

# **The montage of the life course of Alexander Maloletov: searching for happiness in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia**



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**Master of Philosophy in Visual Cultural Studies**

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## Abstract

My research was conducted in Velsk, the southern capital of the Arkhangelsk region (not a big city in the north of the European part of Russia). This work is focused on the life course of 67 years old Alexander Maloletov. In my study I question the role of happiness for the individual, connected to present self-identity and «personal memory museum». I am considering happiness as an emotional lens, through which it is possible to think evaluatively and narratively about people's selves and lives. According to the researcher and anthropologist Neil Thin the enjoyment of life becomes significant, it is culturally legitimated and structured, through life reviews and life stories. Also I explore how a happy life course depends on changeable socio-historical context.

The main informant is an eccentric, stubborn, impudent man named Alexander Maloletov who works as a TV journalist, writes poems and prose, fishes and constantly quarrels with his sixth wife. Everyone knows Alexander in his native town Velsk. Twenty years ago people called Alexander a madman. He used to live on the streets, beg for money, drink vodka, lotions, colognes, varnishes, glue and steal things from his mother's house. Poetry became a life vest for him. At the beginning he wrote autobiographical poem. Later he started reflecting on the events of the Great Patriotic War, the Afghan and Chechen wars, as well as the Siege of Leningrad. He published five books.

My research project deals with idea that stories about happiness always contain realistic stories about people's inner conflicts, doubts, struggles with life circumstances and misunderstanding of people and their value systems. The important message of this master work is that well-being is not constant and stable but rather it is a field of struggle. One of the interesting discoveries of this project was the experimental method of investigation. Alexander Maloletov wrote a letter to himself from the present to the past. This method of communication allowed me, as a researcher, to know the reflections of my protagonist as close as it was possible.

Key words: happiness, life course, memory, self-identity, Russia.

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## **1.1. Introduction**

### **1. The life course in the «turbulent zone»**

«Frustrated or disappointed generation» - this phrase can be used to characterize society of 1950 in the USSR. The constant feeling of fear of each day, millions of people killed not only on the battles fields but also in peaceful towns and villages, destroyed families and hunger which was driving people to madness - all these terrible experiences of the Great Patriotic war (1941-1945) that took more than 26 million lives according to official statistics, were not experienced by people who were born in the 1950s.([https://www.gazeta.ru/science/2011/06/22\\_a\\_3671157.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/science/2011/06/22_a_3671157.shtml). 26.04.2017).

However, their childhood memories are filled with stories from their parents, who had to go through this social disaster. Since childhood the post-war generation had seen how global historical events can influence the life course of the one «little man»; how a «little man» was adapting to the new reality and was looking for ways to not to lose the moral compass and to find the inspiration for creation of a happy life.

In the early fifties, when the country was ruled by Joseph Stalin, the policy of mass repressions in the USSR was finally ended. Knowledge about this tragic period of history, as well as knowledge about the Great Patriotic War, was passed from generation to generation. Anglo-American historian Robert Conquest created a special term - the Great Purge – that marks years 1937 and 1938 years, as the years of the most terrible repression. (Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*, 1968). The Communist Party had very strong policies of brainwashing, especially regarding the importance of industrialization as a solution for economic problems, love and respect of the personality of Stalin (later this phenomenon of state propaganda was called by researchers as "Stalin's personality cult"), as well as destruction of the «public enemies» - those Soviet citizens, who disagreed with government policy. Such dissenters, among whom were doctors, scientists, politicians, foreigners and members of ethnic minorities, were immediately killed or sent to either labor camps or prisons where they died because of hunger or hellish work conditions. Soviet and Russian historian, main researcher at the Institute of Russian History Viktor Zemskov observes that between 1921 and 1954 – there were 3,777,380 people arrested and 642 980 people killed in accordance with government decisions. ([http://scepsis.net/library/id\\_937.html](http://scepsis.net/library/id_937.html) 27.11.2016)

Despite the tragic past of the Soviet Union, in 1950 Soviet citizens began to believe that they can have peaceful daily life. Many political prisoners started to come out of prisons, cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human in history to go out into the space in 1961, the country was developing agriculture, although sometimes in the strange and adventurous way (for example, famous Khrushchev's "corn rush" –a mass growth of the corn throughout the country despite unsuitable climatic conditions for the plant). The population which was tired of the constant fear of the obscure reality was

finally leaving in the socially stable society. This was ironically depicted in the popular Soviet film "Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears" (director Vladimir Menshov, 1980) which presents Moscow in 1950s. In the scene when one of the heroines refers to her friend that is going to get married, she says:

*«The future is known in advance! First they will save up money to buy TV, after to buy a washing machine, then they will buy a fridge. Just like in Gosplan (governmental plan), everything is decided for next twenty years!»*

People had their daily plans, dreams and hopes but at the same time were continuing to live in the strict frameworks of collectivism, communism and partnerships. Thus the enthusiasm about the victory over fascism and cosmic achievements was soon fading away. The life of Soviet people became part of the system of «consumption» - to find those or other scarce products in the country. The stages of "consumer growth" for a Soviet man were the following – to buy a carpet, cut-glass ware, a big sideboard, also known as «a wall», a color TV and a car. In those years Soviet citizens were buying everything that might seem exotic. For example, in the seventies it was fashionable to buy books, cut-glass ware and china ware. It was common to see long queues in the books shops for Dumas novels or for Theodore Dreiser's book "Sisters of Kerry" by or for Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov", for example. Also, Soviet citizens always tried to find imported goods which were seen as symbols of the "beautiful western life" – such as jeans or imported audio equipment. However, most of the times these things were not available, so they became a kind of fetish. Soviet people (of course, not all of them) were filling up their cabinets with such things as empty but beautiful whiskey bottles, empty tin Pepsi-cans and empty cigarette packs with the picture of the Marlboro cowboy. These artifacts were demonstrated to relatives and friends. (<https://www.gazeta.ru/infographics/deficit/> 19.04 2017).

It seems that in 1950 and in the following decades Soviet citizens had closed minds – many books and films were not allowed to be read and watched, there were difficulties with travelling abroad and it was hard to find any foreign goods in shops. But something strange and curious slowly appeared in Soviet society during the «reserved» time. For example, there was the subculture «stilyagi» (hipster) - young people protested against the Soviet stereotypes of behavior. They were dressed in bright clothes, liked foreign music and dances and often used foreign words in their everyday speech. In the seventies in the USSR, there was another counterculture – «hippies» (flower children) who were often perceived as apolitical, lazy kooks. They organized demonstrations against the war in the Vietnam. (<http://back-in-ussr.info/2012/02/stilyagi/> 06. 12. 2016).

In 1985-1991 people of the Soviet Union experienced a real euphoria when the government started a policy of radical reforms which is called «perestroika». People could freely read books by Pasternak, Solzhenitsyn, Bulgakov, Zamyatin and many others, new magazines and newspapers that openly talked about social changes in the

society and it was possible to be engaged in the private business and say “goodbye” to the communist ideology. But the euphoria didn’t last for a long time, the country with the new political reality broke «the spine itself» with a terrible economic crisis. People lost their jobs or didn’t receive salary for six months. Empty shops have become a symbol of this era. Many despaired people began to drink alcohol or committed suicide. According to the cinema language population at the time of collapse of the Soviet Union felt the suspense - confusion, fear and excitement. People tried to find money and survive, to save family; this is why some people became involved in criminal business projects which didn’t bring happiness in the end.

The life course of people born in the fifties is very similar to the air balloon flight in a crazy turbulent zone. Life course can be understood as events that create transitions and trajectories of roles extending across the life, such as having job, getting married, having children and divorce. Another aspect is observation between changing environment of the individual and its results. Additionally, it is an approach offering a way of linking past experience with present and future life projects. (these explanations were taken from works by Glen H. Elder, Jr., professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). In such complicated, changeable times it is possible to observe the strong connection between person and the socio-historical context. Periods of crisis in the country force people to come out of their usual comfort zone and it can be very painful process. Macro-level stressful events also influence an individual’s behaviors and interactions, relationships with family. In these cases the person feels lost, social networks become looser and groups are very unstable and impermanent, so there is nothing sure and nothing can be predicted. That’s why an individual is forced to find his identity, the way how he engages with the world through space and time, how he understands his own place in the society.

Can people be happy when their life course depends so much on the socio-historical context? If the answer is yes, how do people interpret happiness? And how does the feeling of happiness influence the construction and developing of the self? For a long time the theme of happiness was perceived in anthropology as a «silent» theme. Abstractness and subjectivity gave rise to doubts among researchers. However, this phenomenon can be considered an important part of discussions about human flourishing, in different contexts it is conceived, valued, deployed in moral discourse and in the evaluation of experience, action and identity. Happiness is the concept by which people evaluate lives and make personal and collective choices. Since happiness analysis is closely intertwined with the analysis of human flourishing, needs, nature, personhood and social progress. Also British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski in his book «Argonauts of the Western Pacific» writes about the goal of ethnography which is connected with the concept of happiness.

*In each culture, the values are slightly different; people aspire after different aims, follow different impulses, yearn after a different form of happiness. ...To study the*

*institutions, customs and codes or to study the behavior and mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realising the substance of their happiness ...is ...to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man* (Malinowski 1922: 25).

In this research project I discover happiness as not merely an emotion synonymous with the experience of joy and bliss or the notion that it refers to success, luck and fortune. Happiness can be understood not as a single moment of satisfaction but as a long process in which it is interesting to analyze the way of searching for happy life and to see the connection between unique life course of the individual and the society. Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh Neil Thin writes that today happiness tends to be marginalized or hinted at through other themes such as ambition, success, and love in story-telling –fairy-tales, fiction, book-length biographies or everyday personal narratives. (Thin 2012:325). My research project deals with the idea that stories about happiness always hide hard stories about how people fight with life circumstances and inner conflicts, doubts and misunderstanding during communication with people and their systems of values. In the end it is also a story about how the inner world of the individual is transforming, as the person begins to perceive the surrounding reality in a different way, to discover something new. The anthropologist Paul Stoller writes how the challenges of life like illness, for example, provoke strong desires to express a new sense of awareness of one's place in the world and of the meaning of one's life.(Stoller 2007: 184). Another anthropologist Michael Jackson mentions in his book «Life within limits: well-being in the world of want» that we need to understand well-being not as a settled state but as a field of struggle (Jackson 2011:10).

In the process of searching for happiness the individual can find something other than happy life, emotion evaluates the world as it relates to life projects, values and the playing out of own self-identity. The hypotheses for my research project can be the idea that the process of discovering a happy life is also a social process of constructing the self which develops from the social experience and activity and relationships with individuals from different milieus. During my fieldwork I focus on the life course a representative of the generation of the fifties, Alexander Maloletov and his «hard happiness». My protagonist was born in 1949 year and his life course within the socio-historical context of Soviet and post Soviet Russia impressed me very much. The man was called crazy by the people in Velsk (his home city in Russia), who begged for money to spend on alcohol, sometimes lived on the streets, hadn't a constant serious job, wasn't a husband and father but had a wife and child. Then Alexander stopped drinking and changed his social status: he became a newspaper and television journalist, published five books, engaged in a hobby-fishing, worked as a stoker in a geological company and went in the family house. The portrait Alexander's life course is full of different hardships with which he constantly struggled.

Having in mind all this information and empirical data I formulated research questions:

What are the relationships between the «personal memory museum» and present day identity? In this case, I can think about how the experience of the past has changed people and at the same time how they conceptualize it today.

In what way has the interpretation of happiness of my protagonist been changing in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russia? How did large-scale social forces like the collapse of the Soviet Union and the policy of perestroika in Russia influence the life course of one of the representatives of the generation from the 1950s?

Alexander Maloletov is very a intensive and theatrical person, so self-control in different social situations, manipulative strategies in interaction and deep sincerity are very important to him. It is important to understand his personality as a essentially a «basket of selves which come to the surface at different social moments as appropriate». (Cohen 1994:11) The question is – How to characterize the visual identity of my protagonist in front the camera?

## **The fieldwork context**

### **Motivation and research interest**

My first colorful impression of Alexander Maloletov I got from his poems which I found on the internet before I left for fieldwork. His poems are short, quick, lyrical passages from his personal diary and they are about everything: about a red sunset on the river, about the image of the pink seagull like the image of happiness, about his dead father who left so few memories, about men who have returned from the Chechen war, about his time in prison, about an alcoholic euphoria and alcohol tragedy, there are many poems about the Siege of Leningrad. To be honest, I didn't fall in love with these poems, but I was surprised by their rhythm and some metaphors. At this moment I wanted to know Alexander better.

In January 2016 I wrote to Alexander Maloletov for the first time and told him about master's project and ideas about the film that I want to make. A huge «wave» of honest and open letters fell on me when I was still in Tromsø - Alexander talked about himself, his home city, his family and a lot about happiness. He told me a story about his youth: he had read the novel by Soviet writer Oleg Kuvaev «Triple polar plot» which was written in 1968. This novel is about a young sportsman who lost the ability to see. One day he learned about Nenets folklore: if you find a pink seagull (this bird lives in northeastern Siberia and West Greenland), the ability to see comes back. This pink gull

can be understood as an expressive image of happiness and harmony with the environment, Alexander fell in love with this literary image and all his life he tried to find his own pink seagull, his happiness. As a researcher it was interesting to pay attention to the moment how the literary plot with the author's fiction, poetic image, fantasy has influenced the real world of the individual. In this case literature (the Soviet novel) inspired Alexander to discover a happy life, pushed him to self-knowledge and knowledge of the environment. Andrey Tarkovsky in his cinema-lectures reflects on literary, poetic approach: In my view poetic reasoning is closer to the laws by which thought develops, and thus to life itself... So, it seems, poetry approaches truth insofar as it reveals the nature of life. Because it is the logic of life itself, poetic linkage triggers the emotions...( Tarkovsky 1986: 20)

Thus the phenomenon of happiness gradually became one of the main topics of my research project. At first sight, this concept seems to be empty, even absurd, and absolutely not suitable for the role of a tool for analysis. However, I think that this concept is a kind of emotional lens through which it is possible to observe the changeable life course of an individual, his conflicts with society and the discovering process of self. Happiness can be understood as an emotional force that shapes human evolution. By researching this sensorial component we can see more in relationships between the individual and the environment, as well as between the individual and his behavior, his values. To my mind, it is very important to try to find new perspectives while creating something (even if it is a research project during a Master's program). David MacDougall writes about this in the book «Transcultural cinema», he observes that filmmaking acts concentrate the emotions of everyday experience. (MacDougall 1998:58) He paid attention to the fact that many films are in fact declarations of love (and like happiness, love is connected with emotional sphere). These declarations may take the form of an attachment to a particular social and cultural milieu, as is found in Rouch's films, or be directed toward particular individuals, as in *Prelozans*. It may be freely acknowledged or expressed indirectly, transferred or sublimated into exploring the relationships of the subjects themselves.

I must say that another subtopic that is curious to me in this project is memory and identity. In an interview Alexander admitted, that without preservation of memory the individual cannot be really happy. Memory is something not synonymous to the finished reflections. It is selective and flexible process of constructing past experience. For me it is important to understand how my protagonist perceives past time, what he tries to forget and why and in what social situations memories will be activated in his present life.

In the book «Death, Memory and Material culture» (2011) I found the term – personal memory museum. We «keep» and «preserve» our memories almost as though they are objects in a personal museum. We choose when to disclose or display our memories to others, either in the form of personal narratives or photographs. (Hallam 2011: 3). Alexander is 67 years old, he has a great «memory museum» and most of his

recollections became empirical data for my research. In the life course of Alexander Maloletov there were many different events that were as «jumps» from something before to something after and these changes in time and space give him the opportunity to define his identity. Identity as well as memory is not something ready, stable and constant. It is a way a person contacts with the environment, understands the self and others during interactions. Researchers write that in modernity identities are no longer ascribed but are instead achieved. Questions of identity become then questions about states of mind and bodily enactment in the world (Tilley 2006: 10)

### Velsk: a city that remembers the past

It seems that time has stopped here. Portrait of the city Velsk resembles not a modern city but rather a small, quiet, good-natured village. Tall birches and poplar trees that grow almost everywhere in Velsk are guards that protect this place. Milkmaids with red and spotted cows calmly walk along the main streets and animals eat the grass; older women in ornamental Russian kerchiefs sell eggs, honey and milk from individual farms; children ride on old bicycles to the local river Vaga and try to catch fish; the noisy tractor carries hay for the horses in the stock breeding complex near the city center; later in the evening local young people are having fun: someone drinks beer and someone flies on a paraglider in the field. Most people live in their wooden houses with a banya (bath-house) and a small garden; all houses are beautifully decorated with large windows and a fence behind which the cat yawns sleepily. (from my notes). (Map was taken from Google Maps).



My fieldwork was conducted in Velsk, the southern capital of the Arkhangelsk region with a population of 23.000 people. Velsk is the city that has saved the tradition of the merchant past. Here since ancient times people engaged in trade with the Russian principalities and something people sent abroad, for example, resin, rye, oats and crockery. The first settlement in Velsk documented by Novgorod Prince Svyatoslav Olegovich in 1137. Today people in Velsk are also actively engaged in trade: develop business; businessmen produce and sell forest products, meat and dairy products, mineral water and bread. However, this trade often is only on the local level in the Velsk, though some of the goods are delivered to Arkhangelsk.

As many locals say (some I met at the bus stops, communicated with in stores, and also from the stories of my protagonist and his friends) that today Velsk has an atmosphere of nostalgia. If you walk around the city you can see abandoned buildings which are transformed into museum objects or have become places for night walks for teenagers. There are the old bookstore from the Soviet past, the old cinema «The World» («Мир»), a dance floor near the library, the Soviet police building and barracks in which prisoners lived during Stalin's repressions. Most young people are leaving Velsk because there is no university and it is difficult to find a good job. In 2015 one of the most important factories in Velsk – bird farm was closed and a lot of people lost their jobs. The airfield which is located in four km from the city was also closed.

Velsk remembers tragic stories from the history of the country. There is a railway station on the Moscow-Kotlas-Vorkuta line. This road was built by prisoners from labor camps in 1940. During the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) trains with women, children and the elderly came to Velsk from the battle field: Leningrad, Novgorod, Pskov and Murmansk region, Moscow, Kaliningrad, Kharkov and Kiev. Thousands of evacuees were placed in the city, given a house and a job and helped with money, food and clothing. Those who lived in Velsk helped the Soviet Union in the war against Germany, for example by sending food. So, 8.7 tons of potatoes and 940 kg of vegetables were sent on the battle field in 1943. (Zyeva «Вельск мой-маленькая Русь» 2007) Also Velsk sent short fur coats, boots, gloves, sanitary carts and skiing equipment. 16.753 soldiers from Velsk took part in Great Patriotic War. It is important to note that people from Velsk participated in the Chechen and Afghan wars. I saw and filmed monuments on which were written names of people who didn't came back home. There were young people, very young; some of them were only 19 years old.

### **Key informants**

My research project is mainly focused on the life course of *Alexander Maloletov*. He is 67 years old, was born in Velsk and lives there now. He studied electrical engineering at the University in Leningrad but didn't finish his degree. He graduated from college as an assistant to an engineer and worked on the railroad and then later began to work in the boiler room in the Velsk. Terrible alcohol dependence is the greatest tragedy in his life. Alexander not only drank alcohol but all things that contained alcohol

(cleaner for toilets and baths, cologne, glue). He also lost money from gambling and had to steal things from home and sell. Twice he had been in epy prison -the first time for stealing onion and the second - because of a fight in a bar where he protected one woman from hooligans. Twenty years ago, Alexander stopped drinking. Literature «saved» him and allowed him to return to a normal life. He published 5 books of poems and prose. In these poems the author refers to terrible events in history not only for his family and Velsk but also for Russia: Stalin's repressions (1920-1950), the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), the blockade of Leningrad (1941-1944), the Chechen War (1994- 1996) and the tragic destruction of the submarine «Kursk» (2000). For Russian people these events were very traumatic. Alexander became a good journalist. He has written many articles on social problems in a urban newspaper and now he works at a TV station. Alexander also works at a private boiler room that provides heating to the hydro-geological and geo-ecological company «The Rock». Fishing is the true love in his life, both in winter and in summer. Alexander was married 6 times; from his second wife he has an adult son Vyacheslav and grandson Miroslav. They meet together very rarely but I was lucky: they saw each other during my fieldwork.

*Elena Maloletova* is the sixth wife of Alexander Maloletov. She is younger than he by twenty years and she works as an accountant. Their relationships can be called volcanic; they constantly shout at each other, have scandals and live in different «worlds» with their own rules and habits but in the same flat. She likes to go to the gym with friends and to the sauna on Sunday. During the fieldwork I noticed the broken glass on the door in the kitchen. Alexander has broken it during a serious row with Elena. Now through this "window" three domestic cats are able to come in and out. Elena told me that she hadn't remembered happy moments in the life with her husband. She isn't interested in the work of her husband but constantly cleans the flat where they live. Alexander Maloletov leaves cigarettes in flower pots, constantly leaves the kitchen dirty when he cooks fish for the cats and smokes a lot (three packs in one day). Elena also told me that she had never planned to have children with Alexander.

During my fieldwork I was able to see the panorama of the society in Velsk because Alexander interacts with people from different social milieus. He communicates with friends from the alcoholic past, colleagues- television and newspaper reporters, poets and writers in Velsk, friends - fishermen, an official person - the head of the Velsk district, just with the inhabitants of the city Velsk. Also members of Alexander's family became important informants in my project. Unfortunately, his mother, father, stepfather, grandmother, grandfather, sister are all dead and their «portraits» I was able to «draw» only on the basis of Alexander's memories. I will introduce in details all these informants in others parts in my project.

## Methodology

One of the most important methods I used during the research project was participant observation with or without the camera. I tried to follow my key informants as much as possible and to be actively engaged in their daily life. Every evening or the night after the fieldwork I kept a little ethnographic journal in which I honestly described (sometimes in few words) my fears, discoveries, mistakes during interviews and filming, emotional reactions of my informants, sometimes unusual ideas that I would like to use during the filming. In this chapter I will outline all difficulties that I met in the fieldwork at home, also I will describe the main methods that I used during the search of ethnographic knowledge.

### 3.1 Anthropology at home – access, emotional «climate» in relationships with informants and the researcher position

Before I left for the fieldwork I had in mind a strategy of how to work during the research project. For me it was important to avoid the stereotyped behavior of a TV-journalist who loves to plan for the «future» in detail and sometimes «says» informants what to do according to his own «script». I tried to organize my fieldwork according to the idea of the French anthropologist Jean Rouch - «shared anthropology». Paul Henley in the book «The adventure of the real, Jean Rouch and the Craft of Ethnographic Cinema» writes about this approach: Rouch suggests that anthropological knowledge should arise not from detached scientific observation but rather from engagement and mutual accommodation between subject and observer. (Henley 2009: 321). This method is also connected to feedback screenings, discussions with participants, sharing ideas about the film product and problems which could be new topics for new films. During the fieldwork, for example, I with Alexander watched some videos; Alexander shared with me his thoughts and impressions. One of the most interesting comments when he asked me to use the episode where he visits his grandmother in the cemetery and "talks to her". This is one of the most sincere dialogues for Alexander in his life. (00229; 00233) – «*I will smoke with you. That's life, grandma. We are spinning. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. It is an excuse, grandma. You shouldn't be cross with me because I talk about you all the time, I tell people how lovely you were. It is fine with your grandson, this is the main thing, grandma. I'm no longer the alcoholic that was crying to you here. I became normal, I love you, I'll paint the cross, I promise*».

It was important to keep Alexander interested and to encourage him to cooperate, to have a sincere dialogue and to erase the visible boundaries between me as «the official, a foreign researcher» and Alexander as «the object of study». But my efforts in this direction weren't very necessary because from the very first meeting Alexander told me that he didn't want to be seen as a «lab rat» (laboratory rodent). Instead he wanted to see me as a friend. I noticed during our first meeting his incredible openness and sociability. «Alexander looks like a wolf. He is very tall, met me in a long, yellow, dirty bathrobe.

He is unshaven, gray-haired and sunburnt as if he spent all the spring and the early summer on an exotic island in the Pacific Ocean. He speaks very loudly, his fingers look like fingers of a pianist- beautiful, expressive, although with wrinkles and calluses. He immediately took me into the kitchen and began to clean the fish and cook a traditional Russian dish - ukha. He persistently began to ask me about my project, what we will do, how to film, what questions I had prepared for him. He mentioned that he had been waiting for me since winter (when I wrote him about my idea)... (From quick notes during the first meeting, 10. 06. 2016)

However, despite his initial enthusiasm, developing a trusting relationship between Alexander and me during fieldwork was quite difficult. The emotion of irritation became one of the most important emotions at the beginning of my project. Alexander didn't like my «polite manners», as he called it, for example, when I said phrases like this – thank you, good morning, I am sorry, all the best. At those moments he thought that these set phrases weren't sincere and we should communicate informally despite our different ages. For a long time it was unusual for me to hear all Alexander's pretensions, also I couldn't understand why he always smokes, every fifteenth minutes a cigarette was in his hand and mouth At the same time my camera, clothe, hair infused with the reek of smoke. Not only my nose «complained» because of the smell of smoking but also my ears always were disappointed because Alexander's speech was full of slang. But gradually I was able to find access to the space of my protagonist; I didn't criticize his way of life and tried patiently to hear his «voice». Meeting in the local café in the city center, not very far away from Alexander's house, became our tradition. He drank coffee and smoked, I drank a milkshake with the camera turned off.

During these meetings we had intimate conversations: I shared feelings about living in Norway, about longing for home, about my fear of the camera and at the same time Alexander talked about himself (how he married after the army, his first wife fell in love with another man and after this episode he has «changed» a lot of women, how he was sorry that didn't receive humanities education, how he was on the half-island Taimyr and saw the pink seagull). All these stories were told in a very chaotic, inconsistent way and for me as the researcher they were more like legends than true life stories. However, these coffee meetings helped me to change the emotional climate of my relationships with him from irritation to curiosity and empathy.

I had an advantage finding empirical data because I did my research project at home. I am a native speaker that's why I could understand speech of people well, I was even able to catch jokes, poetic images and associations with cultural or historical events from the past of Russia. For example, once Alexander Maloletov referred to a pink seagull, which he tried to "find" all his life, as the Firebird (Жар-Птица). Firebird is a famous character of the Russian folklore. The feathers of this bird shine and this light returns to blind people their ability to see.

On the other hand, knowledge about the cultural surroundings of my home country «stopped» me as a researcher in my discoveries. It was important for me to see the «exotic» in the usual, everyday events in the life of the Russian city Velsk and its inhabitants. Anthony Jackson writes that it is wrong to think that the exotic might be only five miles away – it is, indeed, all around one. It was a grave mistake to think that the distant «savage» had more to give to anthropologists than ones local «compatriot»; they simply have different types of information to impart (Jackson: 1987: 8). During my fieldwork a complex, contradictory social portrait of Alexander Maloletov became an exotic for me. At first I thought very stereotypically: my eyes saw the image of an elderly "revolutionary", an eccentric "actor" who likes to smoke, joke and often plays small performances in front of my camera. It could be loud quarrels with his wife, for example. At that moment I needed to increase my reflexivity, start to observe carefully, to hear my own deep feelings. Such self-knowledge is also to be located in the social techniques of ethnographic/anthropological production.. The self is as valuable source of information (Jackson, 1987:19).

One summer day I with Alexander walked along the streets of Velsk. Alexander noticed a young man in a winter jacket and shorts who was sitting on the grass and looking thoughtfully at the road. Suddenly my protagonist approached him and asked how he could help. It turned out that this guy had lost his beloved because he drank alcohol too much. For the first time Alexander didn't look at the camera and even asked me not to film them. He sincerely supported the teenager, told his story of fighting with alcoholism, listened to teenager. Alexander didn't perceive the camera as a necessary element of the reality; he just "lived" without a dramatic role.



French philosopher Merleau-Ponty in the work «The Visible and the Invisible» suggests that researchers need to keep a distance in order to see something meaningful. (Willerslev 2000: 26) Merleau-Ponty talks about the «theory» of the forest. Once he was in a forest, he realized that not only was he looking at the trees but also they were looking at him at the same time. (p 31). I must say that Alexander helped me in some way. During the fieldwork he always disappeared: he could leave for five days on a fishing trip

without me, sometimes he didn't come to our meetings that we have planned and sometimes he would be at home but not open the door to me. At the end of my ethnographic fieldwork Alexander told me that he hadn't expected that it would be so hard for him. All Alexander's escapes and his desire to be alone, relax and forget about my society and the camera, I viewed optimistically and considered them to be a possibility to build the necessary distance between us. During Alexander's absences I worked in the library and read old newspapers, looking for information in the archive of the city museum, I talked with his wife and colleagues. Also I just walked around the city with a camera, went into the local shops, bus stops and parks.

### **3.2 Participant observation and interviews**

One of the most important methods I used during the fieldwork was participant observation which presents the experience of being both insider and outsider. (Spradley 1980:57). In my case the role of insider was increased because my research project was conducted in my home country and I didn't have to break any cultural barriers. For me it was important to practice seeing reality with the wide-angle lens of outsider and to look at my key informants and myself as objects of the research project, the film process.

It seems to me that one of the most significant of social interactions was fishing on the river Vaga with Alexander Maloletov and his two colleagues- both fishermen. With the camera and without it I observed what was going on around me, I perceived myself as a viewer in the empty cinema. I as a researcher paid attention to all details of the behavior of Alexander and his friends, how they communicated with each other, what position each of them had in their small society, what they spoke about, how prepared for fishing, what fishing technology they used and what Alexander thought about and what he remembered during this close contact with the nature. On the other hand, while fishing I felt myself like a full participant in this social situation and my emotions and thoughts became part of the ethnographic knowledge. As Spradley writes in his book – participation allows us to experience activities directly, to get the feel of what events are like, and to record own perceptions (Spradley 1980: 51). The level of introspection was very high during the observation of my informants. I noticed it when Alexander read a poem by the fire. There were questions to myself rather than to him. I thought about how this sad, melancholic poem, close to the style to the work of the Russian poet Boris Red is similar to the poems by Alexander Maloletov. Is it possible to find parallels in their lives and worldviews?

Another important method during my research project was interviews. I used a semi-structured interview or no-structured interview format which gave me the opportunity to talk openly, to connect different topics and encourage reflecting. Despite the fact that our conversations with Alexander were not strictly structured my questions helped him to find focus in his «stream of consciousness» and helped me to hear and to understand these intensive «flows». It was important for me as a researcher because my main

informant often could not concentrate and gave a specific answer, he immediately began to connect or even change topics.

### **3.3 The letter to oneself to the past from the present: self-report in the discovering process**

The American poet, essayist and critic Susan Howe came up with the interesting idea that a documentary work is an attempt to recapture someone somewhere looking back. The first known documentarist is Orpheus in Ancient Greek mythology, in my research project Alexander Maloletov looks back through the vistas of the past.

During fieldwork I suggested that my protagonist perform a little experimental - to help me to get inside his head. Alexander wrote a letter to himself from the present day to the past. He was writing this letter during our work together and some little parts from it I used in the film with Alexander's voice-over. Writing alone without any audience is a brilliant opportunity to feel free to reflect about yourself, your place in the world, your interactions and things that you receive from others people and how creatively you use this knowledge, principles and values in life. Marianne Gullestad made a point that writing is a kind of mediated form of communication, where a distance between the self who writes and the self who was. (Gullestad 1996:38) I agree with this idea, for example, Alexander Maloletov begins his letter with the fact that he carefully looks at his hands with calluses and wrinkles. He sees hands of the stoker, journalist, fisherman, literary «hooligan» and even a man whose past life was without any serious goal. It was a chaotic mixture of events and meetings with people, similar to the well-known Brownian motion (the phenomenon from the world of physics when particles move randomly). Thus Alexander looks at himself from the outside, tries to analyze himself and his actions.

Life in this case can be compare with a text where words and sentences are the interpretations of my protagonist; while writing the letter he was actively engaged in constructing the environment and his identity in it. This letter, filled with regret, disappointment, happy and sad memories, not only helped to analyze past experiences, but also helped him see his present life through the past facts. Maloletov Alexander wrote that his journalistic TV videos help people from Velsk to solve their social problems. People called Alexander and his colleague Marina a Chip and Dale (famous American cartoon characters who are always rescuing someone). But in the letter Alexander refers to the past and regrets that he hasn't got humanities education at the university and now he hasn't important knowledge in the field of journalism.

It is important not to forget a comment from Pierre Bourdieu who saw life narratives as a biographic illusion (Gullestad 1996:8) and the letter by Alexander Maloletov cannot be understood as an objective truth, it's just his interpretation. So he writes about his relationships with the wife Elena who is younger than he is by twenty years. She works as an accountant and this fact Alexander interprets in his own way. He

thinks that Elena is a very «mathematical» person and pays attention only to the material values. He also observes that because of this their apartment is divided into two «worlds»: a clean and tidy room and a space with dirty socks, cigarettes, books and fishing tackles. Alexander doesn't write that perhaps this «separation» in the one flat has appeared because of the conflicts, misunderstanding and offences in their relationships.

This experimental method during the fieldwork became not only an artistic tool to create a film story but it also a key understanding Alexander. The letter is a system of personal constructs, the center of imagination of Alexander Maloletov and imagination is an act of consciousness, and a major human power. Imagination, how Nigel Rapport writes in his book «I am dynamite, an alternative anthropology of power», represents the greatest force acting within the individual to give rise to his or her sense of reality. (Rapport 2003: 26)

### **3.4 Using the camera during the fieldwork**

A quite serious starting point before I left for the fieldwork was a desire to have a «friendly» relationship with the camera, because the camera is probably the most flexible, artistic and provocative way to present and to understand reality. About three months before the ethnographic research, I started to keep a diary in which I wrote examples how popular camera-persons create their films. I took these notes after watching different movies, most of them artistic but there were documentaries too. I followed the advice of Quentin Tarantino who in an interview in the magazine «Esquire» said: «I didn't go to film school, I saw movies» (<https://esquire.ru/wil/quentin-tarantino> 14.11.2016). Among directors whose filming I liked most I can name Wong Kar-wai from Hong Kong, