

The Soviet Communist Party and the Other Spirit of Capitalism

Anna Paretskaya

Department of Sociology

New School for Social Research

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Abstract

Based on qualitative analysis of the Soviet press and official state documents, this article argues that the Communist Party was, counterintuitively, an agent of capitalist dispositions in the Soviet Union during 1970s–1980s. Understanding the spirit of capitalism not simply as an ascetic ethos but in broader terms of the cult of individualism, I demonstrate that the Soviet party-state promoted ideas and values of individuality, self-expression, and pleasure-seeking in the areas of work and consumption. By broadening our conception of the spirit of capitalism, tracing the formation of capitalist dispositions as well as institutions, and showing that the culture of capitalism can come from within the old regime, I further the agenda of neoclassical sociology of studying varieties of origins, paths, and destinations of modern capitalisms.

Introduction

The year 1989, we were told even before the Berlin Wall tumbled and took down the Iron Curtain, marked “an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism” and thus the end of history (Fukuyama 1989:3). The following decade, however, proved that such triumphalism was premature as many former socialist nations, including Russia whose *perestroika* had supposedly started the domino effect of transitions from state socialism, failed to replicate the institutions and spirit of Western capitalism and democracy. But even those countries that most successfully rid themselves of socialism—the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary—have built capitalisms that not only differ from their Western or East-Asian counterparts but are also diverse among themselves (Stark 1996; Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley 1998; Stark and Bruszt 1998, 2001; King 2002). The end of socialism in Europe and Eurasia did not lead to a global convergence at the final destination of laissez-faire capitalism; rather it created a testing site for a new sociological paradigm—neoclassical sociology—whose research agenda centers around the multiplicity of contemporary capitalisms.

Despite its origins in the former socialist bloc, this paradigm is anything but parochial: it aims to contribute to such long-standing sociological concerns as class relations and economic change (Eyal et al. 1998; Eyal 2000), the role of the state in economic development (King 2002; King and Sznajder 2006), and cultural capital and habitus in politics (Eyal 2003).¹ Moreover, the end of socialism created a new impetus to study capitalism, the subject that drove research by founding figures of the discipline, particularly Karl Marx and Max Weber. But while the main subject of inquiry—the nature of capitalism—remains the same, specific research questions are tailored to a new historical

¹ For a detailed manifesto of neoclassical sociology see Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley (2003).

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reality: Instead of analyzing preconditions for capitalism's emergence and downfall, as Weber and Marx did, neoclassical sociologists investigate and theorize comparative *capitalisms*—the diversity of capitalist forms and relations developing at the turn of the 21st century. Such a pluralistic conceptualization of capitalist trajectories and outcomes sharply distinguishes neoclassical sociology from neoclassical economics and its view of capitalism as “a single homogeneous globalizing logic” (Eyal, Széleányi and Townsley 2003:10) with “social laws generalizable across all time and space” (King and Sznajder 2006:752n3) exemplified by “shock-therapy” economic reforms attempted in several postsocialist countries. For neoclassical economists, the implicit uniformity of capitalism stems from actions of rational, utility-maximizing, free individuals. Neoclassical sociologists, in contrast, explain varieties of capitalist forms not only by historical circumstances of their genesis but also by their agents' cultural norms and political habits, in turn shaped by society's power relations. East-European capitalisms vary from each other because they emerged from above when party bureaucrats allied with managers; from without when dissidents and technocrats joined together against party bureaucrats; or from below as a result of a stalemate between technocrats and bureaucrats (King 2002:7–9; see also Eyal et al. 1998).

In most neoclassical sociological accounts, Russia has developed no genuine, modern capitalism (although it does have a class of property owners [Eyal et al. 1998]); its capitalism is of a merchant (Burawoy and Krotov 1992; Gerber and Hout 1998), chaotic or uncoordinated (Lane 2000, 2007), patrimonial (King 2002), or political (Verdery 1996; Hanson and Teague 2007) variety. Explanations for this putative backwardness vary, but converge in the claim that there was no suitable agent to carry out the transition to “true” capitalism.

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In this essay, I argue—in line with the agenda of neoclassical sociology but against its substantive accounts—that there was such an agent, the Communist Party itself, and long before the “end of history,” although I construe capitalism somewhat differently than does social-theoretical convention. To begin, I call attention to the Weberian and Tocquevillean distinction between culture (spirit and mores, respectively) and institutions and show that despite neoclassical sociology’s claims to take culture seriously, most studies of today’s capitalism in Russia—and other post-Soviet countries for that matter—view capitalism as a mode of economic organization, not a broader cultural system. Next, I depart from Weber and his modern-day followers in conceptualizing “the spirit of capitalism” as exclusively Protestant-like, ascetic, profit-driven behavior. Instead, I follow Bell ([1976] 1996), Campbell (1983, 1987), and Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) who emphasize a broader cultural interpretation of capitalism as the cult of individualism where “the individual and his or her self-realization...is the new ideal and image of life” (Bell [1976] 1996:286). Although also rooted in Protestantism, this streak of capitalism came to the fore in the West later and took the form, first and foremost, of self-gratification and consumption. If we understand capitalism this way, then perhaps what is happening in Russia (and some other places) today is not “capitalists without capitalism” (Eyal et al. 1998:5), but a different brand of capitalism, where fixation on the satisfaction of individuals’ pleasure-seeking desires reigns supreme not in the least because the individualist ethos was introduced years before anyone was interested in building economic institutions of capitalism.

My study of the rhetoric of the Communist Party during late socialism demonstrates that the Soviet party-state, without intending to abandon collectivism, promoted a discourse that placed the individual with her uniqueness and autonomy front and center (though it did

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not often translate this discourse into policy). This post-collectivist discourse, as I call it, encouraged independence and non-conformity, desire for self-realization, and pleasure-seeking by reconceptualizing socialist ideals of work and consumption; and in this sense it closely resembled the individualist ethos of capitalism broadly understood. In the end, I outline likely outcomes of this discourse, including its role in bringing about the end of socialism and its effects on collective and individual identities and behaviors. I suggest that while today's Russia might not have desirable institutions of capitalist economy, it has a lively capitalist ethos and a social group with corresponding cultural dispositions, whose swift rise following the collapse of socialism owed in part to the post-collectivist rhetoric of the old regime. These findings have broader theoretical implications about the social origins and nature of contemporary capitalisms.

Institutions vs. Dispositions

Explaining why the despotic potential of democracy was less dangerous in the United States than in Europe, Alexis de Tocqueville pointed to certain “favorable circumstances” peculiar to the New World. It was not only the design of America’s political system—the Constitution, the separation of powers, decentralized federation—that prevented tyranny’s rise, but more so the mores, customs, “the whole moral and intellectual condition” of the American people (Tocqueville [1945] 1990:299). In other words, democratic institutions were present alongside a pre-existing and more decisively important democratic culture (Tocqueville [1945] 1990:320–321; Offe 2005:28n105). The two constituted a “virtuous cycle [of] mutual strengthening” (Offe 2005:13) but were analytically and normatively distinct. Weber drew a similar distinction in his study of the origins of modern capitalism,

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where one of his main contributions was the discovery of a causal link between religion and capitalist economy. It was religious institutions—monasteries, church bureaucracy, the educational system—that were “the ultimate conditions” for economic rationalization in the West (Collins 1980:929–934). But most famously, Weber ([1930] 2006) found that religious doctrines of certain Protestant sects legitimized a new ethos of methodical work, ascetic consumption, and disciplined reinvestment, giving impetus to the rise of modern capitalism. Whether the “spirit of capitalism” was the primary or just a necessary condition for development of capitalist economies, it “was present before the capitalistic order” (Weber ([1930] 2006:20) and was therefore independent from its economic institutions.

More recently, an unlikely culturalist asserted the distinction between culture and institutions: Reflecting on the attempts to introduce a market economy to the former Soviet bloc, then Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan observed that “much of what we took for granted in our free market system and assumed to be human nature was not nature at all, but culture... There is a vast amount of capitalist *culture and infrastructure* underpinning market economies that has evolved over generations: laws, conventions, behaviors” (Greenspan 1997, emphasis added). In essence, Greenspan repudiated what Fukuyama (1989:6) disapprovingly called “the *Wall Street Journal* school of deterministic materialism.” This “economic fallacy,” common among neoclassical economists, “imagines that capitalist societies do not have cultures in the way that primitive or premodern societies do” (Block 1990:27) and assumes that “the imposition of capitalist structures and institutions (such as private property, the competitive imperative and a monetized accounting system) will force the universal development of free market rationality” (Bradshaw, Stenning and Sutherland 1998:167).

The Economic Bias of Neoclassical Sociology

As much as neoclassical sociology is critical of its economic namesake and has vowed to bring culture back into the study of capitalisms, it often suffers from an economic bias of its own. Most of the work in this new and still small field has focused on institutional change and variations in economic institutions—and almost always institutions of production—and not on cultural underpinnings and meanings of economic transformation in former socialist space. For example, David Stark’s main research question is “by what means can private property become the typical form of property relations in economies overwhelmingly dominated by state ownership of productive assets?” (Stark 1996:998). He discovers not only that the Hungarian postsocialist economy is a mixed economy, but that it also developed mixed property forms, what he calls the recombinant property, with decentralized reorganization of assets and centralized management of liabilities. In Stark’s view, this peculiar configuration resulted from organizational legacies of the past but also from the firms’ semi-conscious efforts to increase their chances of survival in the still uncertain present. But he assumes that Hungarian society had reached an unequivocal consensus regarding the legitimacy and desirability of private ownership and other institutions of capitalism. Is it possible instead that these unusual property configurations are not just an outcome of firms’ actions—strategic or accidental—but a sign of incomplete acceptance of capitalism as an economic and cultural system with its purported focus on rationality and self-reliance? Maybe the postsocialist “polyphonic discourse of worth” that firms create (Stark 1996:1015) is not an attempt to maneuver but a function of being caught in discursive limbo between capitalist profit-making and socialist public service? Similarly,

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Stark and Bruszt (1998) detail debates over privatization in Central Europe and link different privatization strategies that emerge (state-directed vs. spontaneous, institutional vs. individual owners, etc.) to varied paths of extrication from the old regime. But they barely touch upon the question of how the discourse of privatization and financial discipline became dominant in the first place.²

Even when it is acknowledged that “capitalism and the capitalist mode of production are not limited to economic institutions” and that study of these non-economic components provides a better grasp of “not only the *type* of capitalism, but the *extent* to which capitalism has been constructed,” such analysis is omitted by its proponents (Lane 2007:15, 21, emphasis in the original). Admitting that his study excludes psychological (capitalist ethic), political (system of laws and form of government), and societal (ideology, civil society, and class structure) components of capitalism, Lane nonetheless concludes that Russia and most other countries of the former Soviet Union lack these preconditions “necessary to support modern capitalism.” His evaluation of their capitalisms as a “hybrid state/market uncoordinated” type is based purely on economic factors like integration in the global market, ratio of domestic and foreign investment, income differentials, and levels of poverty and unemployment (Lane 2007:35).

Neoclassical sociology has exhibited not just an economic bias but a production bias as well. Profit maximization, industrial output, and added value are often viewed as ends in themselves (which is somewhat ironic because Soviet-type economies were criticized and deemed inferior for their excessive focus on industrial production and general disregard for

² Stark and Bruszt presume that in Hungary this was settled before 1989: first, post-1968 “controlled” reforms created widespread private ownership in agriculture and commerce and then a wave of reforms a decade later introduced the ideas of stockholding companies and voucher privatization (see Szelényi 1988; Seleny 1994; Róna-Tas 1997; King and Szelényi 2004).

the consumer sector [see Fehér, Heller and Márkus (1983)]. For many neoclassical sociologists, “efficiency and dynamism of the system” depends on market monetary exchange and is divorced from the amount, variety, and quality of goods produced: Russian capitalism is inferior because of the “pervasiveness of barter” (King 2002:26), domination of trade and consumption more generally (Burawoy 1997:1435, 1442), or a failure to establish a system “systematically promot[ing] the accumulation of capital” (Lane 2000:498). Michael Burawoy, although not a neoclassical sociologist himself, provides a typical criticism of the “wrong” path post-Soviet capitalisms have taken when he chides a prosperous coalmine in Ukraine for investing in public services for its workers, like housing, vacation centers, and greenhouses, and organizing supply of consumer items, instead of reinvesting in production. Expansion of the market of consumer goods equals “self-destruction and self-consumption...[and] undermines rather than promotes production” (Burawoy 1997:1142).³ The neoclassicists’ production bias is a holdover from classical sociology: Marx ([1978] 1981:199) declared that it is not capitalism if “it is enjoyment that is the driving motive and not enrichment itself,” foreshadowing Weber’s line about “the pursuit of profit and forever renewed profit” ([1930] 2006:xxxii–xxxiii) and the all-too-well-known Protestant ethic.

The Weberian Bias of Neoclassical Sociology

A Weberian influence is also clear in those neoclassical sociological analyses that do take culture seriously because they view “the spirit of capitalism” solely in puritan terms and assess the quality of new capitalisms by the presence or absence of an ethic of asceticism.

Lane equates capitalist ideology with “the values of *accumulation* and private property” and

³ Critical of neoliberalism, this scholarship sees the rise of consumerism as another undesirable by-product of the neoliberal transition strategies these countries followed (King 2002:28), dismissing the possibility of historical and cultural predispositions to consumer capitalism in this part of the world.

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the psychological component of capitalism with entrepreneurs' "propensity to *invest to accumulate* capital" and "a work orientation" of the labor force (2007:17, emphases added); and it is the absence of these proclivities that characterizes, in his opinion, capitalism in contemporary Russia. Similarly, market reforms in China are supposedly in danger because communist leadership, the main agent of economic liberalization, has not replaced communist ideology with an appropriate ideology of capitalism, despite its declaration "to get rich is glorious" and encouragement of competition (Wang 2002). Consequently, the reforms have produced a "post-communist personality" with hedonistic desires for wealth and pleasure rather than the "bourgeois subject" whose ascetic values are necessary to sustain capitalism (Wang 2002:5–6). While Wang reaffirms the Weberian maxim that capitalist institutions need capitalist culture to take root, he sees strict moral and fiscal discipline as the foundation of this culture.

The flip side of this is the claim that the successful introduction of sustainable institutions of capitalism in Central Europe is due exactly to the fact that their agents of transition themselves possessed and were able to impose on their societies the ethic of sacrifice and austerity (Eyal et al. 1998; Eyal 2000). For example, the shepherds of post-1989 Czech capitalism—a coalition of former dissident intellectuals and reform technocrats—had a "moral sense of duty," akin to the Protestant calling, to transform their country "in the most methodical, sober, and self-renouncing manner" (Eyal 2000:54). In order to construct a capitalist economy and civil society, they demanded financial discipline, sacrifice, and penance of their compatriots and country which were to purify the "thoroughly polluted" "human material they have inherited" and to extricate society from the excesses, irresponsibility, and indolence of the socialist past (Eyal 2000:55; see also Eyal et al. 1998,

chapters 3–4). Here, again, we see a clear juxtaposition between alleged fiscal carelessness and consumerism of socialism and inferior forms of capitalism on the one hand and asceticism and self-discipline of the supposedly true and pure capitalism on the other.

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More importantly, however, those who insist that asceticism and delayed gratification are cornerstones of modern capitalism ignore the well-documented fact that “in the culture of mature capitalist societies a distinctly modern hedonism and consumerism...and aspirations for self-expression and self-fulfillment” co-exist with if not supplant the puritan ethic of work and saving (Davies 1992:435; see also Ci 1999). Even Fukuyama in his panegyric to liberalism saw it as “liberal democracy in the political sphere combined with easy access to VCRs and stereos in the economic” (Fukuyama 1989:8), not with balanced checkbooks and long work hours. Daniel Bell was among the first to point out—with alarm—this other spirit of capitalism. In his view, during the first half of the twentieth century American—and possibly entire Western—culture became “primarily hedonistic, concerned with play, fun, display, and pleasure...in a compulsive way” displacing traditional bourgeois values of “work, sobriety, frugality, sexual restraint, and a forbidding attitude toward life” ([1976] 1996:70, 55). If this “new” culture of capitalism emerged only recently, according to Bell, its source was the Protestant Reformation with its emphasis on the individual and on self-realization. In these terms, the shift from the “old” ethos to the “new” was “a shift in emphasis from ‘character,’ which is the unity of moral codes and disciplined purpose, to an emphasis on ‘personality,’ which is the enhancement of self through the compulsive search for individual differentiation” (xxiv).

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More recent work suggests that this un-, if not anti-, puritan ethos developed almost simultaneously with the ascetic streak of Protestantism. The Protestant, and Calvinist in particular, emphasis on individual salvation (through diligent work and frugality in this world) eventually morphed into a more general attention to the individual, subjective, and emotional religious experiences and became a “test of religious worth” and a requirement for the membership in the Church: “candidates...were required to give a public recital of the way in which God’s grace had come to *them*...It [was] not the individual’s knowledge or *conduct* which [were] under scrutiny so much as the nature and *quality of his inner state of being*” (Campbell 1987:129–130, emphases added). Soon, this spiritual sensibility of later-day Protestantism gave rise to Romanticism, its seeming opposite, but the two were similar in “displays of feeling and assumptions about the fundamental spiritual state of an individual” (131). Ultimately, the importance of personal and emotive religious experiences grew into the Romantic “conception of the self as an essentially divine, and unique, ‘creative’ genius” (183) whose fulfillment is achieved not through ascetic lifestyle but by “means of many and varied intense experiences” (Campbell 1983:287) like romantic love, novel reading, travel, and finer lifestyles.⁴ According to Campbell, this spirit (which if taken to extreme turns into hedonism⁵) was an essential and constitutive part of modern capitalism as early as the eighteenth century and it changed attitudes towards and the organization of everyday economic activity as much as Weber’s Protestant ethic. The two ethics have coexisted within

⁴ Cf. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan and Swidler’s distinction between utilitarian and expressive individualisms (1985, chapter 2).

⁵ Hedonism, a self-indulgent devotion to pleasure and individual happiness, is to the other spirit of capitalism what Puritanism with its “entirely negative attitude...to all the sensuous and emotional elements of culture and religion” (Weber [1930] 2006:62) is to the Protestant ethic described by Weber.

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individuals⁶ and societies for at least three hundred years and constitute not competing, as Bell would have it, but “the single cultural system of modernity” as they enable “interdependent forms of behaviour essential to perpetuation of industrial societies, matching consumption with production, play with work” (Campbell 1987:227). Campbell thus not only questions the production theory of the emergence of capitalism (1983:280, 1987:218), but proclaims that “the cultural logic of modernity is not merely that of rationality as expressed in the activities of calculation and experiment; it is also that of passion, and the creative dreaming born of longing” (1987:227).

This other spirit of capitalism that stresses the centrality of the individual and her self-realization does not manifest itself only in consumption. As Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) show, the organization of work processes in France (and, perhaps, generally in the West) in the last third of the twentieth century underwent significant changes to accommodate employees’ aspirations for autonomy and creativity: for example, companies broke up production into smaller units, gave more autonomy to teams of workers, introduced more flexible schedules and efficiency-related salaries, etc. These changes were in response to what Boltanski and Chiapello call “the artistic criticism of capitalism” that gained prominence in the wake of the 1968 crisis. Unlike older social criticism that emphasized “inequalities, misery, exploitation, and the selfishness of a world that stimulates individualism rather than solidarity,” the artistic criticism “vindicating an ideal of...individual autonomy, singularity, and authenticity” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005:175, 176). By that time, it also became clear that “few [people] have any real chances of making a substantial

⁶ Campbell notes that most individuals have a “purito-romantic personality system,” but women and youngsters are more prone—or rather permitted—to exhibiting their Romantic side, while adult males are usually perceived as having a stronger puritan component. As a result, the former—and the consumerism associated with it—has been “regarded as fundamentally subservient to the ‘puritanical,’ utilitarian one endorsed by the patriarchy” (1987:223, 225).

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profit” (163), somewhat undermining capitalism’s legitimacy. The firms’ adoption of the new ethos of individuality and creativity was essential for renewing employees’ commitment, upholding the firms’ image as just and working for the common good, and generally justifying capitalism and the entire social order.

If the Protestant ethic of self-denial (Weber’s spirit of capitalism) was an expression of religious devotion, the other spirit of capitalism to which these authors draw attention celebrates a unique and autonomous self “here and now.” Instead of divine election and eternal salvation, it prizes individual fulfillment. The other spirit of capitalism, I argue, was nascent in Russia well before the collapse of communism—and its agent of promotion and diffusion was the Communist Party.

Outline of the Argument and Methodology

During late socialism the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was reformulating—although mostly in discourse and not in practice—socialist ideals of work and consumption in a way that not only accommodated but encouraged development of individuality, autonomy, creativity, and of unobstructed realization of the self. This post-collectivist rhetoric manifested itself in the Soviet party-state’s pronouncements about the organization and meaning of work, on the one hand, and the significance and functions of consumption, on the other. In the area of work, a new discourse promoted what can be called a professionalization of manual labor. In the era of accelerated technological revolution, the Soviet party-state began to encourage broad and theoretically informed education for blue-collar workers beyond the skills needed for their immediate jobs. But it was also done in order to facilitate workers’ autonomy in work-related decision-making and give them at least an illusion that

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their work could be an outlet for creativity and self-actualization, as it presumably was for professionals. The image of the worker-intellectual, often wearing a white coat on a shop floor and compared to a professor, doctor, or artist, replaced one of a rugged proletarian in soiled overalls with permanent dirt under his nails but revolutionary ideas on his mind. At the same time, the austerity of life and personal sacrifice associated with early Soviet years was sidelined by the promise of abundance of consumer goods now, rather than in a distant future. More importantly, consumer goods promoted in the Soviet press were admired for the qualities that would allow their owners to set themselves apart from fellow citizens and to rely less on state-provided services and thus create unique, independent, and pleasurable lifestyles. In short, if we look closely, we can see a departure in the Soviet state's pronouncements from the collectivist and workerist ethos and inauguration of the cult of individualism, which is much more endemic to the "other spirit of capitalism" as described above than to communism.

To be sure, this new discourse existed alongside the usual Soviet rhetoric about early completion of the Five-year Plan, the leading role of the proletariat, creation of the "New Soviet Man" and the "Radiant Future." But it was a newfangled development: Although scholars have studied earlier periods of Soviet history far more thoroughly than the last two decades of socialism that I explore here, these studies have found little evidence of the discourse of post-collectivism before the Brezhnev years. While some of the themes (privacy, creativity, individualism) slowly began to surface during de-Stalinization (see e.g. Jones 2006; Siegelbaum 2006a), collectivist rhetoric dominated public discourse even during Nikita Khrushchev's thaw, the most liberal time since 1920s. Khrushchev's regime required of its citizens "self-discipline and voluntary submission...to the collective will" and

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repudiated any possibility of individual self-determination by declaring that even “everyday life... ‘is not a private matter’” (Reid 2002:219, 249).

So, why the shift in the Party discourse towards post-collectivism under Leonid Brezhnev? While this question needs further study, I can suggest a few possible explanations. First, the Iron Curtain was not impervious—by then it had become more of a “Nylon Curtain” (Péteri 2004)—allowing information about life in other socialist countries and in the West into the Soviet Union (Bushnell 1980; Lapidus 1987). Perhaps this new discourse was the Party’s pragmatic or cynical attempt to co-opt workers by convincing them that they already led a middle-class life similar to their foreign counterparts (Brown n.d.) or by emphasizing socialism’s continued superiority over the West (Kotkin 2001). Second, Bunce (1980) suggests that Communist leaders paid more attention to raising living standards—professional growth and social mobility, as well as more abundant and better consumer products—in the aftermath of political succession crises that often created uncertainty and potential for mass unrest. Additionally, as Teague (1988) explains, during this period the Soviet Communist Party grew less certain of its legitimacy—even in the absence of widespread organized discontent domestically—especially after the rise of Solidarity movement in Poland. Therefore it is no surprise that the rhetoric of the primacy of individuals’ needs over economic and ideological exigency of the state emerged soon after Khrushchev’s deposal and continued, with varying intensity, throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. Whatever the reasons, the side effect was the introduction of the “other spirit of capitalism” into Soviet reality.

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My evidence comes from a close analysis of Soviet official press and minutes of three Party Congresses (1971, 1976, 1981).⁷ I examined every issue of three major newspapers—*Pravda*, *Trud*, and *Literaturnaia gazeta*—between 1970 and 1986.⁸ I chose these papers because, on the one hand, they were nation-wide publications of the three main Soviet institutions—the Communist Party, the Council of Trade Unions, and the Writers’ Union, respectively—and everything printed there was sanctioned by the authorities. Therefore, nothing contradicting the official position could appear in their pages. On the other hand, they had somewhat diverse audiences: *Pravda* did not aim at any specific segments of the population and, hence, published materials presumed of interest to all; *Trud* had a more working-class readership and paid more attention to that specific milieu; and *Literaturnaia gazeta* mostly targeted professionals and had a more “intellectual” bent. Despite these differences, all three printed stories, editorials, letters to the editor, and other items that in one way or another helped to constitute a distinctly post-collectivist discourse.

Worker-Intellectual and Professionalization of the Proletariat

In the area of work, this new discourse most strikingly manifested itself through an attempt to remake manual labor into professional work⁹ praising blue-collar workers for

⁷ 1) The Archives of the Soviet Communist Party and Soviet State. Fonds 582, 604, 620. 1993–1996. Gosudarstvennaia arkhivnaia sluzhba Rossiiskoi Federatsii; Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniia dokumentov noveishei istorii; Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace; Tsentr khraneniia sovremennoi dokumentatsii (Russia); Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii.; Chadwyck-Healey Ltd. 2) Fond 89: Declassified Documents, collection of duplicates. 1993. Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace; Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii; Chadwyck-Healey Ltd. 3) *Materialy XXIV s’ezda KPSS. (Materials of the XXIV’s Congress of the CPSU.)* 1971. Moscow: Politizdat.

⁸ *Literaturnaia gazeta* 1970–1985; *Pravda* 1970–1985; *Trud* 1970–1985.

⁹ An ideal-type model of professionalism pinpoints five elements: “(1) specialized work...grounded in a body of theoretically based, discretionary knowledge and skill and...given a special status in the labor force; (2) exclusive jurisdiction...controlled by occupational negotiation; (3) a sheltered position...based on qualifying credentials created by the occupation; (4) a formal training

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broad academic knowledge rather than physical strength or political consciousness. As one newspaper's correspondent noted, "today's working class differs greatly from the working class of 1920s–1930s. Now, we see an educated, philosophically thinking worker. At times, I don't even know where a worker ends and an intellectual begins"¹⁰ (*Trud* 2/21/70:2; see also 2/10/70:3; 6/4/76:2; Iovchuk and Kogan 1975; Shkaratan and Rukavishnikov 1974).

Rabochie-intelligenty,¹¹ as they became known and whose numbers were reportedly in the millions, brought "creative spirit, scientific approach, daring exploration" to their day-to-day work and were a living testimony to the eradication of distinctions between physical and intellectual jobs (*Pravda* 8/25/73:1).

Educational credentials and the type of knowledge each group used in their respective work was the most obvious distinction between professionals and blue-collar workers. The Communist Party pressed workers to complete secondary education and pursue technical school and college degrees, although without giving up their manual jobs. Special pressure to continue schooling was put on younger workers by appeals to their political consciousness, but also by offers of material rewards such as passes to summer resorts, bonus pay, and extra vacation days (*Trud* 10/24/70:2, 8/11/72:2). This was in stark contrast to previous eras. For instance, Khrushchev's 1958 education reform aimed at steering more people into working-class trades: all fifteen-year-olds, instead of finishing high school, were to enter the labor force for a minimum of two years, preferably in manufacturing. This arrangement sought "to reduce the inbuilt advantages enjoyed by children from professional families, and to encourage more young people to take up skilled *manual trades*, which the economy

program... which is... associated with higher education; (5) an ideology that asserts greater commitment to doing good work than to economic gain" (Freidson 2001:127).

¹⁰ All translations of the primary sources from Russian are mine.

¹¹ I translate *rabochii-intelligent* as worker-intellectual even though in Russian "intellectual" and *intelligent* have somewhat different connotations.

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desperately needed” (Hosking 1993:354, emphasis added). In essence, intending to reduce inequalities, this reform was raising the prestige of the working class at the expense of everybody else, by forcing everyone to be part of it at least temporarily. Unsurprisingly, this policy met resistance and was never fully implemented. The need for an expanded labor pool in manual professions, however, remained, as did the necessity to showcase progress towards ever-growing equality. But General Secretary Brezhnev’s administration employed the opposite tactic: it elevated blue-collar workers to the level of white-collar professionals.¹² Newspapers and officials’ public speeches regularly noted the growing numbers of manual workers with secondary, and often more advanced, schooling. They celebrated USSR’s achievements in the area of education, but also signaled to workers that they, as a group, were gaining on the professionals in terms of complexity, creativity, and importance of their work even without necessarily moving up the occupational and social hierarchy. “Not all [of us] are engineers, but all study,” remarked one foreman (*Pravda* 11/30/82:3).

But even those blue-collar workers who did not want to pursue education formally could participate in the so-called “schools of communist labor”—often referred to as “workers’ academies”—run by many factories. There, as part of the effort to professionalize their positions, the most capable workers were prodded to defend “worker dissertations.” By late 1970s–early 1980s, hundreds engaged in such projects (e.g. *Pravda* 5/25/78:2, 10/10/78:1, 12/28/80:1; *Trud* 5/25/80:3). Since, as *Pravda* (4/21/72:2) pointed out, “the word ‘dissertation’ is from academic vocabulary,” to merit the title, the workers’ theses had to satisfy certain requirements of complexity and sophistication. And they did, as reports testified: For example, when a Leningrad steelworker was presenting his dissertation in front

¹² Even during Brezhnev years, professionals were often called on to perform manual jobs—harvesting, spring cleaning of their workplaces, fixing and cleaning playgrounds and public parks, etc.—but those were “voluntary,” short-term, and sporadic.

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of the committee, he “freely used scientific terminology, referred to diagrams...convincingly demonstrated viability of his technical ideas. In front of us,” the observer concluded, “was a worker-intellectual, worker-scientist” (*Pravda* 5/25/78:2).

This broad knowledge not only “expanded the intellectual horizon” of the worker, but allowed him to learn second and third trade. Professional branching out was good not only for business, but for workers themselves: diverse skills allowed them to perform different tasks and to avoid “monotony, tedium, and boredom of labor” (*Pravda* 6/3/70:3). It also made workers more independent, putting them in charge of their work process and time. This was, according to newspapers, especially true—although somewhat paradoxical perhaps—for conveyer-belt operators, whose work seemed to be entirely regulated by the production line. As one multitasking autoworker in Minsk confessed, he had had enough of narrow expertise: “A narrow specialist needs an entire army of controllers, repairmen, foremen, fixers...And a specialist with various skills [like me]? I myself assign tasks—a foreman. I fix—a repairman...Now, to push a button [of the assembly line] is a pure pleasure.” In another case, an assembly line of the transistor radio factory in Riga, Latvia, where before workers had performed only a handful of operations each, was broken up and each of them was now responsible for the end product. As a result, a featured female worker, Svetlana, became “the mistress of the conveyer and hence her own mistress.” She regained independence from the assembly line and gained control of her own time (which she could use to get a haircut at the factory salon “at the time convenient for her”) (*Literaturnaia gazeta* 10/23/85:10). For a manual worker this was probably the equivalent of a professor’s summer off from his teaching responsibilities.

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Even if additional education did not yield formal degrees for workers or admission to scientists' professional associations, official discourse nonetheless often likened at least some of them to scholars. Frequent were stories featuring “professors of fittery” and “professors of the assembly line” who possessed exemplary skills and knowledge albeit without academic seal of approval (*Pravda* 3/18/70:3, 11/16/70:1, 11/5/74:3; *Trud* 10/26/73:2). A good example is an ode where a young fitter with failed college aspirations gets comforted by a kind old-timer who opens young man's eyes to the true value of their profession by equating it with rocket science:

Look, in the sky
a rocket treads a virgin path
and spacecrafts glide in space.
But they, you know,
are also made from metal.
Which means
they were assembled
by the fitters.

And a fitter everywhere reaps respect
when he works from his heart, his soul.
You—are a Doctor here!
Professor of the metals—
in your hands
is the steel life of the machines.

(*Trud* 5/15/70:4)

Besides drawing comparisons between manual and highly intellectual work, this poem, like many other newspaper publications, emphasized the individual's professional self-worth, as opposed to his political consciousness as a member of the proletariat. “Reaping respect” and recognition for his knowledge and skill was, according to the ode, as important for the worker as actually building communism (in the form of spaceships in this case). Likewise, an article in *Trud* (2/14/73:3) about two highly skilled turners saluted them because “the mastery they possess has brought them recognition, respect, [and] realization of their self-worth.” Moreover, in a number of articles from the 1980s, “the Stakhanovites¹³ of the 1930s [were] presented as having

¹³ Named after Aleksei Stakhanov, a coal miner who, in 1935, mined record amounts of coal (once, over 30 times his quota in a single shift), these were workers who routinely exceeded production targets through hard work, efficiency, and innovation.

