facilitates and cements values of autonomy in work and camaraderie that are increasingly lacking in formal production. The driving—while more marginal—also hinges on autonomist interpretations of labour. It is tempting to interpret the growth in taxi drivers in terms of employers' criticism of a lack of adaptability among workers to more disciplined labour regimes. Taxi drivers do occupy a niche of informal work that rejects the rhythms and intensities of the new factories, but even for more entrepreneurial tradesmen, such labour is as much to do with the rejection of external imperatives for change while valuing practices of resourcefulness for their own sake and in sociality. Informality is then compared to the do-it-yourself (DIY) practices described previously that seemingly serve no economic purpose but which cement ethical dispositions of autonomy and ingenuity. These values are meaningful for workers not as atomized individuals, competing with each other for status or money; the practices of decoration are valued as social goods in themselves, as contributing to habitability both practically and symbolically (Browne 2014; Attfield 2000). In this way the economic imperatives of informal work are tempered by a social and moral understanding of practice that lies beyond economistic reasoning (Morris 2012a, b, Keat 2000).

'Garage Work': Particularistic Spaces of Working-Class Masculinity and Sociality

One day, when Vanya has gone to Kaluga to work his security guard shift, his mother Masha talks about the garage spaces of her children and husband. Kideckel characterizes the uses of space in the yards outside

housing blocks in Romania as 'bench work', where sociality, drinking and 'tinkering' coalesce in space (2004). Masha describes the 'garage work' of the men in the family in a similar way:

> For some wives it is a problem—if the blokes leave for the garage that's it. You don't know when you'll see them again. But on the other hand it is a blessing and you can get some peace. When Lyova [her husband] goes on a bender (*zapoi*), he doesn't go to his own garage as it is too far away. It's good that he can go to Vanya's garage nearby as I know he'll be safe and even in the winter he won't freeze to death there.

Narratives about garage 'work' continue a couple of weeks later in a far more salubrious garage space owned by Zhenya, a young lathe operator in an informal metal and plastic fabricators shop. Nikita, a cement kiln operative, had been asked by Zhenya to help him change the beam axle on a car he was working on. Nikita used to work in the cement works with Zhenya, but the latter had quit about six months ago and gone to work 'underground', in the informal economy. The car doesn't belong to Zhenya, but to a 'client' who turns out to be an old school friend of his, but a few years older than Zhenya, who is 24 years old. The 'client', Boris, owns a vehicular object of envy for many young men: a 1980s Moskvitch *Sviatogor* which is a copy of a 1970s Chrysler model but with a powerful Renault-made injection engine. There isn't a monetary agreement involved in this work: Zhenya has the skills and space to work on the car, as well as the work-related 'prestige' of being able to call on Nikita and others for help at short notice. Boris has sourced and bought the parts himself, and as a 'payment' gives a significant quantity of Lada spare parts from his old car to Zhenya. However this hardly resembles a transaction. Zhenya in turn has bought a crate of 'Johnny Walker' whisky from his cousin who works in Moscow—actually bootleg alcohol packaged as the real thing. This is a partial compensation for Nikita and me for our time and work, but again, it hardly resembles a transaction—Nikita is in any case keen to work on the car. Not only will he get to learn a new skill, he will be introduced to Sergei, Zhenya's 'boss' and the foreman of an informal underground workshop that is looking for workers.

For the first hour or so Boris tinkers away trying to prep his car for us to work on the axle. But there is another problem with the injector not

working properly. I previously owned a car with a similar engine and can read the English notes that Zhenya has printed out from the internet on how to fix this. Nikita beams as my presence serves as a sort of validation of his own resourcefulness and 'prestige'. Later he talks about how he felt it was partly due to this that he had 'got in' with the group. However, the main activity of importance is the drinking of bootleg whisky. This is prioritized over the car. For Zhenya this is clearly not really meant as 'payment' to us, but a marking of his own generosity and prestige: not only does he have access to this exotic drink, he is making a 'spread' for a group he considers he has 'brought together' for more important things (a later discussion of the work opportunities in the underground workshop). His garage is very different to that of Vanya's. Clean and spacious, it has two old sofas and a plastic table as well as an old desktop computer and a speaker system through which the latest pop hits blare out, accompanied by music videos. Zhenya has even 'obtained' a metal rack from a shop that was intended for the display of flavoured powdered milk but now serves as storage for his music CDs.[1] After a while poor Boris is forgotten and Zhenya and others hold forth about 'garage work', picking up the theme where Masha left off:

> It's only for some wives that the garage is a problem—the guys [*muzhiki*] don't have to make an excuse, they just say 'I'm in the garage' that's all. Yes they can say, 'you've pecked me off I am going to the garage, come on guys we're leaving'. But if the wife knows he's in the garage then she's not going to worry about him. And sure, for older guys often they just drink there—tell their wives that they're fixing something and actually they're just getting away from them…. But also it is a place where you can find your 'theme' [*tema*], not just about cars, but motorbikes, pigeons even. And the guys can discuss it for hours. (Zhenya, 25)
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> Sometimes it is ridiculous, but you are just carried away by it. They turn on a sparkplug and talk about it for two hours. Because they say 'well I tried that one and then it short-circuited, changed it and it was better but then another guy says 'no fucking way I already tried that plug, it was ok,

[1] Zhenya's CD collection also included a quantity of downloaded pornography, I later learnt. These CDs circulated in a way similar to the 'economy of jars' and were used to cement ties as men would 'swap' their latest downloads.

you've got a problem with your engine', and all that. It's serious stuff, like a real academic debate [*nauchnyi spor*], people get carried away. Fuck, like I am! (Nikita, 24)

It's not about getting away from women, from the flat. No, why do you say that? How many hours have we spent hanging around [*zavesali*] here? Here in our company [*kompaniia*] we've spent so much time here that we call the garage not just a garage but a café-club garage. 'Cos you can have a beer here. Or some vodka [indicates about 20 litres of bottled vodka plus a 5 litre water container full of vodka, stored to one side] you can watch a film, have a tinker with the car and everything else. So it is a café-club garage. We phone up Zhenya and say—come on, open up the café-club…. Talk about the vodka—it's already a real garage now. There's only one table for the clientele though—a 'night café-club'… so this is where we live. (Sergei, 31)

