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Prolonging Life: appreciations of a second-hand 'capital' machine

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Abstract:

In this paper I look at a farm that diversified its business and within this process bought a second-hand sausage vacuum-filler. I do this in order to question how this machine came to be understood and valued by the farmers who bought it. The themes discussed include the role of the machine in changing the working practices of the farm, as well as factors unknown when buying second-hand – purchasers can only ever truly know the reliability and levels of performance of the machine retrospectively. While much work has considered the second-hand cultures of goods such as clothes, brick-a-brac or cars, the departure I make here is to consider goods bought and used in commercial contexts. I consider the calculations made when a second-hand commodity is invested with the risks and tensions of expanding a business. There are critical and additional pressures resting on the machine, for example, if the machine fails to work it may be detrimental to the business. The paper focuses on the appreciations of two farmers and how the machine they bought was used and appreciated.

Key Words:

Second-hand, commodities, capital, farmers, evaluations, appreciations

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1990s many UK farms have diversified their business, through activities which fall outside the remit of 'traditional' farming; for example developing holiday homes on farm land, producing food products or selling produce at niche markets and farm shops (Di Domenico and Miller, 2011; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000; Khan and Prior, 2010). The motives behind diversification are for the most part financial and are in the interests of preserving or sustaining existing farm businesses. Poor financial returns for raw produce, disease, competition from outside the UK and demands from suppliers and retailers are adversely affecting the industry (Law, 2006; Maye et al., 2009). To counter this adversity farm businesses are embracing new found farming skills and practices. Non-profitable activities are not replaced, rather it is 'exploitation of income generating opportunities' that is to the fore (McElwee and Bosworth, 2010). According to the UK's Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) (2014) over 50% of UK farms have now diversified their businesses. Creativity, enterprise and entrepreneurial skill are increasingly relevant to the growth and survival of the UK farming business.

In this paper I look at a farm that once concentrated on supplying pigs to a major supermarket, but has diversified and now specialises in the production of their own pork produce. A central purchase in moving in this direction was a second-hand vacuum-filler machine bought to make sausages and one that fundamentally helped to change the working practices of the farm. The

focus of this paper is second-handness (the condition of being second-hand) and what this contributes to understandings of how commodities are valued. I examine the relations between machine and farmers, as they work the machine and appreciate the machine. In using the term commodity I understand it to mean things or objects that have been valorised in some form or shape, for example, attributing a monetary value. In what follows, I draw upon works that have reflected on the malleability inherent in the value of commodities (see Boden and Williams, 2002; Colls, 2004; Crewe and Gregson, 1998; Jackson, 2004; Miller, 1998b; Williams et al., 2001; Zukin and Maguire, 2004). However, a point of departure I wish to make is to look at ‘capital’ commodities – commodities used for commercial or business purposes - and to look at second-hand goods in these contexts. A coterie of commentators have already been attentive to issues of second-hand consumption and the lives of second-hand commodities (see Besnier, 2004; Cherrier, 2009; Ghose, 2008; Shulman and Coughlan, 2007), though much like first-cycle consumption most attention has focused on ‘leisure/pleasure’ type commodities.

I use the term ‘capital commodity’ to consider the extenuating circumstances of the machine’s value. Management and organization literatures attest ‘Intellectual Capital’ is ‘the sum of everything everybody in a company knows that gives it a competitive edge’ (Stewart, 1997: ix). Debates concerning intellectual capital include, the difficulties faced by conventional accounting as it struggles to quantify the value of intellectual assets (human capital), predicted future revenues (anticipated capital) or the value of business relations (customer capital) (Stewart and Ruckdeschel, 1998). I take inspiration from this work in considering, firstly, that

the object for sale has a commercial function, the reason for purchase is production and along with the buildings and contents of the business it is a capital good (Byrne, 2001). Secondly, the item also has a commodity value due to its marketable composition (Appadurai, 1986) – a monetary and exchange value. Thirdly, there is also a biographical journey to the machine in how it has been sold, used and then re-sold and reused (Cook, 2004); here elements such as risk and value swathe how the machine is appreciated due to its previous life, condition and functionality. It is the combination of these aspects I argue influence and affect the value of the machine precisely because the farmers recognise the magnitude of buying a high-risk product for a new business adventure.

Calculations of risk and the fallout of machine's failure or sub-performance are central to the farmer's guesstimations of efficiency and reliability. Present is a temporal disposition of not-knowing if the machine will work, as the long term implications of ownership are retrospective (Bauer, 1960) – knowing the machine is a 'good one' can only be validated through extended use. Unlike consumable goods like clothes, books or DVDs where condition is observable. A rich vein of literature speaks to the predicament of future uncertainty, for example, futurity (Anderson, 2010), premediation (Grusin, 2004) and *l'Avenir* (a future that can never be known) (Derrida, 1996), as futures imagined, as well as futures provoked and permitted have deep-seated affects on anticipation and action. For consumers, future dispositions enliven assessments of the long term performance of commodities and future factors are persuasive when calculating 'willingness-to-buy' and estimations of value (Sweeney et al., 1999).

Appadurai (1986) asserts, there is much to be explored in following things as they move through their life-cycles. Accordingly, I concentrate on two issues in relation to second-hand consumption: 1) the role of the machine in changing farm practices and 2) appreciations of capital second-hand commodities. In doing this I want to move beyond how commodities are made, moved and sold (Castree, 2004; Cook, 2006; Featherstone, 2010; Knowles and Tan, 2009; Willis, 1991) and give greater clarity to the prolonged social and economic life of a machine that has promoted the diversification of a business. I begin by discussing the consumption literature and how the meanings and values inherent in commodities have been considered. Following this I look to my findings in expanding evidence of second-hand capital consumption and finally I offer some conclusions on its relevance to consumption knowledge.

‘VALUED-ADDED’ COMMODITY-SUBJECT RELATIONS

The relationship between consumer and commodity has for some time been of great interest to consumption commentators (Appadurai, 1986; Cook, 2006; Molotch, 2003). ‘The work of consumption’ (Goss, 2006) often focuses on the distinctive role commodities play in networks, in cultures and in political economies (see Appadurai, 1986; Crang, 1997; Jackson, 1999; Miller, 1998a; Williams et al., 2001). Such relationships have rightly intrigued commentators and there is much to be learned from how and why we purchase ‘things’ (Brace-Govan and Binay, 2010; Carrigan et al., 2004; Warde, 2005). Indeed, relationships between consumer and commodity offer insights into the meanings embedded in things. For example, as Rice (2010) discusses, the

stethoscope is a tool a doctor uses to examine patients, however it is also a commodity that demonstrates status, power and knowledge (see Akrich, 1992; Dant, 2006; Streeck, 1996).

Commodities have the ability to change how they are used and appreciated throughout their lifespan and this can provide insights into the qualities, potentials, aspirations and roles invested in those commodities. Commodities, in this light, are usurped, their 'technological identity' transformed; for example, turntables used to 'scratch' and 'mix' rather than just play records (Faulkner and Runde, 2009) or New York subway workers using work tools as security and protection devices (Molotch and McClain, 2008). When the use of a commodity is altered what often follows is a realigning of the values and the interpretations applied to that commodity. As Molotch (2003) attests, change is an important competent in understanding subject-object relations between consumers and commodities; consumers commodify objects, personalise them and at the same time commodities shift consumer's needs and desires.

Zukin (2003) argues the generative and transformative role of consumption enacts performances of identity, social structure and consumer culture. Much of Zukin's work is attentive to the sense of value held by commodities and by those who appreciate commodities (Zukin, 2003; Zukin and Maguire, 2004). Value energizes the social relationship between consumer and consumed. It is, in essence, a two-way street where value is made in the production and selling of commodities, but it is also rooted in the way commodities are used and in appreciations of what commodities mean and provide to their consumer, as well as, the social and culture symbols they cultivate (Dant, 2008). Such qualities have proved fruitful in

consumption literatures, for instance, Shove and Southerton (2000) trace how in the UK the freezer moved from a symbol of modernity to one of convenience. Freezers now 'allied' with the domestic practices of practically all UK households are an indispensable piece of domestic equipment. For, Silva (2000) 'scripts' are written into commodities and home cooking and the de-skilling provided by new technologies illustrate the complexity inherent in expectations and cooking roles,

it does not appear that the intended construction of microwave technology was to shift cooking simply from 'a woman' to a female 'stupid user'. Microwave technology (at least in its simplified form) appears rather to dissolve the cook by democratizing and deskilling the cooking process: it therefore becomes possible for either a man or a woman to be a stupid cook (Silva 2000, p. 626).

Interactions between cook and cooking technology in the domestic kitchen carry with them assumptions about gender hierarchies and gender roles. As Silva suggests technological innovations require new skills in knowing how to use them, what buttons to press and so on – which in turn may highlight a cook's competences and/or incompetences. The works above, and many others (for example, Meintjes, 2001; Montano, 2010; Orr, 1996; Shove et al., 2007), draw attention to the notion of change and how technology and commodities 'rescript' roles and relations in ways that are expected, and in those that are not. Indeed, as Watkins (2006) argues the 'reach' of the machine can push our thoughts to and beyond the associations and networks between consumers and commodities.

Works on consumer/commodity relationships and on the social and cultural biographies of commodities have tended to concentrate on Kopytoff. He considers the accumulated histories of commodities as they move through networks and relations. Kopytoff (1986, p.67-71) draws on the 3 commodity 'spheres' of the Tiv tribe in Niger: 1) Sphere of subsistence items – such as common food items or menial instruments; 2) Sphere of prestige – objects of high value such as cattle; and 3) Sphere of right-in-people – such as number of wives or offspring. The meanings and cultural imperative of each sphere are, as Kopytoff insists, relatively limited - all objects do not fit into specific spheres and what happens when meanings and uses transgress between spheres? When commodities are 'pulled out of their usual commodity sphere' (Kopytoff, 1986), what then? How we choose things, bring them into our lives and how we give meaning to those things and then strip them of commodity status is what Kopytoff calls 'singularization'. Commodities are, no doubt, embedded within the cultures of their existence - items which enhance beauty in one society may not in another (see Koda, 2004). The aesthetics and tastes associated with commodities are complex. The 'marketplace institution' (Parson 2010) for instance, the organising principles of exchange, as well as the spheres of the market – be they, aesthetics, taste or financial (being a hobbyist or being commercially driven) - are important in discerning the value of a commodity and what 'sells'. Antique traders base their judgements on 'discursive' and 'performative' practices - 'the look' of the object and the 'eye' of the dealer decides (see Parsons, 2010). Elsewhere, Epp and Price (2010) consider the sentimental value of a family table; here value is calculated to include the table's history within the family (Brough and Isaac, 2012). The cultural biographies of things help to conceptualize the consumers'

identities and the relations that drive behaviours and processes. However, the assumptions generated in and around subject-object relations and the entanglements between them; 'what economists mean by externalities; that is, costs that are set outside the frame of transaction' (Miller, 2002, p.225) need expanding and this is where capital second-hand commodities can come in.

BUYING SECOND-HAND

Buying second-hand has throughout history been a widespread form of consumption (see Stobart and Van Damme, 2010), and more recently online methods such as Ebay or Craig's List have provided contemporary examples of the popularity of second-hand consumption (Baker, 2012; DeLyser et al., 2004; Hortacsu et al., 2009). Recent works examining the concept of second-handness have focused on issues such as disposal or discard, risk, trust and negotiating cultural and biographical significance (see Daniels, 2009; Na'amneh and Al Husban, 2012; Thomas, 2003). However, as Gregson and Crewe's (2003) attest the 'mission' is to push for a greater understanding of second-hand consumption and to problematize the production/consumption dynamics of commodities. Analysis of consumption must critically review the 'devaluation' and 're-valorisation' of commodities as they are discarded and then reused and recycled (Gregson and Crewe 2003). Gregson and Crewe highlight the importance of the value of 'rubbish'; thus, giving insights into the values and meanings that are generated around commodities through the social relations, spaces and practices of buying second-hand. Second-hand commodities enter into the consumption dynamic in a different way because they have already gone through a cycle of consumption and they are reconstituted with qualities

and potentials dissimilar to those in first-cycle consumption. As Hetherington (2004, p.159) argues, the aim is to 'challenge the commonsense idea that production – consumption – disposal follows in an inevitable, discrete, linear temporal sequence'. Recent work on waste's mutable qualities has 'followed' commodities beyond their disposal. In these examples it is the journey of the commodity from the global North to South that kindles the geopolitical, provincializing and reuse of objects as what is deemed in the North to be waste is reinvigorated in the South (Beisel and Schneider, 2012; Brooks, 2012; Gregson et al., 2010). How we finish with commodities, move commodities on or dump commodities, whether done carefully or care-freely, all constitute part of the consumption process. As previous commentators have shown there is an integral value to the disposal of commodities, for example, finding a 'good home' suggests a desire for the item to retain some of the appreciations once held by its original owner (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2009; Hetherington, 2004). Found commodities can equally promote spectacular 'finds' for municipal workers as they unearth and consume disposed of marijuana and alcohol at city dumping sites (see Reno, 2009). Whereas, lost commodities hold 'absent presences' and connections, significances and traces as previous uses and owners endure (see Bissell, 2009; Callon and Law, 2004; Mansvelt, 2010). The root of this scholarship is transition; consumption is a continuous process and value is to be found in new uses, in how commodities are broken down, repaired and in their lasting qualities (Crewe, 2011; Graham and Thrift, 2007; Gregson et al., 2009).

The shifting nature of second-hand values raises still further considerations that are often less prevalent in first-cycle consumption, for example, the supply chain or authenticity of the

commodities (see Brooks, 2012; Radon, 2012). There are risks to second-hand consumption as compared to first cycle consumption; warranties, for example, are largely absent (Guiot and Roux, 2010). Exceptions include second-hand car traders offering refunds within a number of days of purchase. Equally, computers are sold as refurbished, reconditioned and as having received a full service. Although second-hand dealers actively reinvest meaning into commodities and their tactics can include highlighting links to previous 'famous' owners (see Parsons, 2006). Histories and biographies of commodities become vehicles of meaning and value creation. Nevertheless, links to previous owners can also be viewed differently; the 'imprint' of a previous owner is cleaned-away and removed (Gregson and Crewe, 2003). Such considerations effect values and meanings, as cleaning and repairing skills, along with aesthetic judgement or tastes, may need to be employed (see Brown et al., 2003; Parsons, 2000). The value of second-hand often includes the price of repair or expected longevity. Despite these reservations, the overriding appeal of second-hand commodities is that they are cheaper and this for many consumers is part of the trade-off and attraction of buying second-hand – exceptions include buying 'retro' clothing (Brace-Govan and Binay, 2010; Palmer and Clark, 2006). Second-hand commodities have been used, corroded, worn, and so on, which adds to the precarious nature of buying second-hand (Park, 2010). Indeed, there are many examples of how risk in second-hand consumption has given rise to industries specialising in alleviating these very risks, for instance, surveying houses before a mortgage is approved (for a good overview of how organisations manage risk, see Hutter and Power, 2005).

The purchase of a second-hand capital commodity develops much of the work discussed, because the farmers in this paper lived with the risk of expanding their business. In addition, they also lived with not-knowing whether the machine would work reliably and efficiently. Owning a capital second-hand machine produces different interactions and working practices; in the following sections I unpack some of these and consider their impact on the farmer's relationship with their machine.

METHODS

The research that informs the paper began as a project examining farmers' markets in the North East of England and the relations between consumers and producers at the markets. While this was the project's focus one instance in particular stood out for me that was unrelated to the initial goal of the project. The second-hand machine, as we will see, was clearly meaningful to the farmers and it was them rather than me that kept drawing my attention to the machine.

Through my work on the project I got to know producers who sold their goods at the markets. Two of these producers were Sally and Mike.¹ I watched, over a period of about two years, as their business grew – notable additions included a farm shop and later a café in the shop. Many of the conversations I had with Sally and Mike were about the growth of their business and for them the purchase of a second-hand vacuum-filler was a key moment. The machine had

¹ Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

been bought before I knew them, but veneration remained towards the machine, to some degree it represented their move to a more professional level. The importance of the machine emerged through our conversations and as I observed it soon became apparent the machine held something different for them.

During my fieldwork I visited over 15 farms where produce was being prepared for farmers' markets and Sally and Mike's farm is not hugely dissimilar to many of those I visited. Most of the farms were about 200 acres in size and all had made concerted efforts to expand their businesses through participation at farmers' markets. The majority of farmers were in their 30s or 40s, shared similar socio-economic backgrounds and had comparable business experience – most having only supplied bigger suppliers and multi-nationals and few, if any, had any retail experience or experience of 'adding value' to their produce (for example, turning beef into beef burgers (see Curry, 2002)).

What I discuss here is taken from my research interviews, conversations with Sally and Mike, and observations I made and noted in my field diary. The fieldwork took place at farmers' markets when, during breaks from selling to customers, we often had conversations, or when I travelled to their farm to interview them or watched the progress being made on their farm shop. In addition, I observed some of their daily interactions as they conducted daily responsibilities and jobs on the farm. It was this access that allowed me to observe the workings of the farm and to discuss the importance of the vacuum-filler - as I observed there

were many demonstrations of gratitude and warmth toward the machine. Finally, telephone follow-on conversations were also held with the farmers following the initial period of research to clarify and expand on certain points and discussions we had had.

THE FARMERS, EXPANDING THE BUSINESS AND THEIR MACHINE

Maximizing potential profits, ending their reliance on supplying a supermarket and making good food were the impetus for Sally and Mike's farm diversification. As Mike explains;

'the main reason why we wanted to go into farmers' markets was to cut out the middle man part of it ... the main crux of it is to provide ourselves with a living, let's not make any bones about it. It's also to provide everyone with beautiful food ... and to survive and make some money out of these bloody pigs' (Interview F14.3).

Once the business had changed to focusing on farmers' markets and cutting out the 'middleman', the business began to specialize in pork products; mainly either dry cured pork or specialist sausages. Dry cured products include bacon, gammon hams, oak smoked ham, pork joints and pork chops. While their sausage range includes a variety of at least 20 flavours, these flavours are often seasonal or experimental, for instance, new recipes are launched at the markets and if they sell satisfactorily are kept. The sausages were initially made in the family's domestic kitchen, using old hand operated machinery 'that was lying around', as well as other equipment that they borrowed from friends. Sausages, as Sally and Mike, stated were 'easily'

their best sellers and their sausages have won acclaim at regional and national meat competitions.²

In changing their business and meeting demand for their products two major changes occurred for Sally and Mike, firstly they built a production building and secondly, they purchased production machinery. The decision unsurprisingly was fraught with many concerns, particularly the financial risks involved. To minimise these risks diversification was conducted with an amount of 'savvyness' (see Evans, 2011) and after researching the opportunities available to them, they sought funded support. As Sally states, with the support of the Rural Enterprise Scheme 'I got a grant and we clad out the old dairy' (Interview F14: 3). The grant helped to minimize some of their potential financial risks and also injected much need funds into the business. The production building was an old dairy that had been used to store agricultural machinery and had a leaky roof, broken windows and no door. The building is adjacent to the farmhouse, is a single story and externally is about 30m by 6m in size (see Picture 1). Internally the building housed the production machinery: a grinder/mixer, a sausage vacuum-filler with linker and a vacuum packer, as well as other essential components, for example, running water, cleanable surfaces and packaging machinery (see Picture 2).

² At these competitions sausages are judged by a panel of experts. The winning regional sausage then goes on to national competitions. These competitions are highly prized by the farmers and products are often labelled with their winning status, for instance, 'Regional Gold Medal Winner 2013'.

Picture 1: The Old Dairy

(Source: author)

Picture 2. Internals of production building

(Source: author)

The production of sausages follows a standard procedure; the meat is prepared (skinned, cut and chopped/ground), and then ingredients are added; such as fat, cereal, herbs and spices or seasonal flavourings. The ingredients are then mixed and chopped/ground again; following this the sausage meat-mix is filled into a casing and the sausage is complete. There are variations to the process, for example, producers can vary styles, flavours and consistencies of sausage - some have chunkier or more coarse ingredients in their sausages and vary the chopping and grinding process, while others use different types of casing, either natural or non-natural casing. The vacuum-filler's role is to fill the sausage meat-mix into the sausage casing; the meat-mix is generally mixed and chopped in a separate machine and then feed into the vacuum-filler through a large funnel at the top of the machine (see Picture 3). The meat-mix is then pumped out at a steady speed into the waiting casing (there is slight variation here with vacuum-fillers in

that they may operate in different ways. The cased sausages then run through a linker³ – this device attaches to the vacuum-filler and cripples or twists the sausage into particular lengths. The sausages are then cut into quantities (usually 6) and packaged ready for sale.⁴

Picture 3: A Sausage Vacuum-Filler

³ To view a sausage vacuum-filler in production see,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_wIApjQLIo

⁴ Traditionally sausages in the UK are sold in quantities of 6 - this may assume certain socio-technical arrangements among consumers (i.e. family size or availability of refrigerators).

(Source: <http://johannesburg.gumtree.co.za>)

Sausage vacuum-fillers improve production in a number of ways: for example, increased speed and efficiency - which reduces labour; greater sanitation – the machines are designed to be easy to clean, reducing the risk of contamination; better control over quality, portions and consistency. The business after the purchase of the machine was producing 1000 sausages per month and running over 80% of its outputs through the farmers' markets and the farm shop. There was a substantial cost in purchasing the machine, a business loan was secured and £20,000 paid for the vacuum-filler (a new machine would cost in the region of £40,000).⁵ The

⁵ Correspondence with UK food machinery sales team (February 2014)

German made vacuum-filler had been the most expensive and the first machine they bought for the new business.

APPRECIATIONS OF A SECOND-HAND MACHINE

The vacuum-filler's capabilities and the new farm practices it generated encouraged Sally and Mike to value and appreciate the machine in certain ways. In what follows I draw on what I call 'imprints left', 'the creation of value' and 'appreciative touches' in order to highlight the commercial function, biographical knowledge and worth evident in the relationship between farmers and machine.

IMPRINTS LEFT

Buying second-hand equipment is relatively common in the UK food processing industry. Results, for example, of an online search reveal there are at least 15 companies in England specializing in 'new, used and refurbished' food processing equipment (February 2014). It was to one of these companies that the farmers initially turned to when sourcing a machine. The company was unable to meet the farmer's needs, mainly due to the farmer's budget constraints, and directed them to a butcher with a challenging sell. The seller was a small family butcher in a small northern town close to a sizeable city and about 100km from the farm. The business had been established in 1898 and had been handed down from generation to generation. However, due to the collapse of the mill industry in the town and the progressive decline in footfall and sales, combined with the fact that neither of the butcher's twin

daughters wished to continue the business, the butcher decided to retire, close the business and sell his shop and machinery.

The vacuum-filler machine had been bought new in the 1970s and at the time of purchase was viewed by the butcher as a prudent investment for his thriving business. Production took place in the basement of the shop and it was this location that proved telling when the time came to sell the machine, as potential buyers had been deterred by its awkward location. As Sally explains, 'I think he was just happy to get rid of it in the end, he was going to scrap it, it was going to the scrap heap. I don't think anybody else was interested' (Interview F14:8). Removing the machine took an entire day; the butcher had integrated the machine into a production system containing a number of machines which was firstly dismantled and then the vacuum-filler was broken down into smaller parts. Using a series of pulleys the machine was hauled from the basement onto a flatbed truck before being transported to the farm.

Sally and Mike's reactions in salvaging the machine suggest a discerning pride in its preservation and reclamation. Certainly the butcher had just reason to sell; however, the machine was in working condition which raised incredulity as to how it could be considered as obsolete and fit for disposal. The imprint of previous ownership held by the machine for Sally and Mike is disbelief at its diminished worth, as well as astonishment of their 'lucky' find and ultimately in the potential benefits of the machine's functionality to their business.

THE CREATION OF VALUE

Prominent in conversations with Sally and Mike was the machine's status as a bargain. Although said with a contorted face, the kind one makes when something appears to be perilous and suggesting an expensive or 'risky' bargain, it was clear that they were proud of their acquisition. The machine was talked about as being efficient, reliable and helpful, and in many ways this is exactly what the vacuum-filler is; yet, a deeper sense of appreciation also prevailed in their interaction with the machine. The initial value of the machine was understood through the practical benefits the machine realised – it had justified their pre-requisites of what they needed the machine to do and their expectations of the role the machine would perform. Nonetheless, the vacuum-filler was also appreciated for a more emotive value and one based on the alleviation of risk. I want to expand on these points by first looking at the more practical elements to value creation and then to the more emotive valuations that Sally and Mike spoke of.

When Sally and Mike first began making sausages the sausages' appearance was rather 'home-made' - consistency in shape and sizes was often irregular. As Sally states,

they [the sausages] didn't look quite right ... how commodities look is important, to attract them [customers] initially, once they have it, if it tastes nice then they'll come back and I want it to look nice, and catching trade is important (Interview F14:2).

For the UK agricultural industry the production and packaging of food demands homogeneity, not least because produce must adhere to certain standards, for example, safety standards. In

addition, there has been a degree of conditioning in this regard where consumers expect products to be packaged or to look a certain way, for example, it is rare to see a curly courgette in a supermarket (Ranjbarian et al., 2010). Farmers' markets, it has been argued, counters some of this food homogeneity through localism, quality food, performance or short supply chains (see Ilbery and Maye, 2005; Murdoch et al., 2000; Spiller, 2010; Winter, 2003), yet the meat products on sale at farmers' markets do often look very similar to those on sale in, for example, supermarkets.⁶ However, food and its monetary and cultural value often increases due to its production techniques, for instance, a non-mass-produced or specialist product gains credence precisely because of how it was made (Campbell, 2005; Crang, 1997; Miele, 2006). Sally and Mike's machine produces sausages that adhere to standards – be they customer expectations or safety standards. In doing this the machine ensures good quality produce, which in turn maximizes the potential for growing sales and the stability of the business. The result is that the value of the machine is felt in terms of the product it creates, a standardised artisanal sausage, and in terms of financial reward, the business is making money.

Failure was a constant anxiety for Sally and Mike, as their nervousness subsided, justification in buying the machine then grew. As a result the relationship between farmer and second-hand machine shifted to an appreciation built on the wider perspective of what the machine had allowed them to do. Sally comments,

⁶ Meat products 'unpacked' can be seen in many butcher shops or delicatessen counters in supermarkets, but even here there is a degree of packing, as the product is generally displayed behind a glass cabinet and the food is seldom touched or examined by the consumer before purchase. In most instances, the product is purchased in a plastic bag.

‘it was a hell of a lot of money, you know ... I did have sleepless nights about it, but ... we couldn’t do without that machine... it’s really important that one’ (Interview F14:4)

The machine allowed Sally and Mike to make the product they wished to make and what structures much of their relationship with the vacuum-filler is a sensation of relief. Deflated, through the extended use of the machine, are the risks once associated with second-handness and escalated are the perceived values of the machine.

APPRECIATIVE TOUCHES

The final aspect I highlight are the interactions between Sally, Mike and the machine. They interacted with the machine in two types of ways, firstly when working with the machine it was dealt with in very practical terms; it was turned on, the meat-mix was placed in, settings on the machine were made and checked, and then the processing began. Once production was finished and it was powered down a second type of interaction took place. Often when Sally and Mike were in the vicinity of the machine and were speaking about it they would touch it in specific ways; a soft tap to the top of the body of the machine, a gliding stroke or the careful picking off of imaginary specks of debris. The following is taken from my field-diary.

How [Sally] handled the machine today was interesting. She kept polishing it and adjusting it as we talked. It reminded me of someone with a new car or even how people are with new babies. Staring lovingly in a kind of very proud manner.

Touch is a powerful form of expression (see Hughes and Paterson, 1997; Stoller, 1997). As Rodaway (1994, p.41) suggests, 'touch is above all the most intimate sense limited by the reach of the body, and it is the most reciprocal of the senses, for to touch is always to be touched'. The act of touching can be a process of communication and symbolization, 'actions performed with and upon commodities typically leave traces: once the action is completed, there is still a material thing that embodies meaning' (Streeck, 1996, p.382). The machine does not feel the sensitive touch, nor does it reciprocate the touch, but in this touch there is a social message (Alvord, 2000). What I suggest, is that touch is an embodiment of the farmers appreciation that is expressed in an effusive manner. Exhibited in these attentive touches are quite possibly expressions of emotional attachment and gratitude to the machine (David Edvardsson et al., 2003).

PROLONGING THE LIFE OF A SECOND-HAND MACHINE

Sally and Mike's appreciation of the machine are based on what it is like to work with this particular machine on a daily basis; as well as, in reaction to the worry and anxiety they felt when the business was expanding. The machine offers an example of how new practices instilled by farm diversification have been enacted as a business moves from one based on supply of raw products (pigs), to one of production and 'adding value' (see Curry 2001). In addition, the machine (along with factors such as the production building and the emergence of farmers' markets as sites to sell produce) has developed the business from the kitchen table, to one consistently producing 'professional' sausages.

There are a number of aspects I want to highlight here; firstly the performance of the machine is viewed through a retrospective gaze. The machine at the time of writing is still in use at the farm and has 'never given any bother'. The 'futuraity' and the unknown performance of the machine has reached a positive outcome and with it a verification of a shrewd purchase (Guiot and Roux, 2010). For the farmers, appreciations of the machine are based on alleviations of anxiety – and, to some degree, the disbelief aimed at those who showed no interest in the machine is fortified. Secondly, the business logic of buying second-hand has also been successful – the farmers paid approximately half the price of what a new machine would cost. The vacuum-filler's second-handness was always readily acknowledged by Sally and Mike and this suggests their satisfaction in securing a 'deal'. There is an economic rationale which underlies the imagined potential.

Many works have proclaimed consumption and identity are deeply intertwined and the knowledgeable and resourceful consumer elicits a means of defining oneself and associating with certain groups and distinctions (Bauman, 2005; Bourdieu, 1979; Gregson et al., 2007; Susman, 2003) – in this case a 'canny' and astute business person. Thirdly, the machine has allowed the farm business to prosper and encouraged new farming practices that are now integral to the business. With extended use, and the success of this use, evaluations are strengthened and the machine's centrality to production and to the business is substantiated. As Akrich (1992:222) would have it, 'there was, or so it seems, never any possibility that it could have been otherwise'. Sally and Mike have effectively become sausage makers and sausage

sellers, as well as farmers, and were able as Mike ventured, 'to make money out of these bloody pigs'.

CONCLUSION

The lives of commodities enjoy a litany of meanings and values along journeys of production, purchase and use, as well as through those extended journeys of discard, disposal and re-use (Hetherington, 2004; Knowles and Tan, 2009). In the paper I have focused on the impact of a capital second-hand commodity, because such commodities pose an uncommon focus in the second-hand consumption literature. These commodities are at times vital to businesses and organisations and indeed offer, as I have argued, insights into the meaning and values to be found in commodities. Although second-hand commodities are easily linked to their production and have biographies (see Lane et al., 2009); they do retain distinctions from new or first cycle consumption. Just think of how certain commodities may be valued because of their quality, trademark or reputation and how these factors in a second-hand context are easily usurped by the condition or price of the item. A second-hand commodity that is expensive or well used, no matter what its biography or label, will influence its appeal to a consumer. Nevertheless, as I have discussed, while the imagined potential of a perspective purchase is to the fore in how and why commodities are bought, this potential only serves to frame how evaluations are made and remade. Factors such as relief, disbelief and gratitude are important to understanding of how and why commodities are prolonged. The relationship between Sally and Mike and their machine is structured by the production of sausages. Making large amounts of sausages without a machine would be tough, to say the least and without it the business would have

struggled to meet demand. Over time the machine and its performance in making professional sausages became central to the growth and prosperity of the new business.

I have endeavoured to highlight the contribution capital second-hand commodities can make to consumption literatures. My emphasis has been on the extenuating circumstances of the machine's value, most especially its worth to the business in terms of capital and monetary value. It is a machine central to the new practices and one that was economically shrewd because it was second-hand and was cheap. But here lies the crux of the argument, the machine is different because it is second-hand, the machine is different because its history or biography raise tensions and risks and the machine is different because only with retrospective reflection can the machine be seen to have worked and been a success. I have considered some of the changes initiated by farm diversification in the UK and central to the change was a second-hand vacuum-filler machine. The machine has also come to embody specific values. Distinct calculations and potentials have been made by Sally and Mike and with them retrospective appreciations have helped in the 're-valorisation' of the machine. This paper has highlighted just a few of those appreciations and what these too can contribute to our understandings of consumption.

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