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Unhomely Presents: Trauma and Values of Endurance Among Older People

We are a rubbish dump for Moscow now, in a literal as well as figurative sense, I mean. On the site of the clay mining pit they've started trucking in all kinds of muck [*drian*]. We're worried about how it will affect the water supply. In Soviet times under Rodomirov there was one authority [*vlast*] for everything—the housing, the plant, the roads, and this couldn't have happened.

At the same time half the town works in Moscow on the construction sites. It's such a shame. Who wants to live in a railway carriage behind barbed wire for six months at a time and never see your family? No, I will stay at the metal fabricating workshop for my measly 16,000 a month.¹ This is my town, my home is here. What can you do? We have enough [*nam khvataet*]. Everything is orientated to protect the big city people, but it wasn't always like that.

A few of the ethnographic materials for this chapter appear in Morris (2014).

¹ 16,000 roubles was equivalent to around 500USD in late 2009 when this interview took place. At the time this sum was close to the mean wage for industrial blue-collar work, but low considering Lyova's age and skills. Previously he had been paid around 14,000 roubles by the local authority as a housing maintenance welder.

Thus begins my first talk about life in the town with Lyova, a skilled welder in his late forties. I lived with Uncle Lyova and his wife Auntie Masha in Izluchino in 2009. I had known him for ten years prior to that as a dacha neighbour in a picturesque village where his wife's family has owned land for generations. A thoughtful, solicitous, if rather morose, man, as the time of our acquaintance went on, Lyova became increasingly bitter and was given to fits of temper. His drinking increased in frequency and volume, and talk with him appeared to provoke, or at least coincide with, the surfacing in his personality of deep-seated anger, pain and frustration at his lot in life. Nonetheless, a strong emotional bond of tenderness and kindness remained between us. He was 'Uncle' Lyova to me from the beginning and remains so.

This chapter looks at Lyova's lifeworld as a worker from the birth cohort c.1950–1960, that is, workers coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s and thus working for a significant and formative period in Soviet industrial enterprises. In particular I focus on Lyova's understanding of his social and economic positioning as a working-class person, longitudinally. His life and those of his extended family are the main source of ethnographic material in this chapter, although later I compare his situation and attitudes to rather different informants of the same generation: Galina and her husband Ivan. First, it explores the way people construct the past and present of their labouring lives around a particular understanding of the present 'as another country' and the past as a mourned for object of idealization—perhaps not 'better' in every way, but understood as a place of value in labour and for labour. This is in contrast to the present, marked by ongoing contingency and, for older workers, a sense of trauma. Social trauma as inflecting working-class personhood is explored through the 'corrosive and destructive' effects of memory (Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012, in Strangleman and Rhodes 2014: 418). However, the (idealized) past is also an object of nostalgia. The present is marked by the loss of the yearned for 'socialist-era social contract'. In some respects this expands on the topic of the social wage, but provides a more ethnographically substantive portrait of how the present socio-economic positioning of blue-collar workers is keenly felt in terms of loss, trauma, shame and betrayal. In addition I look at how a remembering of the past in a particularistic (and overly nostalgic) way, as a time of plenty, solidarity, worth

and respect for working people as a class is accessed by people to construct their positioning in the present as ‘unhomely’ and out of step. This part of the chapter aims to develop arguments about nostalgia made by other scholars recently in the growing literature on postsocialist memory (Ashwin 1999; Dunn 2004; Kideckel 2008; Todorova and Gille 2010). Similarly it contributes to scholarship on household involution (Burawoy et al. 2000; Stenning et al. 2010; White 2004) since social reforms monetized the formerly in-kind social benefits after 2007; these benefits had remained an important source of support for all kinds of Russians, not just the low-paid workers since 1991 (Cook 2007).

Second, over and above an overly simplistic ‘nostalgia’ thesis about older workers’ interpretations of the past through the present and vice versa, this chapter brings to the fore a more gendered and class-based interpretation by people in Izluchino of the meaning of the present in the context of the past. Broadly it seeks to answer the question, what are older workers now? If they felt ‘valued’ and found value in a working-class sense of personhood in socialism—who are they in the present? In the main case explored here, the ‘mental space’ of being a respected and materially comfortable worker cannot be voluntarily vacated by Lyova. Consequently, his search for habitability in the present is constantly thwarted—all that he encounters, particularly in terms of his experiencing change in the built environment of the town, the contraction of industrial zones and employment, as well as social infrastructure, is a *terra dolorosa*—a land(scape) of grief. Lyova seeks solace in alcohol use but even this seemingly self-destructive activity (yet common Russian response) needs to be understood as a meaningful way of dealing with trauma and a valid search for habitability for the ‘unneeded’ labouring self in the present, however unpalatable that may appear from the outside.

The third section of this chapter shows how, at work as in domestic life, Lyova remains in the mental space of the Soviet enterprise–worker relationship: simultaneously and contradictorily paternalistic and non-managerialist. Little of either enterprise characteristic remains in the present; Lyova seemingly has no habitable place to seek out in labour or its spaces. Nonetheless, feelings of betrayal are focused on the perception of state withdrawal, providing a (geo)political layering to such interpretations. As the enterprise was the only meaningful representative

of state power in the town (Bolotova 2012: 657), the loss of the social protection of the factory is felt effectively as the withdrawal of the state. This is in contrast to the experience of work and labour spaces construction for others in this book, which make for an equally complex, if more habitable site of blue-collar sociality and identity. This part of the chapter can be read as a contribution to scholarship on post-Fordist labour relations, theories of reflexivity and (self-)governmentality, more generally. Lyova 'fails' to 'adapt' as a worker now labouring under a more neoliberal regime: more demanding than the socialist-era one, at least in terms of managerialist accounting for work-time and actual output. This section forms the first part of an ongoing discussion of the postsocialist labouring self and the degree to which the personhood of workers is malleable according to the purported aims of the neoliberal enterprise. Lyova's case needs to be read against the analyses of others' responses to the postsocialist enterprises' calls for the remaking of the Russian working-class subject. A glimmer of hope is offered at the end of this chapter as Lyova explores ways of overcoming the trauma of the present other than through alcohol.

Imagined Pasts in the Present: Cacti and Sausages

Sometime after my conversation with Lyova about the new waste dumping site I am sitting in the 'break room' of a local company Steelpipe (a sister company to Galina's Polymer) which employs just over 100 workers. It is rather daunting to be confronted by Uncle Lyova's brigade of welders and workmen—in the middle of their 12-hour shift—grimy, chain-smoking and eyeing me with a mixture of curiosity and caution. In reality this recreation room is just a disused windowless storage chamber with discarded pressure vessels, bits and pieces of water pumps on dusty shelves and incongruously a bucket of what look like narcissus bulbs on the floor. 'What are these?' I ask. 'The girls plant them out in the yard in spring and then dig them up in the autumn. They love their garden work but you won't see them digging potatoes on the plots. You don't tend your plots anymore, do you, Masha?' Lyova addresses a woman in her

fifties in clean blue overalls, indicating that she is a technician and not a production operative.

Masha doesn't directly answer Lyova. The female technicians have, according to Masha, tended the cacti on the windowsills of the workshop as well as planted them out in the yard since the 1980s.² They are an obvious material link with the otherwise disconnected past of the factory, when it employed thousands and was a well-oiled cog in the Ministry of Defence supply chain. The decorative plants are from the 'time before', Lyova says³; my attention to them prompts a discussion of their survival despite the temporary closure, in the early 1990s, of the building in which the technicians worked and in which the break room is located. When this particular building was abandoned (and left unheated) the technicians saved the cacti by taking them home. When the production shop reorganized as a disaggregated concern, the cacti and technicians returned. The 'time before' takes on a demarcating role of enormous, if often unspoken, significance for many people whose formative work experiences occurred before 1991.

The diachronic understanding of changes in work, living conditions and satisfaction with life in general are striking in Lyova and many others of his generation. The conversation turns quite naturally to the imminent increases in utility costs—particularly the district heating charges. In the 'time before' there were no sudden spikes in the price of gas, or interrupted electricity supply: 'No grannies should freeze in their flat because of conflicts between the settlement bosses and the suppliers', adds Lyova's *neparnik* (workmate) Grigory.⁴ He continues: 'During the Soviet period, my mum could have carried on in her flat without my help, but now me

² Cacti and ficuses have always been a common decorative and personalizing feature of homes and workplaces in Russia. For an insight into the ideologically charged nature of domestic decoration, including frequent discussion of ficuses as house plants, see Boym (1994).

³ Literally, '*pri sovetskoi vlasti*' or '*kak ran'she*'—respectively, 'during [the period of] Soviet government/power', and 'as [things were] before'.

⁴ There were a number of incidences of blackouts in the settlement. This in turn put out of action the district heating station that supplies all the hot water to the settlement. The blackouts were due to disputes between the electricity supply company and one factory that had a large outstanding debt to it. As there was a single shared transmission supply to the town and the factory, the electricity suppliers cut off the whole town in a blatant attempt to blackmail the whole community. This was in November when the average temperature was around freezing.

and the wife have decided enough is enough—they've not maintained the temperature this winter in her block and so we've brought her to our place where it is warmer.' The *slesar*' (general workman) chimes in: 'Do you realize that we pay a quarter of our take-home in utility bills!' While, revealingly, no one can quite remember what subsidy pertained to the late Soviet period, a similar comparison to the 'time before' is made through observations about the rise in the general cost of living.

Lyova frowns at this last comment. We have already trawled over and over this subject in private conversations. The inflation in food and utilities has led him to angrily call himself and his class 'white negroes'. Without a sufficient disposable income, his household is slowly turning in on itself and cutting kin and friendship ties. His cupboards are bare, and the mention of living costs needles him in this semi-public setting. Household 'involution', as Anne White (2004: 139) described this kind of social and economic atrophication of poorer urban families in the 1990s, continues in the present, despite the economic renaissance of the region as a whole.⁵ Why is Lyova so poor that he can't afford basic foodstuffs like milk and sausage? Because the chronically indebted Polymer workshop can't afford to pay even the district average for 'semi-skilled' manual work.⁶ As the nominal inheritor enterprise of the Soviet-era plant, Polymer sets the standard blue-collar wage for the town, and the cement works and Lyova's Steelpipe pay little more. High inflation, especially in food stuffs (around 10%), impoverishes him year on year.⁷

Attention turns to the communal minifridge adorned with padlock. There are a number of these stacked in one corner, each belonging to a brigade. I don't need to ask what's inside. The fourth brigade member, the most junior worker, Kolya (35-years old), fishes a key out of his grimy blue overalls and dishes out a quick shot of vodka 'as a welcoming' from the otherwise empty fridge. Fortunately, Grigory's wife has prepared a

⁵ See also Burawoy et al. (2000), on involution in general and the marginalization of working-class men. What White and I describe in detail, Burawoy characterizes as 'defensive strategies of minimalist survival' (46–7).

⁶ 'Semi-skilled' is the official designation of this work, but in reality any production requires long-standing familiarity with techniques and machines.

⁷ As recently as 2005, 80% of respondents to one survey reported decreasing incomes during the last 10 years (Melin 2005).

full packed lunch for all the brigade members (a brigade tradition), and there is more than enough to wash down the vodka. I comment, perhaps unwisely and too pointedly, given my acquaintance with Lyova, on the lack of fresh and processed meat in the many home fridges I have seen in the settlement.

I mention too the recent erasure of the last sign of the former factory canteen in the middle of town, which I had personally witnessed a few weeks earlier. Its rather attractive metal frontispiece—featuring tea-drinking figures and a samovar—was pulled down for scrap; the building is now occupied by a shop selling Chinese imports of, among other goods, fridge-freezers (Photo 5.1). Perhaps I am being deliberately provocative, knowing that the subject of provisioning, and ‘meat’ in particular, is a hobby horse for Lyova and Grigory, but I am interested in the others’ reactions.⁸ Sure enough, the team take my cue: they all know about the canteen sign—and this time all remember well the price of ice-cream and pies (*pirozhki*) in the 1980s. First, though, Grigory connects the removal of the sign to another hobby horse of Lyova’s, the recent (2007) semi-privatization of the housing and utility services company (known universally by its Soviet-era acronym ‘*ZheKeKha*’) in the town and its colourful director.⁹

‘Why did they take the sign down, for fuck’s sake? It’s got to be Davidovich and the *ZheKeKha*. That little shit will do anything for a quick buck. He’d sell his grandmother. He was just a vocational school instructor before and now he thinks he runs the place.’ Lyova is quick to change the subject: ‘Let’s not play that favourite game of the Russians: “Whose fault is it?”... It’s better to talk about the food. What pastries!

⁸ Processed meat products in general provide a strong mnemonic link between the past and present, sometimes in highly politicized form for inhabitants of the former Soviet Union—see Klumbyte (2010).

⁹ The ongoing turf wars over the lucrative housing management company between local elites and the district prosecutor and security services formed the political backdrop to much of the fieldwork for this book. While there is no chapter solely devoted to this issue, I make some reference to it throughout the book as it had a major impact on ordinary people, mainly because of blackouts to the electricity and heating supply and the massive increase in charges for heating and water. At the end of fieldwork a number of parties from the district prosecutor to the FSB were involved in the case; the former director of the management company was arrested on clearly politically motivated charges. Because of the risk to informants I have not made this topic a major focus of this book and it is another reason why I have obscured some informants’ identities, used composites, and changed aspects of the town itself. Many issues remain politically sensitive and the identification of individuals may have unintended consequences.



Photo 5.1 Frontispiece sign from Soviet-era canteen taken down for scrap metal (Image courtesy of author)

What meat pies! Meat is so important when you're out in the yard working all day,' says Lyova in a line of reasoning that is very familiar. Lyova repeats something I've heard before: 'We used to have cured sausage coming out of our ears.' Previously, Lyova's wife Masha had embarrassedly shown me the near empty fridge at home. It is used for a few self-provisioned preserves in jars, but rarely sees any meat, vegetables or dairy—processed or otherwise. Food scarcity, while not the issue it was for some periods in the 1990s, is now felt in terms of unaffordable 'luxuries', which includes fresh and processed meats, milk and other 'expensive' foods (cf. Caldwell 2004, 2009). For dinner Lyova usually gets a large frying pan of pasta and sprats that lasts him a couple of days.¹⁰

¹⁰ This observation is not incompatible with that of Dimke and Koriukhina (2012) on the lack of meal planning and daily shopping in working-class monotown families. While Lyova and Masha

Through the conversation about fridges, meat emerges as a key trope for the working poor in Russian today when it comes to evaluating the present in relation to the past.¹¹ Lyova associates the socialist period with a time of plenty. He and others develop this understanding in numerous ways. Meat in the socialist period in the town was ‘so plentiful you couldn’t fit it in the fridge’, he reports. He acknowledges that this was due to the relatively privileged position of the town—as a single-enterprise settlement run for the benefit of the Ministry of Defence it had access to networks of supply that many in both rural and larger urban areas did not.

I mention to Lyova the meat shortages in Moscow in the late Brezhnev period (Cook 1993: 231). Rather than rolling back his claims, my observation prompts him to extend his reasoning from material well-being, this time in terms of the values and state–society relations of socialism, uniting ‘meat’ and ‘just needs’ in a classed manner. Meat was plentiful in Izluchino because the balance of rewards for citizens in the USSR was not skewed towards the undeserving metropolitan middle class, states Lyova, in a development of the opening assertion of this chapter: that the post-socialist political economy only serves well-off Muscovites. He develops a familiar line I hear from many workers and their families, regardless of age: while not using the term ‘social contract’, the plentiful availability of basic foodstuffs to what would otherwise have been thought of as unequivocally ‘working poor’ in the Soviet period becomes incorporated into a lay moral reasoning about the more and less deserving under socialism. The workers produced most of the wealth of the state, often in terrible conditions, and thus having plenty of meat was a part of their compensation—an indicator of their deserving nature.

Cheap and plentiful food links to the working-class urge to display hospitality as a marker of respectability and prestige, and both quantity and quality of food continue to be linked strongly (Cassidy 2011). This also encompasses lay understandings of moral worth (Polese 2009). The memory of meat is something almost tangibly painful for Lyova—a large man with big appetites. We regularly travel to his very modest two-room coun-

make one big cooked meal last, their general household approach to food is the avoidance of buying more than a day or two’s provisions in advance.

¹¹ For a similar finding in Romania, see Kideckel (2008).

try cottage to barbeque chicken wings (but in time even these disappear) and eat his daughter-in-law's home-prepared pickled herring. However, this quite generous 'frugal' spread provokes anxiety in my host. Chicken is a sign of poverty to him; the home-prepared herring a sign of straightened circumstances. 'This is all shit! (*govno*)' exclaims Lyova one day at the cottage plot when he's had some beer (the cheapest possible brand—*My Kaluga*) as a warm up before vodka. 'Oh, if you could see the meat we used to have!' His son Sasha is more circumspect: 'Well, it was all processed crap anyway, no different from now'. Sasha is in his mid-thirties in 2009, and the locus of his reminiscences is different; beer is his interest. While only a teenager in the late 1980s, he keenly recalls the lack of access to beer and today's wide range of beer brands. Ribbing his father, he retorts:

What's the point of meat if you've no beer. I can hardly imagine how you got to work without it. Kaluga has the best beer in the region now—so many choices, and better than that crap you are drinking.... Ah, I suppose you just necked (*zbral*) the vodka instead in those days, much like now.

An inebriated debate ensues as the mosquitos come out to bite and the sun goes down. The father avoids the issue of the 'beer deficit', and the son continues to tease him. Sasha, who was around 20 in 1992, feels keenly the relative intergenerational inequality brought about by the loss of good jobs when he returned from the army after serving during the Abkhazian conflict. His linking of present circumstances to the past lies not in food, but largely in the perception of the dignity of labour under socialism and the social wage that is an integral aspect of that dignity. His personal experience of the *loss* of social wage (no kindergarten place for his children, no accommodation linked to a job) is filtered through his kinship relations and 'family memory'.

Values of Class and Working-Class Subjects that Lack Value

After Verdery (1999), Lyova's understanding of the working-class past can be thought of as a particular socialist-era 'cosmology'. Thinking of meaning-making systems as cosmologies brings out their non-rational,

moral roots, even as they remain linked to political legitimization. For Lyova, this complex and contradictory set of beliefs emerges more or less clearly in these talks at work and leisure. As the previous section shows, food and plenty serve as a visible marker of the Soviet era's valuing of the working class, although Lyova is well aware that Izluchino was particularly lucky to be part of the privileged and closed circuit of supply within the defence industries. But food is a proxy for the social wage more generally, as shown by how Lyova valued the visible spaces like the canteen devoted to the enterprises support of the money wage.

A large proportion of talk with Lyova, regardless of topic, quickly reverts to discussion of communal living and food costs in the present. Watching the evening news together in his flat, the latest grandstanding infrastructure initiative by the government is scoffed at and comparison made between the amount spent on pet state projects and that on social benefits and pensions. Watching the news always makes Lyova angry and we go to have dinner in the kitchen:

Medvedev [Russian President in 2009] doesn't care about people like us. Why can't he just make communal charges free like in Turkmenistan? [as in one news report]. Every day I work for the people, I do good [*dobro*] just like before, like always. I am of use every day to people, but I can't get a social subsidy on my gas bill, even with the wife having a disability pension... For all this talk of 'high-tech' he [Medvedev] can't hide the fact that things were better when this was an industrialized country. You can't replace that with Japanese robots. That's just pompous talk [*pompeza*].

Auntie Masha is somewhat older than Lyova and works for the local authority as a bookkeeper located in the House of Culture or *DeKa*, as it is universally known. She also draws a disability pension. Lyova also previously worked for the local authority as a municipal welder maintaining the central heating network in the town. According to his logic, this should have resulted in a 'social discount', the '*l'gota*' on his water and heating bills. This reflects his understanding of the paternalistic duty of the enterprise and its social wage. For nearly a decade a number of co-workers had argued for this *l'gota* and had written letters and complained to higher authorities to no avail. Since the monetization of ben-

efits reform, any chance of this benefit had disappeared, but as is so often the case, many workers held out a hope that some informal compromise agreement could be reached.

Recently Lyova left the local authority employment and went to work for the Steelpipe factory. However, in many conversations with him he still focusses on his feelings of injustice about his previous employment. The local municipal authority becomes a focal point for a number of coinciding concerns: the exploitation of the town for short-term gain by outsiders and non-workers (the rubbish dump, the management of the housing company); general state withdrawal in terms of things like low pensions and the monetization of benefits, a process that shifted 'responsibility for well-being onto individuals' (Wengle and Rasell 2008: 739; see also Henry 2009); even the global repositioning of Russia as a petro-economy, neglecting industrial production, which, according to Lyova, would provide 'better' and more jobs. In addition, topical concerns are the state of the roads and infrastructure in the town (complaints about which reinforce the sense of loss felt for the enterprise social wages that compensated for social-era minimal social protection more generally); the real fall in disposable income partly due to below-inflation increases in pay, but most keenly felt because of the very sharply increasing utility payments since 2007 when a new management company took control of the town's housing infrastructure.

As is often the case with Lyova, a day off spent with him means hard drinking and by mid-afternoon he has fallen asleep sitting up in the kitchen. To warn Auntie Masha I visit her at her work place in the local authority at the *DeKa*. She has been thinking of selling the flat to move to a cheaper place away from town. This would release a significant sum of money. 'The drinking is just the stress of all the talk about moving flat,' she begins, once her colleague has left us alone. 'Lyova loves his flat; it's part of who he is. He won't sell it and move.' Later Lyova talks about his pride in getting the flat as a young worker from the enterprise—it is clearly connected to part of his being as a worker even now and he is loath to abandon this small symbol of former worth-in-labour. Masha and I talk about how relieved she is that they didn't move away to her deceased relative's flat in the district centre, a town 20 kilometres away.

They had had the option of selling their flat here and moving to a cheaper place. Property prices are significantly higher in Izluchino, partly because of the increasing number of foreign employers, limited housing and the baby boom since the introduction of generous maternal grants given in 2007.¹² Another reason is the perceived prestige of its location on the river. At the same time Izluchino's urban settlement status means that it has lower heating charges than other towns, but still it is difficult for many to make ends meet.

For Masha, meat is not the issue, but milk. Once she says with a look of shame, 'Oh, I'd forgotten you'd want milk for coffee. We stopped buying it so long ago, I've got used to not having it in the house.' As someone who grew up in a village with a family small holding, Masha was used to fresh (raw) milk every day. This reminder of her frugal shopping habits and self-denial in the present upsets her, just as similar comparisons of the present with the past make her husband angry. The social network of women in the town she relies on for finding out about cheap medicines also serves to alert her about the arrival of milk trucks to the open-air market. This sorry excuse for a fruit and vegetable market still hangs on in the town, thanks to the needs of the poorest inhabitants who are unable to afford the higher prices in actual shops. There are private traders as well as ex-collective farm stands at the market. It is hardly a bazaar, but does serve as something of a specifically social, economic and 'spiritual' focal point for pensioners and others in the town (Polese and Prigarin 2013).

In the absence of Masha's husband we are able to talk about another worry—the fixed domestic telephone standing charge. Local calls were free until a few years ago, but now what's the point of paying 150 roubles a month line rental if the calls cost 20 kopecks a minute? Paying the alternative 300-rouble monthly package (c.\$10) for unlimited local calls would be a luxury she can't afford. She has considered getting rid of the landline altogether, but Lyova and her sons won't have it. It would be too visible a penny-pinching step. At least her sons pay for a mobile phone

¹²In 2008, a year after the new maternal grants were introduced for those with two children, to a person in Izluchino on an average blue-collar salary, receiving the grant would have amounted to nearly two years of wage earnings. The grant is mainly intended to be spent on housing or education and those wishing to use it for other purposes have more difficulty in receiving it.

in case of emergencies. Masha reflects here too on the loss of the social wage and the dilemma of existence in Izluchino after the retreat of the enterprise and its benefits:

While we didn't have money before, we had things. A voucher would get you cheap meat and another voucher for other food. It's true that wages were higher in the region, maybe 200 roubles instead of 150 here, but what attracted us in the first place was that you could get a flat here quickly and an allotment, a dacha, although actually that land [in the village] is where I grew up. Anyway you could get a garage too.... we only spent a year with my first son in the hostel before we got this flat. Everything depended on the boss so people who worked for the enterprise got the benefits (*l'gota*); now we have nothing at all from this place. It's like a curse. They said to Lyova when he worked for the municipality: 'next year you'll get the social benefit' [meaning a lower rate of communal and utility payment] but it never came to pass. [...] Before the town was a state in itself and it had so many good points. Like socialism itself. No violence or bribes. We just got on with building up the country. Now it feels like a trap being in the town. But I don't think we will ever leave. We'll just have to put up with it, like these last ten, 15 years.... Most of all what angers me is that they tried to take away my holiday voucher (*putevka*)... We've gone to the same sanatorium for the last 10 years with the other girls in the department and last year they wanted to monetize that too but we fought them and won.

In many ways Masha's words echo her husband's. While local social benefits were a given in the past and acted as a significant incentive for inward migration to the town, in the present their loss is still keenly felt against the backdrop of nearly two decades of falls in real incomes in the remaining factory work. Masha's situation in particular, as a disabled woman of pensionable age with numerous medical needs, vividly bears witness to the impact of the ongoing municipalization of former enterprise social assets since the 1990s (Healey et al. 1999) and the residualization of the social welfare system more generally. This is compounded by the shock, for many, of having to provide informal payments for fairly basic social or medical services (Polese et al. 2014,); in Masha's case she refused to pay out-of-pocket for diabetes medicine that was supposed to

be provided to her at a '*l'gota*' rate (c.f. Henry 2009: 57).¹³ While Lyova and some other men can seemingly only resort to temporary oblivion in hard drinking sessions as a response to the ongoing sense of social trauma, Masha's small actions of agency (we can hardly call them resistance)—the letter writing and 'appeals' to authority are still framed within a paternalistic way of thinking about life in the town, its administration and social benefits. This is not unusual within this age group (Henry 2009) and perhaps not as unrealistic as it might appear, given the increases to maternity benefits and some paternalistic workplace policies, such as cheap mortgage loans, in both Russian-owned local businesses and multinationals. Elsewhere Henry notes how complaint making mainly focusses on the perceived loss of social and economic rights (2012).

Social Trauma of the Unhomely Present

At the heart of these conversations is the continuing reasoning that, since Lyova, and Masha too, are of *use* to the local community, the community should *value* their working personhoods commensurately, as in the past in the case of the enterprise with its benefits.¹⁴ When this fails to happen, little by little, the present begins to be experienced as ongoing social trauma (Oushakine 2000; Ushakin 2009: 7). This is different from the acute trauma experienced, in particular, by people living in big urban centres like Moscow in the period immediately during and after the reforms of the early 1990s. If anything, this is a trauma delayed. For workers in Izluchino at least, the period in the early 1990s most associated with massive economic and social dislocation in Russia as a whole was experienced locally as less marked by distress and shortage than as

¹³Masha was, however, able to get these medicines at the lower rate the following week. By phoning a friend, every morning at around 8 am, whose relative worked in a pharmacy, she was able to find out in advance when the next shipment of discounted medicines was due to arrive and then get to the pharmacy early before they ran out of the '*l'gota*' quota. Eventually, a circle of acquaintances and friends were covering the daily shipments to the four pharmacies in the town. This indicates that notions of involution has to be tempered by even these small acts through horizontal social ties that are used even in marginal households. Nonetheless, even after the application of the '*l'gota*', Masha used most of her salary to pay for medicines.

¹⁴For the valuing of work as providing a sense of being needed see Alashev (1995a: 74).

‘contingency’ in the sense suggested by Malaby (2003). As seen with the younger welder Andrei, who also worked in Lyova’s Steelpipe workshop, the early-mid 1990s locally were marked by an uneasy, ‘phony’ war of personal and institutional improvisation against the inevitable winding down of enterprises and delaying of employment restructuring. Hence, his characterization of that time as a seemingly never-ending ‘interval’. The sense of traumatically being out of synchrony with the times—that the present is somehow mocking and torturing a person—is experienced as an ongoing and growing process of trauma (Ushakin 2009), rather than a single event. For the younger welder Andrei and Sasha, Lyova’s son (of a generation that had only just come of age in 1991), ongoing uncertainty and social risk is experienced more in terms of ‘contingency’. It is somehow possible to adjust to it, if not ‘get over it’, despite a lingering sense of one’s self and identity being out of joint with the times.

Because of the different approaches to ‘risk’ in scholarship on workers, the tendency for it to be over-individualized as a social construct (Atkinson 2007, 2010), and the need to ‘ground’ the experience of insecurity as part of ‘normality’, it is worth expanding on what is meant by ‘contingency’. When people speak about their encounters with ongoing crisis and ‘insecurity’ such as falling real wages, pollution and accidents, crime, interpersonal violence and mass alcoholism, they more often appear to discuss these not as risks but as part of a continuum of everyday life. The ever-present backdrop of insecurity that informs all aspects of life has to be confronted as ‘integral’ to one’s ordinary set of experiences. In terms of personhood, ongoing precarity has to be integrated somehow (but not necessarily rationalized). Otherwise, the sense of trauma of the present overwhelms the personality and results in extreme forms of self-harm (and social harm), such as the increasing alcohol use observed in Lyova—an example of the embodiment of loss/trauma (Oushakine 2006). Most of the time though, uncertainty is lived through stoically—interpreted as impossible to avoid or control. This results in a response that acknowledges the ‘open-endedness of unpredictability’, which is what Malaby calls ‘contingency’ (2003: 16). The normalization of insecurity comes to occupy a space in life choices like that of calculated risk to a gambler (Malaby’s work was on Greek illegal gamblers). The ‘unpredictability’ of outcomes in gambling linked to other aspects of social uncertainty’

(ibid). Honkasalo and Caldwell (2004) have both drawn on these ideas in the postsocialist context. For Honkasalo's Karelian informants, insecurity is inseparable from and constitutive of lived experience and is therefore not experienced as risk or danger (Honkasalo 2009: 52), but as closer to a quotidian experience which should not be reduced to fatalism. It is more akin to the endurance of suffering. This gives an indication of where the concepts of habitability and contingency can usefully inform each other.

Endurance as a form of 'small agency' (Honkasalo 2009: 62) is visible in Masha's story: 'I don't think we will ever leave. We'll just have to put up with it, like these last 10, 15 years.' Her search for a habitable space in the new Russia is located within the last bastions of socialist-era consociality—the 'girls' holiday at the sanatorium, and kin-based sociality at the village plot. Her small agency revolves around defending a right to the sanatorium holiday and the remaining rights to subsidized medicine. Equally, contingency as accepting social risk instead of attempting to control it also inflects searches for habitability. The small agency that makes for habitability is that of the chance niche of comfort, the fleeting experience of euphoria, the random collision of human trajectories that result in an impromptu social gathering, the concentrated distraction of a craft or hobby activity that is done 'for its own sake' and often socially (Knight 2007: 156).

Non-instrumentalized practices are an important aspect of such sociality. Masha was thankful for the apple harvest that year and made a lot of *kompot* with dried apples. This made her feel 'happy' at various times in the winter, especially when it meant as a lodger I didn't have to bring home 'expensive' juice from the minimarket. However, in reality she gained most from this activity not instrumentally, but as a way of passing time, skinning apples in the yard in front of her dacha where she could chat to passers-by. Similarly, when in late spring a clump of irises appeared at her village plot that had not flowered for some time, Masha experienced a kind of ecstatic joy. River swimming in the summer was an activity marked by a certain kind of 'sacred' and even secretive category of enjoyment for her and other older women. Children and grandchildren would be left with the men folk to allow women the chance to really relish this experience (one which was enhanced by being able to swim naked without men being present). A major victory was won when Masha did

eventually get her discounted medicines that she was entitled to; the sense of satisfaction was enhanced by the fact of this achievement being held in common with her circle of pharmacy monitors (see note 14). ‘Involution’ therefore must be seen as a spectrum, with an individual or household’s place not static, but shiftable even through small acts of agency.

Similarly, Masha’s colleague Nina worked in the children’s library of the *DeKa* and was able to relish a sense of satisfaction in sourcing children’s books through friends and relatives that the district library budget could not provide. Nina prided herself on speaking to the local school teachers to acquaint herself with the new academic year’s curriculum in advance, something she was not required to do, but which, like Lyova, enabled her to say that her work was ‘of use to the people’. When in 2010 the local authority couldn’t repair a leaking pipe in the library section of the *DeKa*, the heating to that part of the cavernous building was cut off for most of the winter. It is a measure of both Nina’s precarious economic position *and* her stoic and tenacious ability to deal with contingency that she remained at work under such conditions rather than lose pay. Eventually an electric heater was ‘donated’ by the district cultural authorities, but in the meantime Nina’s daughter-in-law had been busy knitting all kinds of clothing that could serve as indoor wear. Nina’s and Masha’s sense of habitability was located in these kinds of meagre but meaningfully ‘small’ acts of agency in the face of uncertainty. We should not project our sense of ‘poverty’, whether emotional or economic, on such an experience.

But what of Lyova? Surely his story seems to point to a ‘lack’—both in terms of dealing with contingency and of the search for habitable space. To a degree this is the case, and in comparison with his wife, this has to do with both his gendered, generational and classed positioning in Izluchino. As already mentioned, his access to spaces of masculine sociality appeared more limited, both in time and space. As for most men, the domestic space was largely reserved for kinship sociability, not for hard drinking or even less extreme outlets for masculine sociality. As Kay has amply demonstrated, there is an enormous social pressure for men in Russia to drink heavily and little ‘middle way’ between abstention and high consumption (2006: 25). Non-consumption, or lower consumption than that of other men in a social setting, continues to be marked out as indicating a lack of masculinity, although this was visibly changing

among all age groups even during my period of fieldwork. Men increasingly successfully resisted peer-pressure to drink heavily. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing value *as leisure and enjoyment* of drinking, heavy or otherwise for male homosociality. In most accounts of male drinking in Russia, the ‘pathological frame’ remains ubiquitous (Gusfield 1996: 40). For Lyova, the dacha, the home, the factory workshop all remained spaces of masculine sociality. But the most sought-after space of drinking-as-refuge for him and many other men was the garage.

Trauma of Spatial Decay: A School with No Pupils, a Theatre with No Stage

Unlike Masha, for Lyova the present as ongoing trauma appeared to overwhelm his personality and show itself more and more as an affective-somatic category—in alcohol use, especially, as he approached and passed the age of 50. His positive moods and thoughts occurred when he momentarily occupied a mental space orientated towards the past. The past, as already discussed, was a place of value for working personhoods *per se*, and the value of the work of those building communism. A lot of satisfaction was expressed in the physical construction of Izluchino, which the factory workers themselves took part in when they weren’t working. While much of the building work was carried out by prisoner labour, the finishing and installation of plumbing and heating communications was carried out by the specialist and non-specialist workers alike—this was part of their ‘payment’ for the flats they so quickly were granted (Collier 2011). The attachment of workers to place by virtue of their participation in building it is well documented in the Soviet case (Bolotova and Stammer 2010; Stammer 2010).

This provides another explanation for Lyova not wanting to move. He and some other informants retain a vivid memory of helping build the flats they live in. Similarly, the slow decay of so many municipal buildings and the seemingly conniving way in which local elites privatize former communal property, or let it slowly rot, rankles with working people. Lyova remembers helping to do welding work in School Number Three

which in the mid-1980s became one of the best equipped educational institutions in the region with three heated swimming pools. Since the late 1990s the school has been closed, victim of both falling enrolments (the demographic crisis) and lack of funds for maintenance. This and other derelict or reallocated buildings are a constant visible prompt for inhabitants of Izluchino of the achievements of socialism that they had a personal and professional investment in and which underpinned the general quality of their life. Unlike the preceding war-time generation, people Lyova's age were socialized in the monotown and have no life experience of any other prior social order. This adds to the sense of the present as a 'life catastrophe' (Dimke and Koriukhina 2012). On the other hand, the particular experience of trauma in Izluchino is different to that explored by Walkerdine in deindustrialising communities in the West (2010: 99)—while the built industrial environment that connects the community is almost immediately erased there, in Russia the visible reminders of the past remain and act as an open wound. Instead of 'affective empty space' (ibid), Lyova is presented with spirits of the 'undead' past.

Michel de Certeau relates memory and place by suggesting that 'memory is a sort of anti-museum' filled with absent presences and that 'the places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences' (1984: 108). 'Place' is a localizable geographical entity, but 'space' only arises in the way we use and read place. 'Space is a practiced place' means that 'part of what we think of as urban space is the shifting connotations and associations we hold for it as individuals' (Robinson 2014),¹⁵ but also as communities and members of classes. 'There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can invoke or not.' Various 'spirits', the ghosts of socialism, remain stubbornly looming absences in the landscape and memoryscape of Izluchino. The loss of the workers' subsidized canteen has already been discussed. Two other enormous structures dominate the town: one is the modern school; the other is its once famous 'House of Culture'—the *DeKa*—which used to house two stages for theatre and cinema. The *DeKa* still has a func-

¹⁵ I acknowledge and thank Iain Robinson for pointing out the salience of De Certeau to this reading of memory in Izluchino in a personal communication (2014).

tioning stage and a lively mix of traditional shows and contemporary music and dance. But even these events—eagerly anticipated in the small town—provoke feelings of loss and memories of the ‘old time’. Young ‘cultural workers’—as much as Masha and Lyova—lament the renting out of precious rooms and facilities to private business. ‘In the old times this revolving stage was the pride of the region,’ a young lighting rigger says. But now they lack the lighting and amplification facilities to put on proper shows on the main stage. Dasha, the drama instructor, talks about how culturally the small town was self-sufficient. The enterprise made sure you didn’t need to go to the *oblast* or *raion* capital for entertainment. She’s one of the few cultural workers under 40.

Every day I walk past the site of the secondary school in the centre of the town—trees have started to grow out of the swimming pool building, which is roofless. The site is nearly two hectares—young people climb through the broken fences to take drugs or drink beer there. One day Misha—a loader for a local wholesale trader—takes me inside. ‘It’s shameful. I remember being taught to swim here. We had the best facilities in the region. The town gave something precious to me, but it won’t to my children. It’s like the *Titanic* taken out of the water, this school. What are the bureaucrats paying attention to?’ Misha’s colourful metaphor links back to Lyova’s understandings of the former status of the town as a powerhouse of production, deserving of just rewards from the state in return for workers’ sacrifices on the shop floor.

The visible reminder of decay and neglect in the town weighs more heavily on Lyova because, as a man of a certain age, he had more at stake in terms of the social construction of self through the socialist-era achievements in the town. Seeing the school is experienced as ‘pain’ (*bol’no*) for him. Here the moral understanding of the value of work links to the ‘moral landscape’ of the monotown: the process of city building was understood as a collective and ‘healing’ process (long) after the destruction of WWII (Collier 2011: 106). Lyova’s pain is compounded in the present by the actual reconstruction of other parts of the town—the park, the industrial zones owned mainly by Muscovite and foreign companies. The contrast in the valuing of the socialist-era built environment (as disposable—a ‘worthless dowry’) is experienced as a constitutive of part of Lyova’s personhood. In contrast, the shiny new lime kiln built

by the German engineers is an ever-present reminder of his unhomeliness that cannot be avoided. You cannot shut one's eyes to this contrast, except perhaps by retreating into the refuge of alcohol. But can that refuge be compared to other attempts at making life habitable?

This is not quite the rhetorical question it seems. Despite the ease with which it would be possible to judge that Lyova's increasing drinking can in no way be compared to the niches of habitability carved out by others in Izluchino, people around him mostly do not hurry to interpret his behaviour as self-destructive, 'socially harmful'¹⁶ or a shameful thing. And this perhaps reflects again the picture of their sense of life as the contingency outlined earlier. And yet there is a contradiction here, in that once Lyova's drinking developed into a classic case of what Russians call '*zapoi*'—more than a 24-hour period of severe inebriation—it *was* accompanied by more signs of household involution, which *might* point to feelings of shame on the part of him and his wife, if not for the equally valid interpretation that these two phenomena could equally be merely seen to be coincidental, not contingent on each other.