The garage as social space is reminiscent of the informal socializing on gendered lines in Kideckel's 'bench work'. However the benches and bars that comprise the gendered separation of space in the Romanian case also indicate the semi-public affirmation of places of solidarity. These are almost entirely absent in Izluchino. Young men occasionally drink in or behind the House of Culture (*DeKa*), or in the yards, but are harassed by residents and police alike. Women at least are able to continue 'bench work' in the beautifully kept front gardens of the town which are amply provided with wooden benches. But masculine sociality—always closely linked with drinking alcohol—remains pathologized and any public visibility it has is transient. For over ten years open-air bars and beer tents have come and gone but they have always been closed down by the authorities within a few months because of the perceived threat to public order and propriety. Freidman (2007) and Kideckel (2004) both note the disappearance over time of benchworking spaces in Romania, but in Russia, the permanent drinking establishment as the socially affirming space of male sociality has, for many, never existed.[2] Thus the garage

[2] Since 2010 two bars have opened and manage to ply a business of sorts but the nature of their clientele is unclear and they are talked of as 'off limits' by all my informants due to the perception that they are linked to criminal gangs and because of their exceptionally high prices. Upon visiting them they turned out to be unremarkable, if extremely expensive places frequented by local men with money to spend on their women.

looms large, occupying an important real and symbolic space in the lives of men. At the same time it bears witness to both the relative marginalization of blue-collar masculine sociality as such, and retains the status of a liminal space of sorts. Physically peripheral to the town, the garage space is looked on ambivalently by men and women alike: not so much a place where crime is feared, but certainly a place marked by an absence of propriety. The social conservatism of the town shows through here. Garages are marked by a stricter gendered form of socializing than the benchwork described by Kideckel. While in the larger towns women make full use of bars and the actual benches of the housing yards are frequented by male and female pensioners, the garage is almost exclusively a male space. Girlfriends would only occasionally visit garages and for many women these spaces were perceived as off limits.[3]

However, the very 'marginality' of the garage space makes for an even more vibrant sense of the possibilities of masculine sociality. The police rarely if ever patrol such places. Similarly, the kind of modifications to buildings outlined above would not be tolerated in the housing blocks. This gives the practices and activities of the garage spaces a feel lacking inhibition, if not 'freedom'. Often, even late at night, Zhenya would crank up the volume of the CD player and the garage would blare out the latest pop hits. On the other side of town in a different garage, Nikita and a group of younger workers he barely knows would make repairs to his high-end motorcycle until the small hours, making a racket as they attended to a faulty clutch.

Certainly the very relegation to the garage of so many practices related to the performance of masculinity-in-common by blue-collar men inflects such activities with an intensity of feeling, of belonging and of delight among the participants. As illustrated above, even mundane everyday activities such as trying to fix a motorbike clutch take on a festive, cheery

[3] For some teenage girls there was less worry about propriety, and garages were seen as a legitimate refuge from the domestic sphere for girlfriends to go to avoid the policing of sexual behaviour. In an example of 'strength in numbers', groups of young women would regularly make barbeques outside garages, while more upwardly mobile women illustrated their wholesale rejection of the garages' possibility of propriety by renting at great expense parking spaces in the private, gated car parks that were 'guarded' 24 hours a day. These spaces were often right next door to the traditional garage blocks, but in terms of symbolic value were as far from them as the traditional Soviet blocks of flats were from the villas of the local elites.

character. By necessity rather than design, the garage remains an example of the making of space habitable for working-class men. Symbolically too it is a masculine domain where working-class 'authenticity' can be performed and even experimented with.

The second time I visit Zhenya he is working informally with some friends on another car. This time he is drinking alcohol-free beer. In response to my visible shock, he says, 'I don't feel like drinking at the moment…. What are you looking at? It's my garage; I can do what I want!' With the private and marginalized nature of these male spaces comes a meagre sense of freedom from conventionality, even while strong markers of normative blue-collar masculinity are continually replayed and performed—such as the necessity of displaying 'practical' and resourceful skill in mechanics or DIY work.

The garage provides an example of the search for habitability as the 'propertizing' of marginal spaces in a way that allows the maintenance and expansion of the horizontal social network of workers. They can encounter others here and build weak and strong ties of comradeship, even if only temporarily. This was particularly true of the younger Nikita: once he had bought a motorcycle he would strike up conversations with other owners and this is how he discovered a group to help him with his clutch.

The meaning and valuing of the space rests on a shared identity as 'worthy' worker-others. What other justification of presence is possible, other than being of use, having some skill that can be offered up to the group, even if it is tokenistic or symbolic (such as in my own case as a marginally useful contributor to fixing things)? It should also be acknowledgement that the significance of this space is inflected by age. Few of the men with whom I socialize have children; although older men clearly do use the garage in a similar way, just less frequently.[4]

[4] By the same token the access to garages over time takes on significance in terms of socio-economic stratification within the community of factory workers. As restrictions on the further building of garages are put in place and the rental or resale cost of these outbuildings as property increases significantly, there are many younger workers 'left behind' who have no access to these spaces apart from as friends of those who already own them. This in turn reinforces the sense of the places as a precious resource. Those younger men with a garage are an object of envy and are something of a labour 'aristocracy'.

Entering the Informal Economy Through the Garage

Garages are central to the leisure of men and occupy an important place in the practical arrangements of household maintenance and food storage. As implied above, their liminality as social spaces is activated when they became the site of entry to the informal economy. The example of Zhenya using the garage to fix other people's cars, sometimes for payment but more often for 'the hell of it' and for barter, serves only as an affirmation of his independent and seemingly entrepreneurial spirit. It is hardly 'business' in any sense of the word—indeed, the idea of 'getting ahead' through this kind of work is frowned upon. Economically significant informality emerges thanks to the recombination of these more minor informal economic activities—display of formally and informally developed work skills—but most of all the performance of trust and mutual recognition as 'competent' and 'authoritative' blue-collar personhoods, as described in previous chapters and elsewhere (Morris 2012b). The sociality of the garage is not enough in itself. There needs to be history too: Zhenya had worked in the cement works and had met Nikita there, although Zhenya had left soon after. Through Nikita's entrée into the garage space he is consciously and unconsciously being 'tested out' as a 'competent' working-class person.

But what does this 'testing' mean? Nikita and I were given a lot to drink. Too much in fact. Could Nikita hold it? He could. Was his self-control maintained despite inebriation? It was. He swore a lot and told blue jokes. But he still helped out and showed a modicum of mechanical mindedness. But drinking wasn't the main thing. Sasha, the eldest man and the team leader (*brigadir*) of the underground workshop, was watching us, only sipping his whisky and quickly switching to beer rather too soon. He asked Nikita about his work in the cement works: How did he find it? Was he happy with the pay? How long had he worked there? Subsequently it was clear that he wanted to gauge not only whether Nikita was sufficiently dissatisfied with the pay and conditions that he would be motivated enough to leave the Cement and come to work illegally but also that he wasn't a 'weak link' in his existing formal work team.

The practical nature of the garage work gave only a hint of his qualities, but they were enough. Most importantly of all though was the socializing element. Was Nikita the 'right' kind of bloke? Was he 'competent' is a wider sense? Was he generally reliable but not too serious? Was he going to fit in and be willing to do what turned out to be quite a low-level job in the underground uPVC window fabricating shop? By the same token, despite his antics and happy-go lucky demeanour, Nikita was anxious to be accepted, but also wary of what was on offer. He'd heard about the jobs on offer and the potential doubling of his income. While he was equally keen to see the car and have a good drink, he was under no illusions as to the possible opportunities at stake. Overall then, competence emerges as a kind of mutual interpellation of working-class personhood within a setting of seemingly innocuous homosociality (Morris 2011: 625).

In this sense the garage socialization often takes on a kind of informal 'vetting' process. New or untested participants in hands-on practices of mechanical competence, or just helping out, are performing a form of general competence as blue-collar persons (Morris 2011: 626). In circumstances where entry to organized informal economic practices is at stake, given the higher potential rewards and the quasi-legal nature of such work, these performances might be thought to render the garage as a liminal space, indicated by Nikita's hidden anxiety. However, performances of working-class masculinity are themselves predicated on 'lower-key' values of circumspection and self-control. This indicates a reinscription and intensification of Nikita's existing identity as a deserving worker and bearer of value (cf. Skeggs 2004, on the performance of excessive sexuality among working-class women). If anything, Nikita, even in entering the 'dangerous' and murky sphere of informality, is bound closer to the blue-collar set of normative codes that are inscribed through the experience of formal work. This cuts across the experiences of both older workers and younger ones like Sasha. Values around autonomy in work re-emerge in this way in informal labour, as outlined below.

Soon Nikita is quickly inducted into the underground workshop making plastic windows and I am able to follow him there and work in his 'brigade' along with Zhenya and their boss, Sasha. But before describing the underground workshop it is worth returning to the main theme of the previous chapter: the interpretations of formal work as precarious

that leads to the informal economy being seen as a viable alternative. Sasha increasingly equated formal work with loss of autonomy and dignity. This view is shared by the other two men working at the uPVC shop. However Nikita, before he joined the underground workshop, had emphasized in-work poverty as the main motivation. This is understandable as he had worked as an electrician for the municipality for very low wages for a long time before moving to the cement works. However, despite receiving wages that did not allow him even to buy clothes for himself (Morris 2012a: 224–5), Nikita had put up with the work because it involved minimal supervision and gave him free time; he was able to use the local authority electricians' workshop to carry out all kinds of private work for himself and for others. In addition the office block in which the workshop was located was a significant site for young people to socialize in the evenings. It was part of the '*DeKa*': the House of Culture.

The underground uPVC workshop, while 'mirroring' the formal workspace in production activities, offers a tantalizing glimpse for Nikita and others of the possibility of continuing to exercise some autonomy in work, while at the same time getting monetary (and untaxed) rewards that allows them to participate in consumption on a 'level playing field' with the best paid blue-collar workers in the region (the multinational car plant conveyer line workers in Kaluga). After Nikita has worked making double glazing units for a few weeks at the underground shop, he and Sasha invite me to join them. They've lost their delivery driver and odd-job man through illness and they need an extra pair of hands.

Autonomy in Informality? The Underground Production Workshop

Just like in the 'normal' factories, getting ready to go to work is marked by a ritual gathering of the team. However, there is no grumbling in the cold works bus. Nikita has bought the donuts at the open-air stall next to the bus station and brigade leader Sergei has brought his mother's home cooking for lunch. This is a close-knit team of six permanent cutters and assemblers. Nikita has already started shifting his narrative of justifying this work from purely pecuniary motivation to explanations more

embedded in a sense of autonomy: 'We work for ourselves. That means if we need money we go to work. If we don't want money right now then today we won't work.' Sergei looks askance at him: 'But you always need money, don't you Nikita!'

Despite his bragging, Nikita clearly links informal work to flexibility. While he tries to work all the days given to him, he particularly relishes taking 'drinking days' off. In his mid-twenties and having had the smallest imaginable financial resources before the Cement works, spending his new found income is important. Nonetheless, his interpretation is also inflected by his socialization in the team and through his experience at the Cement, and not based on a comparison with the lack of autonomy in his previous electrician employment where he had enjoyed lots of freedom. It is car mechanic Zhenya—at the workshop the chief cutter responsible for all the lathe work—who develops the theme of autonomy in informality in comparison to 'normative' factory work:

> The pace is slower, you haven't got people looking round the door to check on you. But then when Sergei or Igor—the owner—comes and says 'we need this order for tonight', then we'll work harder than we would in the factory. I worked in the Cement and no one there would break their back for *avral* [storming to meet a deadline].[5] On the other hand when you get a decent amount of hard cash for the job then the quality is going to be right.

An older worker, Petr, who had served in the second Chechen war and had a further technical education adds:

> There is an element of craftsmanship [*masterstvo*] to it, after all, there isn't if it is a proper production line. You just wouldn't have time for that at the Polymer. In fact the reason we have so much spare plastic for making drainpipes at the dacha is because there is so much wastage because of them rushing [laughs]. It's not like that here. Here the profit is in not wasting your material. Like we had a special order for a triangular window and it

[5] See previous chapter for a discussion of the more polychronic approach to task management in Russian production. See also Hall (1983) for a culturally differentiated discussion of polychronicity.

> took us all day to work out how to seal the sharpest angled joint. But it gave us a sense of satisfaction. Time isn't always money, really, not like there over in your West.

In two cars we had made our way, a 15 minutes' drive from the town, to one of the industrial zones attached to a smaller housing settlement near the out-of-town industrial railway terminus. Having given a conspiratorial nod to the gatekeeper of the factory complex we park up next to what looked like a derelict hulk of a building. Sergei explains how the agreement with the cable shop works: the Moscow management rarely visit the plant and so the subletting of this disused workshop by the local management for cash is relatively unproblematic. The only issue is that there is no heating and the low level of power supplied is not sufficient for some of the equipment. The only risk is that the higher than normal electricity consumption might alert the Moscow owners, but there is little chance of that.