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been motivated by concerns for self-actualization” rather than driven to overfulfill the Plan by ideology or economic necessity. In other words, “official statements have recognized that workers may find satisfaction in the ‘content of their work,’ irrespective of its contribution to societal development” (Shlapentokh 1986:52). This stress on individual professional satisfaction and advancement was yet another signal that manual labor and people who performed it were supposedly catching up with white-collar professionals, in whose line of work individual contribution is more evident and pride in personal achievement is more legitimate.

Many publications compared the creativity of manual work to that of art: for example, a steelworker who liked to have all his instruments laid out handily was likened to a pianist and his keyboard, or a construction foreman responsible for three work shifts to an orchestra conductor (*Trud* 10/20/72:2; *Pravda* 11/21/70:1). A turner from Moscow also endorsed the idea of an artistic component to manual labor and described her own work as a process of creation: “[In the beginning] you have a metal rod, a blank in front of you. You study the blueprint, choose an instrument, and with your own hands turn a complex, intricate tool part” (*Trud* 6/6/72:4). A prominent Soviet writer praised precision and beauty of manual labor, its “mesmerizing perfection,” and compared a first-rate manual worker to a musician: “Reading musical score, a virtuoso musician can play [a piece] in a way that will thrill its composer. So will a worker of highest qualification, having carefully consulted with the blueprint, with the help of his tools and due to his natural talent, create a part that will delight people [who have the ability to evaluate his work] no less than a performance of a famous musician will elate music lovers” (*Pravda* 1/3/83:2). This is an example of not just lip-service praise to the hegemonic social group, the working class, by a member of intelligentsia, but “a way of *constructing expertise*—that is, creating, organizing, representing to both actors and spectators...that here...there is available

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specialized knowledge superior to that of other persons, who may well be even more knowledgeable and well-trained *but in other domains*” (Larson 1990:36, emphases in the original).

In addition to informal academic honorifics and symbolic comparisons with artists, Soviet manual workers made claims, with support from the press, for more tangible—although not necessarily material—rewards similar to those of the professionals they were being compared with. At the 1971 Communist Party Congress, a grinder from Leningrad complained about a lack of “moral stimuli.” In particular, he was upset that many workers were not permitted to put a personal stamp on goods they made. Such a stamp, analogous to an artist’s signature on a painting, would not only indicate the worker’s mastery, but also mark his particular contribution to the overall product instead of it being lost in a collective effort. The grinder also proposed to hold local and nation-wide talent competitions for workers, especially novices, in various trades: “We have young musician laureates—vocalists, violinists, pianists. Why not establish a contest for a turner laureate?” he posed under the audience’s applause. The Congress attendees were also enthusiastic about his other idea (undoubtedly dictated by the Party, just like his entire address): he suggested that, as “members of scientific and artistic intelligentsia, doctors and teachers” were bestowed official honorary titles and special prizes (the Honored Artists/Scholar/ Musician etc. of the Soviet Union or a specific union republic), it was now time to institute same official honorifics for manual workers. “It would sound so great, ‘The Honored Worker of the Republic’!” he exclaimed (Archives, film #2.537, f. 582, op. 1, d. 12, l. 14-15.). And sure enough, by the next Congress a special medal, “The Labor Glory,” was created for blue-collar workers with extraordinary achievements. Moreover, the USSR State Prize, previously awarded only to professionals in arts and sciences, was also extended to workers who, in the words of a

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working-class Congress delegate, “considered it only appropriate” (Archives, film #2.573, f. 604, op. 1, d. 5, l. 12). Newspapers annually printed the names of the workers receiving the high honor, and often profiled winners of the “professional mastery contests.” And again, they underscored that these challenges tested not just workers’ manual skills, but their broader competence. In short, workers were revered in a similar way and for similar skills and knowledge as were engineers, artists, and other professionals.

Newspapers also covered the presumed fading of probably the most acute and visible distinction between blue-collar workers and professionals, their working conditions. According to one report, workers at a Moscow electronics factory wore “sterile, spotlessly clean coats and snow-white caps” (*Pravda* 6/19/78:3; see also 7/29/70:2), the description of which evoked in reader’s mind a laboratory or a hospital. Many facilities in different industries were also reportedly working to reduce industrial noise, blue-collar workers’ big foe (*Pravda* 7/29/70:2): the transistor radio factory in Riga mentioned above built a “recreation room” with soft music, dim lights, and plush armchairs for its workers (*Literaturnaia gazeta* 10/23/85:10); and a Leningrad timber-cutting shop potted greenery at its factory floor to moderate noise and dust pollution (*Trud* 2/6/80:3). Even industrial machines were becoming more “cultured,” the press reported. “Their movements are now quicker, more precise, more intricate... They are attractive in their modern beauty of smooth concise lines, hidden inside impetuous force, matte-white or multihued panes of facing,” as a *Trud* reporter poetically described new lathes (10/26/73:2). Such tools were obviously “smarter” than old ones and made work of their operators less strenuous. But, more importantly, they were designed with much attention to their exterior, the description of which brought to mind a doctor’s scalpel, architect’s compass, and possibly the most sophisticated and sleekest of all devices—a space rocket. Although Soviet blue-collar

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workers were still mainly doing physical work, at least their workplace was changing to approximate, as much as possible, professionals' offices and labs, which were clean and pleasantly lit, sported comfortable furniture and modern slick tools, and where the only sound was nice, soft music.

In a society of “developed socialism” the party-state, for reasons of politics and economics, could not allow everyone to become a white-collar professional. But it had to demonstrate to its people that some tangible progress towards classless, homogeneous social system was being made and that more and more of the barriers among social groups were being stamped out. Still maintaining the notion of the working class as the “vanguard of the society,” the Soviet press—indubitably with the consent of the state and Party leadership—worked hard to prove that members of the Soviet working class did not need to actually move up into the ranks of intelligentsia to be performing equally intellectual, creative, and sophisticated labor in similarly comfortable working conditions, enjoy same symbolic rewards, and be honored and respected in comparable ways. Yet, by likening blue-collar workers to Soviet professionals, “the scientific and artistic intelligentsia,” public discourse under Brezhnev signaled to the Soviet workers that professions were more desirable than trades, that white-collar workers with their creative independence were superior to manual workers, and that the future of socialism lay in professionalization, individual or collective, of all labor.

From Worker to Consumer: Post-Collectivist Lifestyles

The 1970s also ushered a shift in the consumer-oriented direction supplanting an earlier discourse of revolutionary asceticism and sacrifice. At a Party Congress in 1971, General Secretary Brezhnev declared that even a small sacrifice of people's material comfort was no

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longer acceptable and that comrades who failed to recognize this did not understand the Party's current agenda (*Materialy*:51–52). Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin described the new course even more forcefully: “For the first time in history, socialism is turning the wealth of the society into the wealth of its every member” (Archives, film #2.537, f. 582, op. 1, d. 11, l. 71), signaling an audacious shift in priorities away from austerity and from the primacy of collective over personal interests; now the state would work for the benefit of men, rather than men working for the benefit of the state.

While this rhetoric somewhat dissipated at the next Party Congress in February 1976 (Breslauer 1977; Grossman 1977), it did not mean the leadership abandoned or even lessened its dedication to people's well-being. If indeed financial commitment to the production of consumer goods decreased, the Party re-oriented its discourse to the quality of consumption, both in terms of the quality of goods produced (rather than sheer quantity) and of satisfying consumer demand, rather than producing to meet the Plan. In his report to the Congress, Brezhnev stressed the need to improve quality and expand the inventory of manufactured merchandise: if consumer demand was not yet satisfied “the problem was not with the amount, but rather lack of high-quality, fashionable” products (Archives, film #2.573, f. 604, op. 1, d. 1, l. 92). The Party's Central Committee and Secretariat upheld this position in their internal communications as well. The Secretariat's resolution of June 11, 1979, sent to the heads of republican and regional Party organizations, stipulated that “the Central Committee once again underscores topmost significance of an all-out increase of consumer goods output, unequivocal compliance with the set goals of their production and improvements of their quality... These issues at all times ought to be in the center of attention of all Party organizations since satisfying consumer demand is one of the most crucial economic and socio-political tasks” of the Party (Fond 89, film #1.1000, op.

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32, d. 4, l. 4) as people judged the Party's performance based on how it handled consumer issues (Archives, film #2.577, f. 620, op. 1, d. 2, l. 66). Catering to consumers' ever-rising expectations had safely taken place of a political and economic priority in the first socialist state.

Attention to consumption was not new in late socialism. In the 1930s, consumption was envisioned as a part of a "civilizing process" to convert Soviet workers, especially newcomers to the class, into cultured builders of communism (Hessler 2000; Volkov 2000). In the following decade and a half, Stalin's policies rewarded midlevel managers of the Soviet state with expanded consumption options that instilled middle-class, or rather petty-bourgeois, values in their clients (Dunham 1976). Khrushchev's administration used consumption "to renew and maintain its popular legitimacy [especially among women] without surrendering its exclusive hold on power" (Reid 2002:221). But under Brezhnev, the discourse around consumption elevated values of individuality, self-reliance, and privacy—attitudes that are usually associated with consumption outside of state socialist societies. In short, it was undercutting the main tenet of socialism—its collectivist spirit.

It was not so much the goods themselves that mattered, but how they were to change the lives of people and society and what lifestyles they encouraged. If household durables and means of individual transportation would supposedly save people time and energy to be used instead on collective endeavors, it remained unclear how fashionable and often custom-made clothes, stylishly decorated apartments, and high-tech sound- and video-recording and reproducing devices would necessarily contribute to the advancement of collectivist spirit and socialist values. Instead, this rhetoric fostered "a new ethos [of]...the pleasure of purchasing goods, including new gadgets, the placing of personal interests at the center of one's private life and the acquisition of as much money as possible to satisfy the new wants" (Hirszowicz 1980:116–117).

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The early 1970s saw the inauguration of a new type of a grocery store—the *universam*. *Universams* were different from more traditional shops in two respects, as the name indicates (*univer*, for universal, and *sam*, for self-service): They were to carry and sell a wide variety of foodstuffs, as opposed to specialized stores each carrying just dairy, meat, or produce. More importantly, in these stores customers were to help themselves to pre-packaged products displayed in the open. Both innovations were to reduce the time consumers spent on acquiring food items: the former minimized the number of stops the shopper had to make to buy all the ingredient she needed to prepare meals, and the latter reduced the time she had to spent in the store.¹⁴ Newspapers unanimously hailed *universams* for this time-saving quality (*Trud* 5/22/77:1, 10/20/79:4),¹⁵ but also for greater control customers gained over the process of shopping: “Ordinary shoppers have become active participants of the buying-selling process [because] most store counters that for centuries were an insurmountable barrier for consumers have now disappeared,” *Trud* summarized (9/24/80:2; see also 7/1/73:3). If there were any complaints about this new shopping experience (in addition to ordinary grievances regarding shortages and poor quality of some goods), they usually were about the *universam* staffs’ attempts to regain control over shoppers: customers—both newspaper journalists in their articles and readers in their letters—grumbled about having to check their bags entering the store and being subjected to searches leaving it. Even though shop clerks were not necessarily viewed as agents of the state, the introduction of the new type of store and its generally positive depiction in the press

¹⁴ In older shops she usually had to queue at least three times—to have her purchase weighed at the counter, to pay for it to a cashier, and finally to exchange her payment receipt for her purchase back at the counter—and often more if the products she needed were sold at different counters in the same store.

¹⁵ This is contrary to Verdery’s (1992a) concept of “etatization of time” suggesting that state-socialist regimes were seizing time from their subjects—by purposefully creating consumer queues, among other things—in order to minimize free time they could spend outside of direct control of the state, socializing with friends and family or making money in the “second economy.”

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reinforced for the readers the value of autonomy and self-reliance when making their consumer choices and, perhaps, a more general opposition to supervised communal existence.

Soviet consumption discourse encouraged retreat from collective life into private more directly as well. Many of the products publicized by the media—especially home appliances and gadgets—not only helped conserve time but reduced the need to rely on communal services by making “private space” more usable, comfortable, and desirable. In 1973, *Pravda* (1/31/73:6) and *Trud* (5/24/73:2) each ran news items that featured, respectively, a new refrigerator model with an in-built bar and an electric fireplace with one. In the midst of an anti-alcoholism campaign, these products were praised for creating a cozy atmosphere in one’s home where he could consume chilled drinks by the fireplace “with the flickering flame of simulated coal framed by imitated brick” all he wanted (*Trud* 10/2/73:2). Similarly, proliferation of television sets, transistor radios, reel-to-reel tape players and recorders—all of which were among most frequently and proudly advertised gadgets—privatized leisure by allowing people to enjoy various kinds of entertainment in their own home, rather than in movie theaters, concert halls, or sports arenas. The Soviet press especially enthusiastically described portable devices: a small color TV (*Pravda* 11/23/77:6), battery-powered tape-recorder (*Trud* 5/24/73:2), and mini-fridges powered by car battery (*Trud* 6/2/71:1; *Pravda* 1/31/73:6). Not only could Soviet citizens evade, with the help of this equipment, leisure activities regimented by the state and escape into a relative privacy of their own home,¹⁶ but they also could, if they wanted, create their own entertainment and carry it far away from if not the authorities than their nosy neighbors.

Furthermore, the official rhetoric was mixed on how the time saved with the help of new consumer products and services was to be spent. On the one hand, liberated from household

¹⁶ cf. Siegelbaum (2006b) on how mass production of family cars inadvertently facilitated proliferation of private networks and generally embedded the concept of private in Soviet people’s consciousness and practices. More generally on privacy in post-Stalinist Soviet Union, see Siegelbaum (2006a).

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chores, the Soviet people were expected to use free time on socially meaningful endeavors: civic and political engagement, improvement of their professional qualifications and labor productivity, and collective educational leisure. On the other, Soviet newspapers often elevated, if not outright glorified, the most primordial and unproductive form of leisure: food consumption. “Points of communal eating” for a long time had been sites to celebrate special occasions with one’s family, friends, and co-workers, but, by mid-1970s, people increasingly enjoyed coming to restaurants and cafes “‘for no reason,’ for a good time, for pleasant conversation,” “to see and be seen” (*Pravda* 9/1/74:3; *Trud* 9/24/72:4). Newspapers commended establishments that had a distinctive ambiance created by unique décor, entertainment, and menu: old-fashioned *samovar* tea and blintzes in Leningrad’s “Russian samovars,” traditional Ukrainian fare from a 1812 recipe book and folk music at “Café May” in Zhdanov, or Italian pizza at a Moscow bistro (*Pravda* 9/15/76:3; *Trud* 11/17/79:4, 2/6/80:3). Newspapers especially noted places that created a cozy atmosphere conducive to intimate conversations: small but not crammed dining rooms, music that was not too loud, candles on the tables. And if there were too few places to go to, long lines to get in, unfriendly service or limited menu, the papers were not shy to chide restaurants’ management—and, by extension, the authorities—and demand that customers’ wishes be fulfilled and expectations met (*Trud* 11/17/79:4).

The supposed cornucopia of products and services available to consumers, as described by the press, meant that everyone was going to find what suited their personal needs, tastes, and budget. According to the newspapers, the Soviet people were able to afford and industry supplied them with enough variety of brands and styles that one man’s apartment would be decorated differently from his neighbor’s and a woman’s outfit was not going to be duplicated by her coworker. In the early 1970s, *Trud* regularly ran a column where fashion designers informed the

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readers what clothes and accessories were in that season and how to update one's outfit even on a budget. In 1972, apparently, fashion was going to be "simultaneously individual and universal" (*Trud* 1/1/72:4). There were supposed to be different outfits for "the holidays" and "for the street." A few days before the October Revolution Day, the paper advised its readers on how to refresh their wardrobe for the holiday with "an eye-catching detail [or] a fashionable accessory...a jabot or a timeless collar and cuffs...large buckles, broaches, and flowers" (*Trud* 11/3/73:4). By the mid-1980s, newspapers recognized the existence of "avant-garde" and "ultra-hip" fashions alongside more mainstream styles, although they, of course, were appropriate mostly for younger customers (*Pravda* 3/10/85:6). Consumers were also encouraged to take advantage of numerous tailor shops and more exclusive "houses of fashion" where clothes were custom made. And when, not infrequently, these tailor shops chose to make more off-the-rack clothing to fulfill their production plan, the media deplored them for abandoning "their main task of serving the *individual* needs of their customers" (*Pravda* 11/15/77:3, emphasis added).

Likewise, the Soviet media criticized the uniformity of architecture and home décor. For example, a popular Soviet television comedy, "The Irony of Fate" (1975), opens with a tongue-in-cheek cartoon depicting the march of indistinguishable and featureless apartment buildings from the oceans to the mountains to the deserts. In the film itself, the protagonist, after a night of drinking, lets himself—with his own key—into an apartment furnished very much like his own, located in a building identical to his and with the same street address but in a city 400 miles away. "Our homes and things we furnish them with are now being designed and built without taking into account demands of individual consumers...But every person wants to furnish his home in such a way that it would satisfy his own tastes...[and] each of us is trying to overcome the faceless standard in his own way," a newspaper wrote (*Pravda* 8/16/74:3). It urged architects

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and interior designers to make sure that Soviet homes, their layouts, décor, and amenities were less standardized and more distinctive, even unique. For example, the dull brown color of most television sets could be changed to white, red, or any other “depending on how the rest of the room is decorated” (*Pravda* 8/10/76:3). *Trud* (9/16/76:2) hailed a new type of furniture store, which allowed its patrons to buy as many or as few kitchen cabinets as they needed in a variety of colors and patterns, as opposed to a usual practice of selling pre-fabricated sets that came in one or two hues.

Color, shape, style of home appliances, furniture, gadgets, and clothes became valued in the consumption discourse at least as much as their functional qualities. Manufacturers, recognizing consumer’s demands, strove to make goods more attractive in order to compete with foreign brands that were often more popular not only because of the prestige they gave their owners but because of their unusual styles. For instance, the “more elegant design” of Soviet family cars’ exterior and interior, along with their increased comfort, was invariably stressed by their designers and manufacturers (*Trud* 11/18/78:4, 4/26/79:3, 8/22/80:4; *Pravda* 8/28/82:2). An article in *Pravda* (9/11/85:6), reporting on an experimental model of *Moskvich*, the second most popular Soviet family car, began its description by noting the prototype’s golden color, which its creators dubbed “Stradivari.” In a country where car models had numbers rather than names and most of them came in primary colors, a rare shade with a foreign name that evoked sophistication of classical music must have seemed extremely desirable even to journalists of the Communist Party mouthpiece.

The media’s ongoing promotion of fashionable clothes, smart-looking appliances, funky furniture pieces, and cars of uncommon hues was supposed to demonstrate to its audience the extraordinary achievements of the Soviet way of life and, in particular, the much improved

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standard of living of the Soviet people who now could afford “quality goods” that would satisfy any customer’s demands. Notions of “the average consumer” were no longer acceptable.

Furthermore, by not making goods readily available, the Soviet regime “aroused desire without focalizing it, and kept it alive by deprivation. That is, in socialism desire floated free in endless search of goods people saw as their right” (Verdery 1992b:25–26). Rather than breeding the “New Soviet Man,” this new discourse around consumption gave birth to a tenacious consumer¹⁷ and once again reinforced post-collectivist values: independence and self-reliance as opposed to submission to societal supervision; withdrawal into the private sphere vs. commitment to collective living and interests; individualistic orientation rather than blending in with the rest of society. Not unlike in other historical contexts, mass marketing in the Soviet Union, however embryonic, “encouraged experimentation with identity and an ideal of individualism” (Young 1999:66).

Conclusion

Just as capitalist firms in the West readjusted to facilitate expression of their employees’ autonomy and creativity in an era of post-Fordism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005), so did the Soviet Communist Party reinvent the idea of work and recast the working class as the class of professionals. By the 1970s, the Party began to insist that manual labor should both require and reward knowledge and creativity instead of mere physical strength, be organized to provide control of the work process and relative autonomy from colleagues and supervisors, and give workers a sense of satisfaction and an avenue for self-realization. Also, not only did consumption

¹⁷ Zukin and Maguire observe that “media advertisements...are extremely important in socializing people to be consumers even before the goods are widely available” (2004:190). Even though the Soviet press’s promotion of goods was not exactly advertising, in the absence of a marketing industry it played a similar role.

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become a legitimate pastime like in the West, but Soviet authorities sanctioned consumer goods as markers of distinction and means of self-expression, and they acknowledged the uniqueness of the needs of each individual. In a society without elaborate marketing and advertising industries, the Communist Party became the creator of new desires, the promoter of new lifestyles, and an advocate for immediate gratification, rather than a “dictator over needs” as Fehér, Heller and Márkus (1983) argued. This new depiction of work and consumption placed individuals’ rights—at least to gratifying work and to abundant and trendy consumer goods—above their duties to the state, Party, and ideology of socialism, sanctioning “a concern for oneself and one’s immediate family...an emphasis on personal autonomy...on one’s personal accomplishments” (Inglehart and Welzel 2005:135). Without intending to do so, the Party sowed the kernels of more differentiated, privatized, and commodified dispositions—not unlike those capitalist dispositions described by Bell, Campbell, and Boltanski and Chiapello.

Soviet socialism and Western capitalism were thus not as different as usually depicted: Zygmunt Bauman has claimed that whereas the latter “turned consciously, explicitly and joyously to the production of new needs,” the former was “[s]tuck at its metallurgical state...[and] spent its energy on fighting wide trousers, long hair, rock music and any other manifestation of semiurgical initiative” (1990–1991:187). But evidently there too choice had become “a value in its own right...[and] [w]hat mattered now was that choice be allowed and made, not [necessarily] the things or states that are chosen” (188). Also similar was recognition on both side of the Iron Curtain of an imminent, if not already present, crisis of legitimacy, which caused adjustments in both capitalist and socialist systems. Perhaps theories developed to explain a perceived crisis of Western capitalist democracies—legitimation crisis theories among them—may also help explicate the problems and ultimate collapse of communist regimes (Held

1996:241n2; see also Arato 1993, chapter 3). Uncovering these possible affinities between Soviet-type socialism and Western liberal democracies and understanding why the contemporary Russian culture of capitalism might be more akin to the Western one rather than to most other postsocialist cultures, may deepen our understanding of varieties of capitalisms, both old and new.

Did this post-collectivist discourse really mark the end of socialism? Was it not an attempt at internal reform or cooptation, especially since this rhetoric by no means deliberately aimed at ushering in capitalism? At the very least, I would argue, the stronger emphasis on the individual, acknowledgment and gratification of his needs, and recognition of her autonomy that took place during the so-called “stagnation” of the Brezhnev years were a sign of a significant reconceptualization of the “Soviet” and the “socialist” in the USSR. The Soviet Union at that time was not as neo-Stalinist—uniform and paternalistic—as some have suggested (e.g. King and Szelényi 2004:106–108; Zaslavsky 1982). On the surface, this redefined socialism might be akin to post-totalitarian socialism of the Central-European variety; but in the Soviet Union it was the Party hardliners, in control of what can be said in the newspapers and at official forums, who promoted socialism’s humanization, not humanistic intelligentsia and technocrats as in Central Europe. At the same time, since this new discourse hardly translated into policies, the Soviet Union remained far from Hungary, Poland or Yugoslavia where economic reforms opened possibilities of a market, however constrained, and produced a class of “socialist entrepreneurs” (Szelényi 1988; Seleny 1994; Róna-Tas 1997). If these controlled reforms leading to proto-capitalist markets and proto-capitalist petty bourgeoisie constituted “late socialism on its way to capitalism from below” (King and Szelényi 2004:110), the Soviet Union’s post-collectivist

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discourse might be an indicator of late socialism on the road to capitalism, however long and winding, from above.

At the time the effects of this discourse were indeterminate; they did not have to lead to the end of socialism and the beginning of capitalism in Russia. Yet, discourse, and the discourse of power in particular, plays a central role in constituting subjectivity (see e.g. Foucault 1972; Halfin 2002). By going beyond ideological orthodoxy and offering a new vision of the relationship between the state and individuals and of the goals and values of the Soviet society, the Soviet party-state expanded “what can be said, and how the said can be understood” thus pushing “the legitimate boundaries of social thought and action” (Steinberg 1999:16, 16n14). This new discourse created possibilities for a different way of constituting Soviet subjects: in addition to a politically conscious, hard-working, and selfless “New Soviet Man,” now Soviet subjectivity could be based on the “[c]hoice of the kind of person one would like to become...choice of pleasures one would like to enjoy, choice of the very needs one would like to seek, adopt and gratify” (Bauman 1990–1991:188).

How this discourse of post-collectivism affected its target audience and in what ways, if any, it reconstituted their individual and collective identities and shaped their actions is an empirical question that cannot be fully answered here. However, there is evidence suggesting a change (e.g. Ralis 1984; Lourie 1991; Raleigh 2006; Honey 2007; Mincyte 2007). As I demonstrate elsewhere, in the last few years before perestroika the Soviet people (and not just bona-fide dissidents) increasingly couched their criticisms of “developed socialism” in terms of its restrictions on their private pursuits (whether to read works by banned writers or turn to the “second economy” for apartment repairs), on their desires for self-expression and self-realization in work (by moonlighting at the government job) and leisure (by watching imported thrillers on

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video instead of official newscasts), on their independent decision-making (to give up their Soviet citizenship or to skip voting in an election). Furthermore, worker collectives declared work stoppages not just to resolve “bread-and-butter issues” but because they wanted more autonomy in setting their own work norms and more general control over the production process; people of different class and age opted for foreign radio broadcasts to get independent news analyses; and many desired paid, non-state-run healthcare that would give them choice of doctors and treatments. Because the Soviet state was unable or unwilling to adequately deliver on its new promises in the spheres where this rhetoric was most evident—work, social mobility, consumption, and social status—demands, however spontaneous and sporadic, for the right to independent choice spilled over into the areas beyond the state-demarcated limits. By the time Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, “[i]t was already clear that people had become altogether different” and “if he didn’t start to change things from above, they would start to change from below,” as some Russians have suggested in a recent oral history of that period (Raleigh 2006:250, 148).

This new discourse possibly reshaped not only individuals and their behavior but also transformed group—particularly class—identities. The values of achievement, self-realization, individuality, privacy, consumerism were not the ones that the Party traditionally tried to instill in the Soviet working class, or even professionals and peasants. By consecrating them as legitimate, the Party, without realizing so, began symbolic work (Bourdieu 1987) on behalf of an embryonic middle class.¹⁸ These values of individualism closely resemble dispositions of the Western post–World War II middle class (Archer and Blau 1993:34; cf. Bellah et al. [1985];

¹⁸ In early–mid-1970s almost two-thirds of new Soviet immigrants to Israel identified themselves as middle-class. The authors of the survey concluded that “Soviet socialization has failed to convince at least these people of the accuracy and aptness of the official view of social class structure,” which did not include a middle class (Gitelman 1977:557).

Gans [1988]) and also dispositions and practices of the contemporary Russian middle class. For example, according to surveys, two thirds of the self-identified members of the Russian middle class today live by an old Russian maxim that “one is a blacksmith of his own happiness” and believe they can achieve their life goals on their own.¹⁹ More than 50 percent (as opposed to less than 30 percent among general population) think they are capable of providing for themselves and their families without help from the state.²⁰ A small business owner opined about postsocialist changes, “I simply cannot stand it when somebody orders me about. We have obtained inner freedom, and that feeling of freedom is quite strong.” A stockbroker concurred, “I wanted to be independent, to realize my ideas...Now everything depends on me...I’m starting life anew” (Semenova and Thompson 2004:140, 141). A majority of the middle-class says they like to “stick out” and are not afraid to find themselves in a minority by taking risks in private and professional life.²¹ Certainly more research is necessary to demonstrate in detail the continuity between Communist Party post-collectivist rhetoric and the dispositions of today’s middle class and its role in bringing the end of socialism, but it is fairly clear that a social order based on the domination of cultural capital began to emerge not with the transition to postsocialism (Eyal et al. 1998:7) but years earlier: work and consumption, as well as leisure,²² correspond though imperfectly to three “subspecies of cultural capital: an embodied disposition that expressed itself in tastes and practices (an incorporated form), formal certification by

¹⁹ Although surveys conducted in Russia are often problematic (because of flawed sampling, unaccountable interviewers, reliance of some polling organizations on state funding, etc.), they are nonetheless valuable in gauging how common the ideas and values of post-collectivism have become in public and sociological discourses.

²⁰ *Izvestiia*, November 12, 2003 (www.izvestia.ru/russia/article40956). Retrieved September 28, 2010.

²¹ *Izvestiia*, January 13, 2006 (www.izvestia.ru/russia/article3052351); *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, June 27, 2006 (www.kp.ru/daily/23729/54537). Retrieved September 28, 2010

²² I discuss a similar shift to post-collectivism in leisure elsewhere.

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educational institutions of skills and knowledge (an institutional form), and possession of esteemed cultural goods (an objectified form)” (Sallaz and Zavisca 2007:23–24).

If we accept the other spirit as a legitimate part of capitalist culture, then certain postsocialist practices of Russians that have often been derided as un- and anti-capitalist are not so unreasonable. For instance, during the 1990s—a decade marked by dramatically decreasing living standards—many Russian consumers went on shopping sprees, particularly favoring expensive consumer durables and house repairs, even though they had to economize when it came to food and other basics. But as Olga Shevchenko demonstrates, such seemingly irrational and ill-timed material indulgence was for them a means not only to mitigate the effects of runaway inflation, but also “to truly measure one’s thrift and foresight...give grounds for certainty about the future” and “affirm their practical mastery over their...environment” (Shevchenko 2002:855). *Dachas*, summer cottages and garden plots whose popularity has grown since the days of late socialism, are another way for Russians to assert their independence, autonomy, and a sense of ownership (Zavisca 2003; Galtz 2004), rather than simply a place to grow food to substitute expensive or scarce groceries, as some critics suggest (e.g. Rose and Tikhomirov 1993; Burawoy, Lytkina and Krotov 2000). Perhaps Russia’s transition to capitalism wasn’t a failed one after all.

If this other spirit of capitalism (or its precursor post-collectivism) had indeed set in before anyone even thought of building institutions of capitalism, it might also help explain the dynamics and direction of postsocialist economic reforms: the kind of capitalism that transpired in Russia (less “modern” and “rational,” according to some) could be due to a mismatch between values of self-gratification and “ascetic” practices, such as balanced budget, profit-maximization, and capital investment, brought from without by neoliberal reformers. Russia did have home-

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grown carriers of the “puritan” spirit of capitalism—confined to small groups of bankers (Dinello 1998) or neoliberal ideologues in early Boris Yeltsin government (Shlapentokh 1999)—but exactly how and why they, unlike their Central-European counterparts, were unsuccessful in convincing their compatriots of the virtues of austere capitalism needs further study.

While this last point remains somewhat speculative, I have demonstrated that under Brezhnev the Soviet Union was not as neo-Stalinist as it is usually perceived and that it was undergoing a reimagining of what socialism ought to mean and how it should work (but in a different way than elsewhere in the socialist camp). I also make an important theoretical contribution. I have shown, contrary to most neoclassical accounts, that the agent of capitalism, and of capitalist dispositions more specifically, does not have to be an outsider to or a reformer of the old regime, i.e., dissidents, communist-reformers, and foreign advisors or entrepreneurs. In the Soviet Union it was the most improbable agent—the unreformed and doctrinaire Communist Party—that, however accidentally, sowed the first seeds of the culture of capitalism budding in Russia today. This was not capitalism by design launched as the old regime was collapsing, but more capitalism by chance which the Soviet party-state introduced trying to achieve other goals; and while this might be different from the intentional transitions elsewhere in the region, it is not entirely unlike the near-accidental emergence of capitalism (although of a quite different variety) in the West where one of its main sources was religion and the church (Collins 1980:935). An alternative theory of the communist transition thus comes into view.

Lastly, I have argued for a more nuanced conceptualization of capitalisms that not only focuses on economic institutions (and primarily institutions of production), but also understands capitalism as a cultural system. As I have demonstrated, most existing neoclassical sociology

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exhibits an institutional and production bias and therefore does not pose and answer important questions about the meaning of capitalist institutions, practices, and policies introduced into transitional societies, the varied consequences of which may very well depend on the cultural legacies of these societies. When existing neoclassical sociological accounts have considered the cultural meaning of capitalism as a variable, it is treated as an independent variable only in the form of the classic Weberian spirit of capitalism: the Protestant ethos of asceticism, hard work, and delayed gratification. If this spirit is absent, it is argued, the transition to capitalism is delayed, derailed, or irreparably damaged. However, just as “the original conditions necessary for the emergence of capitalism were not necessary for its continuation” in the West, contemporary transitions “need not follow the route of classic capitalism” (Collins 1980:935). Instead, they may be shaped by a different spirit of capitalism: the cult of the individual, of self-realization, and pleasure-seeking. This other spirit of capitalism is just as longstanding as the ascetic spirit. By positing capitalism—both its culture and institutions—exclusively in terms of frugality, accumulation, and production, even the most critical assessments of the blind export of neoliberal economic ideas to the former socialist states inadvertently help essentialize the neoliberal strain of capitalism as its most ideal, pure, rational, fully developed, modern, and desirable form. For a sociological project whose *raison d’être* is a rejection of the singularity of capitalist logic and a study of the varieties of modern capitalisms, it is only appropriate not to be constrained by an incomplete notion of what its object of analysis is.

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