Ultimately any socially meaningful interpretation of drinking as symptomatic of marginalization cannot be disaggregated from numerous other complex issues such as drinking cultures and physiological addiction. On the former, it is worth underlining that drinking and even *zapoi* are not as normatively marked by shame among many working-class men themselves. Unlike—as we saw earlier—the lack of milk in the house, or for that matter, phenomena that are correlated with alcohol misuse, such as domestic violence, to understand the phenomenon of alcohol as an affordance for working-class men and as a contingent response to continued marginalization, we need to think about what is considered normal, habitual behaviour, and what is valued in everyday life. Despite a reduction in alcohol use among people in the town since 2009, heavy use continues to be marked as part what might be called a 'normative orientation of the habitus' (Sayer 2005: 23).

'Lay normativity' is a shorthand way of describing 'the ethically normative dispositions' that a particularly classed habitus is said to bring

¹⁶The definition of alcohol abuse as where it leads to 'social harm' is common in medical social science treatments of drinking. Social harm arises when a person fails to perform their main social roles due to their drinking.

about. Coined by Andrew Sayer, ‘lay normativity’ is a way of characterizing the ethical dispositions generated by ordinary people as they encounter the world and undertake action within it. It might usefully describe how people, ‘in their mostly subconscious and fallible, but mostly practically-adequate ways, [...] *value* the world’ (ibid: 34), and in particular the intersection in their everyday reasoning of the contrast between the past and present. Thus, although I employ the term ‘reasoning’, this encompasses both an affective, moral and physical evaluating apparatus.¹⁷ That is why I use the term ‘cosmology’ for Lyova’s world view in attempting to link up material, moral, spatial and ‘political’ mnemonic resources available to the Russian working poor that contribute to the enduring perspective they developed about their society prior to 1991. Perhaps Lyova is not shamed by others’ implicit disapproval of heavy drinking because he does not acknowledge his wife or others—including me as a middle-class person—as worthy judges of his character, looking more to peers for approval or disapproval. We are not in a position to give value, or devalue, a socially marked practice such as heavy drinking. Certainly for most men of his age group, the *zapoi* is hardly worthy of comment. It is also indulged in by the enterprise Steelpipe (and many other local businesses and organizations) for various reasons, practical (they don’t have to pay him when he is absent due to *zapoi*), but also ‘moral’ (in exactly the sense of lay normativity Sayer has in mind); it is acceptable and understandable that a man of his age in his position (noting the intersection of class, age and gender) would have two to four *zapoi* days a month.

‘I Have Respect, Therefore I [Can] Drink’: The ‘Respected’ Worker in the Enterprise Today

This final section expands the discussion of drinking and the valuing of the labouring personhood. It contextualizes it more widely with Lyova’s workplace social positioning and the realities of production regimes in inheritor industrial enterprises in the town. It is certainly the case that at

¹⁷A similar point is made by Sayer (2005: 25) in criticizing the overly rationalist approach of Bourdieu to habitus which neglects the embodiment of dispositions, which leads to the ‘denial of the life of the mind in the working class in much sociological writing’.

VW or Samsung, workers with significant alcohol use, including *zapoï* would have trouble keeping their job. In that sense a worker's drinking in those production contexts would result in 'social harm'—their household's loss of wages (Room 1996, 2000). But that was not, and is not, the case in Steelpipe or most other Russian-owned enterprises, even ones boasting of a Western 'modernized' approach to labour relations and production.

But before explaining this, it is necessary to discuss the final field of dissatisfaction with the present for Lyova that contributes to his *terra dolorosa*: the changing nature of production relations, autonomy at work and the rhythms of intensity on the shop floor. Along with many informants, Lyova laments what he sees as dissolution of the social-work-link characteristic of the socialist era. In the time 'before', he felt that people were more open to each other generally and, particularly, in terms of out-of-work socializing, which reflected a closer sense of working-class solidarity and consociality. In this respect it may be worth reflecting again on the standard narrative of social involution discussed above. If Lyova is right then involution may be partly inseparable from a general process of individualization and greater compartmentalizing of life that is not characteristic of just the most marginal social groups.

Nonetheless, despite this complaint, Lyova still feels that with some co-workers he retains a socialist-era casual social-closeness—the 'confrère' status Michael Burawoy repeatedly refers to in his work on Hungarian steelmill workers in the 1980s (1992). Some of the drinking sessions at Lyova's garage are with such confrères. Some social drinking takes place at work, but generally, in the town, only very rarely do workers socialize in each other's homes. He also feels that due to his age and relatively high technical skills (in welding), he has a particular kind of work- and skill-based respect, universally known as '*avtoritet*' ('authority', or prestige) among other workers and management.

Andrei, the younger welder who described living through the early 1990s, also talks about his own sense of *avtoritet*. When pressed to define exactly what '*avtoritet*' means, he associates it directly with '*vzaimov-iruchka*'—'mutual aid', both on and off work. His narrative of work-related sociality is clearly generationally different from Lyova's, although his description of *avtoritet* is similar:

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 [...] We're not a collective; these are work *priateli* [between friends and acquaintances] who know they can look to each other outside work too. [...] It's actually nice that people come to you outside work for help—they phone you up and check how you're doing.

What Andrei's and Lyova's narratives of work-based and class-marked respect show is that to 'get on' at work and beyond, and gain access to worker-to-worker resources (through trusted confrères), one needs *avtoritet*, more than just a friendly attitude and connections. Similarly, *avtoritet* is instrumental in one's relationship with the boss.¹⁸ Lyova continues to pride himself on his level of prestige at the factory based on his skills and reliability. At the same time he complains about the 'rationalization' of work brigades, both in his present and previous employment. In his work in the local authority plumbing brigade he had witnessed a reduction in his team (covering all the 'new' 1980s housing in the town) from 35 maintenance workers to 5 since the reforms to municipal housing in the mid-2000s. The increased tempo and duration of intensive work were experienced as highly negative aspects of this new labour regime. He contrasts the current regimes (in both the municipality and Steelpipe) with his view of work during the socialist era:

piece-work [*sdel'naia*] doesn't exist anymore, but neither does task-based work [*akkordnaia*]: it used to be 'finish it and you can go home' [...] nonetheless I know that the boss respects me, he asks for me by name when there's a tricky job like welding two types of metal together in a confined place. But I am not some Japanese. I am not a robot.

Lyova succinctly summarizes a common set of responses, particularly among older workers socialized during the 1980s, to the perceived present 'individualization' of work and work tasks. While piece work has always been seen as individualized, it still allowed for a measure of worker

¹⁸I summarized attitudes towards *avtoritet* among a number of different workers in a summary paper on worker's relations to neoliberal labour regimes (Morris 2012). Some of those points are repeated here.

autonomy in approaching tasks.¹⁹ Similarly, Lyova's lament about the loss of task-based work illustrates the move towards enterprises looking to utilize the time of workers as efficiently as possible throughout the working day. For workers like Lyova who were used to carving out long periods of downtime (*'prostoi'*) while equipment was broken or raw materials were lacking, the new focus on utilizing labour intensively remains a source of disgruntlement. In recent sociologies of production, recourse to Foucauldian theories of governmentality (Miller and Rose 1990; Larner 2000) has been useful in drawing attention to the degree to which workers of all kinds are hailed as self-regulating subjects—induced to 'work upon themselves' to become ever more flexible to the demands of post-Fordism (Atkinson 2010). This renewed focus on worker (self-)governmentality can be clearly linked to a perceived loss of 'dignity' in work for Lyova and others (Morris 2012). 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 (their traditional Soviet role) to agents of management.

Lyova's sense of *avtoritet* continues to a degree in the present—this is how he managed to move from the municipality to Steelpipe—by leveraging his good name and reputation both with employer and in his social network. Yet his discontent with work now stems primarily from lack of recognition of its value (the universal bitterness among workers conscious of the relative low wages they receive—cf. Melin 2005: 66–7). Equally though, the present is understood as narrowing the opportunities for the carving out of some kind of autonomy and self-management of the intensity of physically demanding work—the *prostoi* periods and 'going slow' (along with the attendant 'labour rushing') that were possible in the

¹⁹ Piecework has traditionally been understood as an element of 'sweating' labour both in labour history scholarship generally on Russia (Ruane 2008), and in work on late socialist-era labour regimes (Haraszti 1977). Filtzer (1992) views Soviet labour relations through the prism of a lack of union representation and brutalizing discipline leading to a lack of solidarity and atomization, which led to a 'hyper-individualization of labour processes and incentives' (1992: 224). However, this view is based on an analysis of the Stalinist era, and scholarship on the later period provides a picture of a more nuanced set of relations such as that by Alasheev who emphasizes the late Soviet workplace as a space in which workers were able to carve out more or less benign working conditions and work as an object of affective value (1995b). He also details the effects of labour shortages: informal discipline and negotiated relationships on the shop floor, and strong elements of enterprise paternalism prevailed and underpinned this (1995a).

socialist era were also seen as part of the state and enterprise's contract with labour—a kind of compensation for poor pay and conditions. Thus the 'valuing' of labour in the past by workers gives way to acute feelings about the lack of value (economically and in terms of labour and shop-floor relations) in the present. Ironically then, governmentalization of the labour regime in the present is resisted precisely because it is seen to remove elements of autonomy and initiative from skilled workers in particular (Morris 2012).

The continuation of some form of recognition of Lyova's *avtoritet* also explains his employers' tolerance of his *zapoi* (although it also lowers labour costs for them). 'I am an *avtoritet*, therefore I [can] drink,' says Lyova with a bottle of *My Kaluga* beer in his hand, looking at me as if I were somehow mentally defective. When I speak to employers—including Lyova's—about absenteeism (*progul*) due to heavy drinking, they are sanguine: 'We just write it up as unpaid sick leave'. A number of workers who regularly go absent because of heavy drinking are equally unconcerned; no one knows of any local cases of workers losing their jobs due to alcohol problems.

While work- and skill-based prestige may represent a real, yet diminishing, space for workers like Lyova in terms of dealing with contingency and the making of the present 'habitable', this is largely cancelled out by the interpretation of new work regimes as punitive, unjust and unrelentingly exploitative 'sweating' of their labour (Burawoy 2002: 304). Thus, the lamenting of the 'new' governmentalizing postsocialist labour regimes Lyova encounters need to be recognized as the third element, along with the trauma of physical decay in the built environment and the loss of social wages, contributing to his view of the present as a *terra dolorosa*.

Enduring and Inhabiting Through Alcoholism: Drinking and Moral Economies of Class

It is tempting to look at Lyova's alcohol use as a pathological realization of his inability to find more reliable ways of making the present habitable. However, as argued above, this interpretation has to be squared

with the largely normative marking of heavy drinking, even *zapoi*, and the problematic ascribing of ‘shame’ or stigma to such activities.²⁰ What can be said is that the present continues to be experienced as particularly unhomely for Lyova, and the struggle for any kind of habitable niche is fraught. For similar reasons, Lyova’s case should not be seen in isolation as a personal ‘failing’; the question of the social role of alcohol in Russian workers’ lives and its significance in terms of reflecting the positioning of labour in society, more generally, has featured in debates in labour history.

Donald Filtzer has influentially argued that drunkenness served as a form of escape, or a ‘rational response’ (Filtzer 1986, in Kotkin 1995: 200–1), for Russian workers in the Stalinist period and after, given the lack of any options for resisting labour exploitation (Filtzer 1992, see also Ashwin 1999: p. 4). Ashwin has described the inexhaustible ‘patience’ of the Russian workers after perestroika during the 1990s, but criticizes both undifferentiated ‘social contract’ and ‘atomization’ theories of labour quiescence (1999: 5; cf. Woolfson and Beck 2004). Similarly, she criticizes a discursive analysis of class which not only fails to investigate class experience as an ontological reality but posits workers as prisoners of the Soviet state’s monopolization of the language of class (Ashwin 1999: 6). What emerges is her positing of the ‘patience’ of the workers in enduring yet continued dependency on the post-Soviet enterprise, and the micro tactics of ‘just’ surviving. The word ‘patience’ used by Ashwin is a translation of *terpenie*, which can equally mean ‘endurance’, a term already used to describe Masha’s life practices.

Ashwin follows Filtzer’s argument about alcohol as ‘escape’ under Stalinism in her postsocialist case study of Russian miners (1999: 4, 47–48), while noting the important role drinking plays for homosociality. What is absent from these accounts of heavy drinking and absenteeism is the interpretation of the workers and drinkers themselves. Lyova and his main companion drinker Grigory, his work *naparnik*, talk about drinking in many ways that are familiar from accounts of postsocialist

²⁰ On the axiomatic pathologization of alcohol use by social scientists that ignores lay interpretations and assumes ‘malevolence’, see Gusfield’s provocative analysis (1996: 31–54). In particular, Gusfield criticizes a focus on the normative meaning of ‘drunkenness’ over analysis of actual drinking practices, and the results of intoxication rather than the causes of drinking.

scholars and health sociologists (Leon and Shkolnikov 1998; Rechel et al. 2013; Ashwin 1998; Kay 2006): Heavy drinking to Grigory is 'like taking a holiday, from the work and the worry'. It is a psychosocial stress release valve, and a way of escaping cramped and 'feminized' domestic spaces. The social mores that proscribe female hard drinking lead to men externalizing hard drinking from the home to the garage, thus the importance of the work space (even during the working day, but more usually after) and other 'masculine spheres' of sociality as drinking spaces. However, drinking also needs acknowledging as part of a 'conventional' set of masculine behaviours (Gusfield 1996: 42). Drinking, shared worker-identity and masculine sociality become linked and mutually reinforcing social cues.

Prolonged inebriating drinking²¹ is also linked to the need to kill dead time between shifts, which can stretch to days at a time due to the switch from day to night shifts. This is often the case for younger workers with little to occupy themselves and who live in the parental home in cramped conditions. But this temporal rhythm of social drinking itself helps articulate more reflexive interpretations that relate back to 'lay normative' values of the self, and of the meaning of labour. Although Lyova attempts to access the everyday narrative of habitability—'we have enough'—that others genuinely articulate, the overwhelming experience of trauma in the present means that clearly this is only partially true. Having to cut back on buying meat and milk and having to seek out essential medicines were obvious signs that there 'isn't enough'. But drinking to prolonged and debilitating inebriation forms a kind of 'enough'. Like a 'right' to slack time at work, a 'right' to automatic social benefits by virtue of loyalty to the enterprise, the 'conventionality' of heavy drinking and absenteeism are also something approaching a 'right', particularly for older workers. In fact Lyova uses this word: 'It's my right (*imeiu pravo*) to do this'. Adding wryly, 'I've given my dues (*obrok*) and will get what I deserve.' The term 'dues' was used during serfdom to mean payment of 'quitrent' to a landowner and the severance of a serf's ties. Lyova's words are part of a phrase Soviet school children would

²¹Note that I avoid the word 'binge' as an overly loaded term that is so highly relative as to be almost meaningless, even within a single cultural context. See Heath on the lay and medical interpretations of what constitutes a binge (2000: 40).

learn when studying serfdom. Lyova's drinking therefore should also be seen as integral to a 'lay' (and even partly institutionalized) understanding of a 'right' to slack time due to poor working conditions and pay. Indeed, as seen at the beginning of this chapter, Lyova and his mates even retain a 'right' to drink during work time, and they are not the only ones in the industrial zone. People drink on the sly in the lime kiln at night. Electrical technicians drink in the back room of the cement works. I drank with people in numerous workplaces, both blue-collar and white-collar. Where they couldn't drink on the job, they would drink straight before, and directly after the shift. With Denis, who worked at one of the foreign industrial businesses on the night shift, this became something of a ritual: we would buy three litres of 'cask' beer in the morning before his shift, to, in his words, 'oil up the chain' (*smazat' tsep*).

While the 'moral' right to hard drinking may contain within it echoes of a culturally specific understanding of alcohol in general as a psycho-social compensation for the misery of everyday existence, it also emerges as an act of 'small agency', of will—a display of self-sufficient personhood, even if to a destructive degree when other avenues are closed off. After all, Lyova notes, while getting through his second litre-bottle of vodka during one session with Grigory in his garage, 'It's not like we are "bruises" (*'siniaki'*)'— meaning 'real' alcoholics incapable of working. 'They should bring back the Soviet law against parasitism for that lot,' he adds.

Nearly 30 years ago Mary Douglas noted the inherent normative bias in attempting to label alcohol use as 'problem drinking' in other cultures (1987: 4). For Lyova and even his long-suffering wife, his drinking may be both a problem and his chosen solution to the insoluble present (pun intended). At the same time drinking more generally continues to be culturally marked 'as a rite of corporate identification' (ibid: 6), with drinking, work, blue-collar identity, and sociality at the nexus of working-class masculinity. Others have noted the social pressure among working-class men towards drinking as an expression of 'thriftlessness' and a display of the 'equality of interests' among the marginalized (Mars 1987: 100).²²

²²At the same time we should be alert to the simplistic Marxian reading of working-class alcohol use as 'corrupting' and 'enslaving', when middle-class use maybe just as frequent, but is hidden behind closed doors. See Chrzan on the American experience (2013: 58–81).

Chrzan notes that drinking sees linear time give way to ‘anti-time’—a focus on the event, the moment, ‘authenticity’ of self and social life (2013: 96). While this is perhaps a rather rosy view of hard drinking bouts in the Russian context, it does point to drinking as some form of dealing with contingency nonetheless. Bouts of hard drinking are not so much a badge of honour, as in some working-class communities (Mars 1987), but something almost tangible to hold onto given labour’s subaltern positioning. Drinking is not so much ‘compensation’, as conventionality; Lyova’s everyday way of enduring the present, his way of saying ‘it’s enough’. As inseparable from a sense of class, gender and sociality, drinking is also part of propertizing the self; it belongs to Lyova as part of his habitus, and forms part of his making of the traumatic present habitable.

Coda: Beyond the Mountains of the *terra dolorosa*

There is a well-known phrase of Soviet propaganda: ‘the radiant future is not beyond the mountains’—meaning it is near at hand. This phrase was used ironically by ordinary people in the late Soviet period to indicate the emptiness of official language and the detachment of ideology from reality. At the same time the phrase has a certain quaint hopefulness about it. Hope against hope, things might turn out after all. For Lyova, his *terra dolorosa* remains full of peaks that he cannot ascend or pass over. The beloved yet derelict school building, the canteen, the abandoned workshops are looming mountains of sadness and pain that hem him in. Yet Lyova’s story is not one of unrelenting woe just as the dominant sociological portrait of Russian workers’ as the passive sufferers of ‘psychological oppression’ is unsatisfying (Maksimov 2002: 116). Jarrett Zigon has recently shown the variegated nature of moral personhood among the Russian middle class (2010). In particular he draws out how embodied morality becomes a way of dealing with challenging personal circumstances and social crisis. Unlike in the case of Polina and Julia, suffering as performance for Lyova is not linked to governmentalizing imperatives. His classed, hemmed-in experience of the present more resembles the feminine responses Zigon documents as ‘being-unable-to-actness of

suffering' (2006: 77). Neither the moral disposition nor the suffering that results is easily 'propertizable' for Lyova beyond the 'symptom' that is drinking (cf. Skeggs 2005: 17, 179 on value of working-class selves).

Despite this, as in his wife's case, there are tentative signs that even Lyova can find meaningful actions in the present that look to the future. 'We live not just badly, but really badly,' he says over a perfectly respectable dinner of sprats and pasta. However, his mood lightens and after his wife leaves the kitchen, he lowers his voice:

I've talked to that guy I told you about: Egor. His brother lives in my home village Emelianovo and he has a car shop there—you know, where they do welding and tyres. Well if I go out there at the weekend then he's going to teach me spot welding with an automatic welding machine. It's a new thing. I can't get a better job without knowing how to do that.

We go to watch the evening news. Somewhere a long way away there is a war breaking out. 'It's better to make merry than to work. And it's better to drink vodka than to make war,' says Lyova philosophically. 'I need to get to Emelianovo to see my mum and help her with the potatoes... Maybe I'll call on Egor's brother.' Soon Lyova's second son Vanya will buy him a decent car and he will start building work on the family's dacha to enlarge it. He will spend more time there in the summer again, although much of that will be spent drinking heavily.

Despite what might appear an unrelenting picture of involution, self-destructive behaviour, a sense of unhomeliness and mythologization of the past, Lyova and Masha illustrate similarly enduring, if divergent, searches for a habitable niche in an unwelcoming present. For Masha and most women in Izluchino, social relations must be kept strong as part of a contingent response to ongoing uncertainty. Social crisis begets sociality and even more of a reliance on close social networks and kin. Even in involution, in a fickle material environment, the household cannot survive without the social, even if that social appears meagre against the backdrop of what feels like the generalized loss of social trust after socialism: whether that is the girls' sanatorium group or Lyova's drinking companions. For Lyova the trauma of loss in the past and present prevents much more than this. A certain fatalistic aspect of his habitability means that Lyova expects any change to be external, whether good or

bad. He's almost ceased trying to effect agency in any other way other than the bottle. Nonetheless, even he sees glimpses of that 'small agency' in the hemmed-in world of his anger and drinking. As Stenning and Hörschelmann (2008: 322) note, the everyday moral communities of socialism that gave Lyova's life its most essential values have been 'undermined but not replaced' entirely. The 'posting' of socialism is to be found in the everyday (325). That everyday—even at its most depressing—can offer snatches of hope and solidarity, mutual aid and recognition.

Lyova's case dramatizes the ongoing intersection of the gendered, generational and class-constructed experience of personhood as 'lacking' in the postsocialist present. This is a continuation of the 'dislocation' and 'demoralization' Burawoy defined as characterizing involution in the 1990s (2000: 61)—the worst period for unemployment and wage arrears. But Lyova is neither unemployed nor are his wages in arrears. The working poor in Izluchino 20 years after the crisis of the 1990s mostly get their wages on time and earn only a little less than the district and *oblast* average for blue-collar wages. Their lived existence is insecure, but, like Clarke's insight in 1999 that much behaviour is not strategically orientated towards survival, despite crisis, habitability is perhaps founded upon the motto 'everybody does the best they can in the circumstance' (ibid: 14)—and if that means more enduring than 'adapting' to new labour regimes, then so be it.

Worker responses to the present must then also be viewed through the lens of a 'moral order' (Burawoy 1992: 102) of shop-floor industrial relations that acknowledges the primacy of labour as value. Burawoy (1992: 147) has shown well the lack of any naivety in workers' understanding of the 'immanent contradiction' of their position in socialism. Nonetheless, positive memory and comparison with the present are more about culturally enduring values (which include those coinciding with some aspects of socialism) and both affective and material associations that evoked and incorporated a developing discourse among informants of 'lay normativity' about the superiority of aspects of socialist-era lived reality. This interpretive position of workers towards work persists after socialism and can be seen as a mnemonic resource which is drawn on to judge the present (Straughn 2007, 2009). Burawoy convincingly argued that production under socialism necessitated a significant degree of labour autonomy on the shop floor; due to the shortage

economy and other factors, workers engaged in self-organization (1992: 108) and were active, flexible solvers of production problems. Self-esteem, dignity-in-labour, the social value of work in people's lives (Alasheev 1995a, b) and mutual recognition as agents of production were all psychosocial benefits that accrued under this regime, whatever its disadvantages. But now neither the state nor the enterprise can fulfil their part of the 'bargain' as Lyova sees it (Henry 2009). Not only that but despite a continuing sense of 'contract' and an idealized notion of the role of state in enforcing social justice, Lyova's present is palpably felt as a 'lack': these necessary characteristics of labour dignity are missing. As far as older male workers are concerned, Henry understates the extent to which 'older norms, such as collectivism, erode', while 'new norms, such as individual responsibility and reliance on market forces, have yet to achieve widespread acceptance' (Henry 2009: 52).

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