The workshop has been out of use for about ten years. When I arrive in November the temperature in the daytime is around freezing. As long as you are doing something active you can keep warm. Sergei has used aerosol expanding foam to fill most of the cracks in the structure which stops the draughts. Two workers man the third-, or fourth-hand Turkish-made lathes, cutting the plastic or aluminium to make the window frames. Nikita as the youngest is the fill-in man, by turns helping out on all the menial and ancillary work. While he had been 'master' of electrical jobs in the *DeKa*, here he is still a neophyte, with a smaller share of the pay too. Still, he is happy: he earns 40,000 roubles ($1300) in a busy month and even now at the beginning of winter there is a lot of work. In the municipality he had earned less than a quarter of that. As the production cycle progresses, Nikita and I move to the yard—there isn't room in the workshop to do the finishing work. We haul by hand the 30 kilograms sealed double and triple glazing sheets out into the open air, assemble the units and then bring them back in again. The work is physically hard, even for Nikita who is much stronger than me. He takes too many cigarette breaks, and breaks too many panes of the expensive glass. Nikita is a bit of a disappointment to Sergei: 'Look, I know he's Zhenya's pal and all, but to be honest, I'd rather have an English professor doing the finishing!

Nikita is too free (*vol'nyi*), he's too much of a liability [*besshabashnyi*].' Clearly, an informal comradely shop still replicates those elements of formal employment characterized by individualized and responsive modes of worker self-discipline. The difference here in the informal sector is that Sergei has fewer levers of discipline. They are part of a team after all, and it had been his decision to take Nikita on.

The following summer (2011), Nikita leaves and goes back to the Cement. Sergei has not got rid of him, but certainly Nikita had been the first to lose a day's pay when the level of orders in the later winter couldn't justify having six workers at the shop. But Nikita himself admits that he was glad to be going back to the Cement. At the uPVC the money had come just a little too fast and easy. Even his girlfriend said as much. The structuring of the shifts at the Cement still gave him time for carousing—his favourite past time—but it more clearly delineated his working week. If he missed a single day he would not get paid and might lose his job. And not getting paid a day's wages when you earn less than 20,000 roubles a month ($600) is a big deal.

'He's the kind of person that would have been happier under socialism,' says Nikita's father some time later. 'He needs that stronger sense of belonging to a factory to keep him disciplined. Otherwise he just ends up, well, you know how it is.' I knew this better than Nikita's father, a respected technician working for the municipality. I knew that the more money Nikita had, the more he spent. He is in debt to a number of confrères from the workshop and elsewhere and is unlikely to be able to pay now that he has returned to the Cement. However, in 2014, when Nikita had been working back at the Cement for three years, he seems more settled. His brush with informality is over, but unlike most of the other younger people in this book, he has found an accommodation with the more predictable rhythmicity of the traditional Soviet-era shift patterns of the Cement. While the production regime suffers from the encroachment of more and more elements of the monitoring, sweating and harassed modes of Russian labour, Nikita feels 'OK' there. 'He's more like the stereotype of the Soviet worker,' says Petr, not unkindly. 'He actually needs heavy physical work to feel good about himself. And he likes being part of a collective. That's really important to him, to belong to something, even if it is the bloody Cement!'

Petr has moved by now to one of the car plants in Kaluga. He has little positive to say of the Cement, whereas he speaks in warm tones about his time in the underground workshop. It turns out not everyone needs autonomy, or 'time to think at work', as Petr puts it. Nikita, more than any other informant also knows of some of the ideas that emerged from my fieldwork, having translated for himself my article where his movement from the formal to the informal economy and back again is described in detail (Morris 2012a). There I speculate as to how workers might permanently avoid the formal economy. In 2014, Nikita remarks proudly, 'Well, it looks like your idea was wrong after all. I didn't stay in informality. I came back.' For Nikita there is clearly significant value still to be garnered and defended in remaining in low-paid blue-collar employment. This value centres on being part of an enterprise and a blue-collar collective, particularly where numerous older workers are present. More than a propertizing of his class value in autonomy, what is important for him is recognition in the traditional context of blue-collar labour. There in the tougher but still less individualized and directed labour regime, he can develop the sense of worker 'competency' and 'prestige' that he craves. Previously, Nikita's masculinity had been marked as less 'dominant' than his peers. The shift to formal, dirty and dangerous work at the Cement is also seen by him as a way of obtaining a visible and symbolically manlier status. Nikita has gained confidence, despite his problems in fitting in at the underground shop. It was part of his coming of age as a worker, a process that for him could only be completed in a more traditional space of labour: the Cement.

The Needs and Values of 'Gypsy' Taxi Drivers: Carving Out an Informal Niche

While Nikita defies the 'thesis' of workers permanently moving away from formal to informal work, there are plenty of others who confirm it. A worker's 'feel' for opportunities of more autonomy and risk in the informal economy, and better income, is tempered by personality—as in the case of Nikita—or age and circumstances. The previous chapter

showed how despite repeatedly changing formal employment in Russian and foreign companies, Sasha's search for a 'niche' in blue-collar employment was doomed to failure. Ultimately he could not or would not 'adapt' to the modified demands of labour regimes.

The model of the neoliberal subject as self-regulating requires personal technologies of monitoring and evaluation in order to maximize human capital. 'Self-esteem' and shame are seen as technologies that assist governmentality and produce more malleable subjectivities (Cruickshank 1993). Being in work in a formal employment setting and drawing a regular wage is a formidable anchoring experience in a person's valuation of self; for younger people like Nikita it overcomes both the pecuniary attraction and the flexibility for the worker of informal labour. But judging the labouring self is problematic given the seismic collective-individualized shift in the structuring of risk from socialist to postsocialist contexts. A pre-market 'cosmology' (Verdery 1999) or 'mnemonic resources' of the socialist period (Straughn 2009; Olick 1999) are still accessible to individuals and households allowing negative comparison of the present with a mythic but meaningful past social contract with labour. These resources are most fully exploited by older people in their nostalgia for the mythic stability of the socialist past, and in a more complex, muted way by younger people like Sasha. Self-esteem for some workers increasingly comes to be associated with non-dependence on the derisory returns of formal work. 'Normative' blue-collar employment simultaneously requires subjection of the self to external and individualized regulative technologies that compare unfavourably with Soviet-era labour discipline. Even Saraev, the owner-director of Steelpipe whose embracing of neoliberal ideology appears total, also acknowledges that a large minority of workers inevitably reject the formal labour regime offered:

> Why do they quit and go to the informal economy? Because for them it is better to sit around for a week and do nothing and not be responsible for anything—that's already their mental setup [*mentalnost'*] […] Their needs are fundamentally different from our workers who stay and don't switch jobs all the time. Their needs are different, and he doesn't need it, he doesn't want to move forward: Firstly, he can't work here, can't change himself. It isn't age, it is mental set up which doesn't depend on age but rather hardens

> with age. To find something more or better one must change oneself, but does that person really want to? […] He doesn't want to work on himself, he wants to stay in his niche.

Saraev continues to stress the need for adaptation to new labour regimes, but fails to acknowledge fully the larger context of falling wages over time and the impact of the past 'compact' on this so-called flawed mentality. At the same time his narrative on the workers who 'churn' (switch jobs frequently) and turn to the informal economy also elides an acknowledgement of agency—however meagre—in the actions of the worker who 'churns', or, like Sasha, eventually exits the formal economy altogether. Similarly, for Sasha, the interpretation of 'adaptation' is increasingly associated with loss of self-esteem in 'putting up' with indignities of over-monitoring, over-intensity. What is most striking though is the similarity of his characterization of the 'niche' to Sasha's own interpretation of his position. While Saraev reduces this to blanket characterization of 'mentality', this is not too distant from an acknowledgement of how complex moral valuations of work, reward and recognition impact the real employment biographies of workers.

It is worth comparing Saraev's comments on 'mentality' to Sasha's reasoning and the words of others about their rejection of waged work in factories and their 'niche' in informality. At the beginning of the previous chapter Sasha talked about his 'comfort' in his 'habitat', referring to the psycho-social benefits of being a member of an identifiable consociality of workers in the town. These are people who know each other mainly through formal work and stay in contact with each other as 'confrères' even after moving on to other employment. Sasha refers to mutuality and acknowledgement by and of others in terms of the values of self-reliance. He also has inherent values of personhood based on 'authority' or 'prestige' and competence gained through a blue-collar biography. What is lacking from Saraev's characterization is the acknowledgement of agency as contributing to the active search for a niche, even in the most marginal of informal activities like taxi driving:

> Time isn't money—you can't earn it back. Taxi-driving: I can go at the pace I want. I can work a 24-hour shift, or do a long trip to Moscow and back

> and make what I used to earn in a week or more in the factory. At least if I am sitting on my arse in my car I am still my own person. Nobody in my circle looks down on me for not having a permanent job. It's like the curse from that Soviet comedy film: 'May you have to live on a salary alone'.

With his comment about the valuing of time over money, Sasha echoes very closely the words of Petr above. In some respects then, Saraev is right. Sasha's needs and values are different from Saraev's 'adaptable' workers. But isn't movement into the risky and marginal spaces of the informal economy also an adaptation? After all, Sasha's whole blue-collar biography suggests a person longing for a 'niche' in the manufacturing and extractive enterprises that remain in Izluchino. There are so many men like Sasha in the small town and all over Russia's industrial hinterland who once worked in the factories that still remain, yet whose working lives now take place in the informal economy beyond it. The route into taxi driving as an emblematic case of this movement deserves more attention.

As indicated in the previous chapter, gypsy-cab driving had been a stopgap for Sasha between factory jobs in the late 2000s. This was not unusual. Izluchino had gone from a town without any taxi services in 1999 to having no less than five taxi 'firms' by 2009. Having driven through the industrial zones on the main road into Izluchino, the most visible sign of work is not the cement mixing plant or linoleum rolling mill of the surviving post-Soviet enterprises, but the swarms of gypsy cabs, utility vehicles of self-employed (and unregistered) construction workers making their way to and from the mushrooming private developments, and the impoverished sellers of seasonal produce at the side of the road. At peak times there are around 20 taxis parked up in the dusty and potholed unpaved central 'square'. Their drivers are almost all relatively young men. The chances of winning more than a single local one-dollar-fare per hour are slim; most people travelling further afield use the hourly bus service to Kaluga. In any case each driver has to pay a hefty fee to the 'dispatchers' in order to work, not to mention buying their own radio set and 'checkers' roof-sign. The dispatchers are local women working informally in a back office who regulate the orders but also act as middlemen between the drivers and the unregistered business owner—who is often unknown even to them.

Then there is the chance that they will get beaten up or even murdered by their fare. Recently in Kaluga two drivers had been killed by drunks. Then there was the risk with taking higher value fares further afield. If you dropped someone off in Kaluga from Izluchino you earned 500 roubles ($10), a not inconsiderable sum—more than a day's wages in the factory. You might be tempted to try to pick someone up in Kaluga and make a local trip or take someone back to Izluchino, 45 minutes' drive away. But you are working illegally, you have no registration to work in Kaluga (in fact you have no official registration at all). But it isn't the road police you need fear (they'll just fine you your fare); the local firms in Kaluga are on the lookout for drivers like you. They might call each other on the radio, box you in, damage your car, and beat you up. So why would someone give up even poorly paid permanent work in manufacturing or processing plants for such an uncertain, indeed precarious existence?

In answer to this question, Sasha and his fellow drivers reiterate narratives around time flexibility, the possibility of combining taxi driving with other informal work, and leisure. They feel a certain superiority in being masters of their own fate, having their fingers on the pulse of the town, knowing when and where the cops are and how to avoid them if drinking and driving—a frequent 'necessity'. They are less forthcoming about the economic merits of this occupation. Sasha complains that he can't afford to repair his Lada Priora after it was stuck in a washed-out dirt road after a summer downpour. He'd been making a good living in the early summer months as the Kaluga and Moscow dacha dwellers had come out to stay in the villages near the town. While most had their own cars, there were still plenty of women whose husbands 'stranded' them and their children at country cottages while they returned in their cars to work in the towns and cities. That was another perk of the job, Sasha said, winking at me. Having witnessed taxi drivers' inappropriate insinuations to female passengers in the past, I decided not to pursue with Sasha this aspect of 'autonomy'.[6]

[6] Nonetheless, it is fair to say that taxi drivers inevitably were exposed to criminals and prostitutes in the town and in some respects this gave them an 'advantage' in finding other sources of income, whether legal or illegal. See, for example, the description of fuel theft and reselling in the town, which was facilitated by taxi drivers (Morris 2014).

Taxi driving for many men is seen as a way of maintaining their sense of working-class masculinity after the factory, particularly in terms of independence and living a lone, tough life on the streets. Much talk is structured around justifying their trade as somehow more masculine and noble than working as a tradesman, even informally. As paid employment continues to constitute the very visible anchor for normative versions of masculine identity in the town, the removal of this anchor for the taxi drivers sometimes leads to an overcompensation in macho behaviour and harassment of women passengers. The socialized construction of their own masculinity through blue-collar work is under threat (see Connell 1995; Morgan 1992).

In 2012 Sasha's brother also gave up work completely for taxi driving and as a less guarded informant, his talk about driving and other work serves as a kind of triangulation of encounters with Sasha. Vanya's valuing of informal cab driving is not dissimilar to Sasha's. For him and Sasha, the car is an extension of the garage space: mobile and flexible. One winter morning, Vanya suggests we meet for beers in his car parked on the street. Sasha comes along, as does Vlad, a friend who had worked at the Cement with him and now works the nightshift as a security guard in the bankrupt paper processing mill 20 kilometres from the district capital. Vlad is a young-looking pensioner. He is considering sinking his savings into a cheap Russian-built Renault—a typical taxi vehicle—and joining the pair in driving.

Somewhat to his brother's chagrin, Vanya is open about the less stable structuring of his income from driving:

> Yes, sometimes I might only earn a couple of hundred in a shift [$5]. That's local trips only and that only covers the petrol. You just eat potatoes and try not to think about it. But is it that different from working at the Cement, or in Kaluga at the Hardware wholesalers? [Vanya had worked there for a couple of years as a paint mixer and loader after quitting the security firm]. When I worked there I was being ordered around every day and my back ached even before I got there. You know I only got 18,000 roubles, even after I got made deputy manager of the paint department. Fuck that. In the taxi I am my own boss [*sam sebe khoziain*]… But on the nightshift when people are drunk then I can get a thousand a day, easy—more if you get on

> the right side of the dispatchers and get the out-of-town trips, to the district centre or Kaluga. It's probably the same money as the factory for half the hours. And I can easily fit in some moonlighting [*kalym*] jobs in between. You couldn't do that at the factory.

The freeing up of the 'dead' time between factory shifts when workers are often too tired to do anything other than drink is more important for the drivers than the money. By *kalym*, Vanya indicates any skilled or unskilled manual moonlighting work carried out through confrère contacts (Morris 2014). This may be directly connected to the skills gained in formal employment or unofficial jobs gained from existing clients of the firm. It may also be simply the result of being in the right place at the right time—driving taxis allows greater scope for maintaining an extended social network and greater time flexibility. Thus at the drop of a hat, some decorating, delivery work or even short-term filling in some factory setting can take place. When we meet in his car for another impromptu drinking session, Vanya supplies the expensive dark Czech beer to celebrate one such *kalym* job he's just completed. An acquaintance who works as an electrician fitting out cabling in the wooden houses of the Moscow dacha dwellers had needed a mate to help him with a big urgent job. They wired the house in six days, and while the electrician pocketed 25,000 roubles ($830), Vanya got a tidy 15,000 ($500). This is almost what a semi-skilled fabricator would get in one month at one of the manufacturing shops in Izluchino.

Vanya's example of *kalym* moonlighting is a fair description of the most common type of informal work: unregistered plying of skilled trades like plumbing and construction. These trades are difficult to maintain as a lucrative source of income while still in formal full-time employment. Mixing factory shift work with intensive and time-consuming informal jobs is effectively just a more lucrative version of 'portfolio' employment and income sources found among white-collar workers throughout the postsocialist world (Stenning et al. 2010: 90–101; Williams and Round 2007; Morris and Polese 2014). Eventually, many workers with high-paying trades in the informal sector leave the factories. Their skills are in high demand, but few see any reason to formalize their activities as the chances of getting caught by the tax police remain slim (Morris 2012a,

2014). Sasha and Vanya's choice of taxi driving reflects their less specialized blue-collar skills. Nonetheless, they still decided that driving was a better option than the factory.

Skilled Informal Tradesmen: Andrei's Story: My Own Keeper but Not an 'Entrepreneur'[7]

Andrei the welder described his experience of the voucherization of life in Izluchino earlier. The previous chapter explored how Andrei—in contrast to Sasha—still derived satisfaction and a sense of dignity in work at Steelpipe thanks to the recognition of his working personhood in terms of paternalistic production regimes. Both Andrei and Sasha were 'first-class' workers in terms of productivity and therefore recognized as '*peredoviki*' in their formal employment; nonetheless, Andrei was also significantly involved with informal work. His trajectory at first glance seems to represent a shift towards the more normative (and semi-formalized) end of the informality–formality continuum of work: informal own-account work or 'self-employment' related to a previous job or training. For example, another informant—Kiril—was able to transfer machine repair training, fixing conveyor belts at the poultry-processing plant to moonlighting in a different context but doing a qualitatively similar role as a '*slesar*' (general mechanic) on a local construction site where day-rates are paid cash-in-hand. Kiril, like Nikita the ex-electrician, had vocational training, but the formal sector provided inadequate remuneration, despite shortages of technical staff. Unlike Nikita, Kiril and Andrei were able to build a network of contacts and jobs directly related to their training but largely informally in parallel to their 'day' jobs at the poultry plant and Steelpipe, respectively. However, looking more closely at the choices Andrei has made and his interpretation of own-account informal work sets his understanding of labour at odds with an entrepreneurial self-employment that might be readily incorporated into the formal economy.

[7] For 'entrepreneur', Andrei uses the recent official term 'individual entrepreneur' ('*individual'nyi predprinimatel'*') which refers to the formal tax and regulations regime for the self-employed.

Andrei came to Izluchino in the early 1990s—even in the darkest days of Russian industry there was a shortage of workers at the cement works. He worked in a lime pit as a blaster's mate for a while—very dangerous work indeed, surrounded by huge moving machinery. For years after that he worked as a skilled welder and fitter in the small Steelpipe. While he had no complaints about the work there or Saraev the boss, he would always complain about wages incommensurate with the skills and efforts for which he and his brigade were praised. Gradually, Andrei built up a small weekend *kalym* business installing electric water heaters domestically in the town. Soon he found that he could earn as much on a Saturday as he did in the whole working week.

When I met him in 2009 he still worked at Steelpipe but was mulling over the offers he had from Moscow for better paid formal work and the idea of leaving employment completely for the *kalym* work. Later the quantity of *kalym* work became such that simultaneous engagement with both formal and informal spheres was becoming untenable. Almost every weekend Andrei was working very long hours, sometimes commuting to the neighbouring region (3–4 hours' drive each way) to install full domestic heating systems. When I met him again in 2010 he had lost weight, looked haggard and complained about not being able to spend time with his eldest son, who had recently returned from military service. Similar to the case of Nikita and Sasha, Andrei was at the centre of his own wide-ranging web of contacts that continually provided him with informal work, with payment, often substantial, by results. I travelled with him one Saturday in his battered car to meet his 'mini-brigade', hand-picked from the best workers at Steelpipe. The job, at a small town some 70 kilometres away, was to install the plumbing from scratch in a large country residence (a luxurious 'dacha' of approximately 200 square metres). This took four weekends working ten hours a day for a four-man team (not counting my own incompetent participation). As foreman, Andrei earned $2000 (in roubles-equivalent) for this job—nearly four times what he might hope to earn in a month in industry with bonuses.

Back at his tiny one-room flat, squeezed between children and pets, we reflected on what *kalym* meant in comparison to the 'day job'. Andrei had always valued the formal status he gained from being a valued worker at the pipe company—he regularly got the best bonuses as well as infor-

mal extra payments and other perks. He had recently needed a medical operation and Saraev had paid for this without any argument. At work he had '*avtoritet*': 'authority' status qua worker. However, it was increasingly clear that he could translate this into work outside employment primarily by involving others in his social network in bigger and bigger informal jobs. Indeed, his employment-grounded status conferred and facilitated the extension of this network 'vertically' to include important entrepreneurial contacts beyond Andrei's blue-collar circle. Thus he became one of the faces on the Board of Honour for a while outside the town hall (Photo 3.1). Ironically, it was not long after that Andrei decided to quit his formal job. A few months later he returned from Moscow where he had been working in construction as a plumber informally. He now had even more contacts further afield.

His job in Moscow had changed him and his attitudes to informal work, somewhat. While he was not going to return to Steelpipe, he did not want to work again with strangers 'slumming it' in temporary accommodation in Moscow. Nor did he have any intention of officially registering as an 'individual entrepreneur', effectively becoming legally self-employed. Why not? I ask him. It is not a question of red tape—since 2011 it has become even easier to register as self-employed in Russia and taxation has

Photo 3.1 Board of Honour in Izluchino (Image courtesy of author)

been simplified; on the other hand there are no bureaucratic or tax incentives pertaining to this status either. In addition a minimum social protection payment must be made which might be onerous to a trader with a small turnover. The answer lies more in a 'moral economy' view of labour, payment and politics more generally. Once the decision had been made to leave waged work, Andrei felt that he now owned his labour completely—why should the corrupt state with its blurring of politics and business get any of his income? Paying into the social fund? But they had closed the out-patients service at the local hospital and when he had needed his operation he had to pay: 'over or under the table'. What about legal status? 'What difference would that make,' Andrei scratches his head, grinning. Despite the extension of his social network upwards and outwards, jobs and clients can still be largely 'vouchsafed' through existing contacts; trust-based versus contract-based 'transaction costs' are hardly differentiated. 'If someone doesn't want to pay, they won't pay.' Additionally, informal plumbers like Andrei are not in the same disadvantaged position of more visible 'tradesmen' encountered—like mini-bus drivers or shop owners—where avoidance of registration is not an option. If anything, they resemble the medieval craftsmen whose reputation spreads by word of mouth. Except there is no proto-guild in newly 'feudal' Russia.

While more developed as a viable form of household reproduction, it can be seen that Andrei's arguments for informality, like those of the other informants, coalesce around a fuzzily articulated, but persistent sense of dignity and autonomy in labour. Finally, Andrei's case 'for' informality coincides in terms of mutuality with that of other informants too. His own-account work allows him continuing professional access to significant peers: his mini-brigade, without legal ties which 'aren't necessary…it wouldn't somehow be right to sign a contract with them'. Informal economic activity is closely correlated with 'informal' sociality and solidarity within blue-collar groups. Andrei talks about his relationship with workers with whom he continues to labour after formal employment, and with others: 'Mutual aid is still important. It is pleasant that people check up on you, even if they stayed at the factory.'[8] For

[8] 'Mutual support' translates '*vzaimovyruchka*', which has more of a concrete meaning than the more standard '*vzaimopomoshch*', meaning 'mutual aid'.

Andrei, *kalym* somehow does not fit with the term 'entrepreneur'. To call himself that would mean giving up something that makes him both a 'worker' and an *avtoritet*, and this would go against the grain of blue-collar sociality.

Narratives of Self-resourcing: Emblematic Working-Class Persons Come 'Out of the Shadows'

While the trajectories of Andrei, Nikita and Sasha to and from the Cement works to Steelpipe and into and back out of the informal economy are all different, each in their own way has a common thread that returns back to shared understandings of how to make their lifeworlds habitable. Each of these workers—even dour Sasha—can be seen to develop a self-reliant sense of personhood in terms of hands-on practical skills and competence, some of which are developed through the course of experience on production lines that can be turned over to improving life outside work: building work, welding, plumbing, even driving. At the same time this resourcefulness is experienced and built upon only by virtue of recognition of and reliance on significant others—the confrères from the factory, even after the factory. In Sasha's case, he is a trusted taxi driver only because he has 'authority' and propriety as a former worker that is recognized by peers and 'customers' alike. I often hear of drivers being requested by name through dispatchers. His blue-collaredness shows through, even in the marginal and rather different work of driving. The emblem of blue-collar respect from others is a resource in maintaining economic and social capital in the town. In other words, in all his work and other activities, the compressed social geography of the town is embedded in a blue-collar personhood that is less individualized, shared and maintained through continual rearticulation of key practices. These practices may seem entrepreneurial, but are more than the sum of economic necessity: 'just coping', or even 'getting ahead'. Even in Andrei's case as a successful tradesman, the economic value of reasoning in his informal work needs to be tempered by moral values and needs,

and social connections of mutuality. As he remarks, when learning that untaxed work is sometimes referred to as part of the 'shadow' economy, 'I am not in the shadows. Everyone can see what I do and that I am good at it. They value that.' For Andrei, the value he derives from work informally is clear and visible to all. To be in the 'shadow' for him would be in engaging in work that was unrecognized within a social milieu of like-minded others, competent to judge his expertise.

Andrei and a number of others in Sasha's circle, shared his DIY decorative practices of making fish tanks for the decoration of the home. This is another indicator of being part of a meta-occupational sociality. While workers move around between production facilities and in and out of informality, they retain membership of a wide sociality of 'blue-collars'. DIY is a case of the (sometimes competitive) display of resourceful, self-reliant working-class personhood (Morris 2012b). However, this resourcefulness is as much about gaining respect and recognition by significant others as it is about economic rationality or a rejection of consumerism. The shared and competitive DIY practices that avoid the use of bought materials signal how embedded the resourceful blue-collar person is in his social network of peers. He cannot do without them. He needs their help in making ever more intricate decorative materials. There are two elements to this: access to an extended network to get materials (acrylic glass for the fish tanks, lead metal for the belt weights), but also a 'helping hand' or the learning of new techniques. He also needs their recognition of his efforts to affirm his value as a competent person. For Sasha in particular, having left production for the taxi, DIY practices that looked like self-provisioning and consumption substitution should be understood as much as a reaffirmation of a resourceful working-class personhood more eagerly seeking approval since having renounced the life of the factory.

It is worth revisiting Sasha's initial talk about being a worker and his DIY activities. Sitting in his gypsy cab Lada Priora on a snow-swept street, Sasha talks 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. 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.

Sasha looks across to Vlad, struggling with my seemingly off-the-point questioning.

> Think of it this way. Vlad works the night shift at the paper mill, but he doesn't feel bad, because he knows he can learn from others there all the skills he needs to do their jobs. He sees how start there and they can't do anything. Gradually they get more confidence to try something else. If I can learn to 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 me]. Why buy something when you can do it yourself, or find out how to do it from books, the internet? There's always someone around to help you out.

The final comment is a clear reference to Andrei himself. It was Andrei who had started the craze of fish tank making. Now Sasha, his brother and other families were intent on creating their own fragile biospheres. Sasha indicated the importance of the network of 'skilled hands'. 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 a social network that extends out beyond friends. Someone has access to the right kind of gravel for the substrate. Someone else is a breeder of fish, someone else has snails that clean the tank. Someone knows just how much medically activated charcoal (bought at the pharmacy) to put in the filter mechanism. Someone else knows how to rig up a water-proof heater. Sasha is introduced to one or another 'helper' through Andrei as a trusted confrère 'worthy' enough to get access to this resource. Isn't this how the informal economy works? Sasha gains not only knowledge and access to materials but also social recognition as a resourceful and competent person. The pleasure of competence within a sociality makes precarious livelihoods habitable.

A 'normal' person, he explains, is someone who has to do manual work from a young age. The fishkeeping is 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 is 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 autonomist values cherished in production are increasingly no longer available for Sasha in formal work. He therefore seeks them even more in DIY. Spending hours on his fish tank, 'doing it for himself' becomes a 'cognitive resource' (Ries 2009). A habitable space as a good labouring subject is increasingly closed off to him. However, even 'after' work the same valuing of 'doing stuff'—that is, manual work for its own sake—is evident. At the same time, performances—of self-sufficiency, resourcefulness—are those of the 'person' and not the 'individual', because more often than not these performances emerge as socially embedded categories pertaining to in-group staging of the value of practices for their own sake. This is evidenced by the importance of the 'hobby' of DIY fishkeeping being acknowledged by others.

Domestic aquariums were just the most striking example of DIY decorative practices. Andrei, with his access to Steelpipe, made shelving and decorative items from steel, going to a particular effort to create brushed patterned effects even for utilitarian items like shoe-horns:

> 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 *priiateli* [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 worker prestige: '*avtoritet*'. This 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 such DIY and other practices such as the car repair in garages. This is not an economy of solidarity

in terms of recognition of mutual economic need. Respect as authority 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; the fact that the ties are affirmed through practices rather than actual occupational affiliation or status through work, indicates that the practices are more for their own sake than any economic reasoning for self-production. Ironically, the most economically 'pointless' practice of making fish tanks was one of the most important for Sasha in 'propertizing' his working-class personhood. Just as the fish tank is a biosphere sustaining fragile life in a hostile environment, the DIY practice is a sphere that sustains Sasha's troubled sense of making his lifeworld habitable. At the same time, the willingness to invest much time and effort in these projects 'for their own sake' helps us understand the set of ethical dispositions at the heart of the working-class person that lead to a rejection on Andrei's part of the narrative of entrepreneurialism, and on Sasha's part the rejection of the demands to remould himself to the new norms of production.

While Saraev and other business owners see lack of adaptation and workers stuck in a 'Soviet-era' niche, their actual practices bear witness to initiative, creativity. Perhaps too there is the development of an 'entrepreneurial' self, but which is resolutely aimed towards the private and social sphere, not the work place. Finding no outlet for 'voice' in production relations, workers use DIY strategies gained from work skills to better and make more comfortable their home environment and leisure. These practices are as much 'for their own sake' as for domestic decoration. The ingenuity and inventiveness of the Russian worker that is no longer 'needed' in formal work is given full expression (Temnitskii 2011). From self-built fish tanks, to elaborately crafted found objects and hybrid vehicles, DIY practices illustrate the imbrication of working-class sociality (one needs a 'helping hand'), status and respect (production is a mark of honour), and the work and non-work spheres of action and agency. At the same time the initiative and (self-)resourcefulness that mark these practices give a hint at an alternative to a Hirschmanesque view of the lack of choices facing the working poor, where there seems to be no 'exit',

just as they lack 'voice' and 'loyalty' strategies.[9] Skills that emerge from blue-collar work—but more importantly, 'confrère' relationships based on trust (a quality sorely lacking in a more generalized sense)—enable some to carve out a habitable niche in a hybrid zone of labour that combines formal employment and informal work. Whether this indicates the wholesale victory of the neoliberal project where even the most marginalized are forced to 'work on themselves' and become the most ruthless self-exploiters of their own labour remains to be seen. What if all the work on the 'self' that Sasha undertakes is for his aquarium or his river fishing?

Central to this chapter is the question of how marginalized people (in the economic sense) remake a working or blue-collar personhood that revolves around self-sufficiency and self-resourcing, a certain occupational or meta-occupational status, but also mutuality of that resourcing. Without the last aspect, the atomization and involution theses of the post-socialist working class would be confirmed (White 2004; Burawoy et al. 2000). That argument usually rests on evidence about the lack of political organization among impoverished workers (Clarke 1995; Crowley 2004; cf. Woolfson and Beck 2004), but my approach is holistic. Workers are 'marginalized' economically, politically and socially in today's Russia, but that does not mean that they lack any kind of recourse to tactics and strategies that both compensate morally and in terms of mutual valuation of the self, if not materially, to improve their lot. But even the 'tactics' approach of 'household survival'[10] is to take a rational-materialist perspective that becomes tautological (Stenning et al. 2010). Thus the focus in this chapter is on the making of habitability through a combination of refashioned class identity which is only meaningful through the recognition by others and in everyday—often mundane but significant practices—such as non-instrumental or economically meaningful DIY, hobbies, leisure and sociality.

[9] Hirschman's (1971) hermeneutic framework on responses to insecurity in organizations faced by crisis has been used elsewhere to analyse choices facing ordinary people after socialism, particularly as an apt metaphor for the 'non'-choices that workers faced during the 1990s transition. See, for example, Ellerman 1998; Bohle and Greskovits 2007; Szabo 2009; Sippola 2014. My use of the framework draws on Crowley's (2004) proposition of 'exit' into the informal economy for workers who have no 'voice' which in turn draws on Greskovits (1998).

[10] See the debate between Burawoy et al. (2000) and Clarke (1999).

Again, it is useful to contextualize the practices in this chapter in terms of 'lay normativity': a way of characterizing the ethical dispositions generated by ordinary people as they encounter the world and undertake action within it. The use of the informal economy and DIY show how workers 'in their mostly subconscious and fallible, but mostly practically-adequate ways, […] *value* the world' (Sayer 2005: 34), not in terms of economic rationality and utility, but for the sake of the practice in itself and in the way that as participants they embed themselves more firmly within a sociality. Without this embedding, they find themselves without the social resources needed for economic survival, but more importantly, without a sense of shared values that make life worth living—that make it habitable.

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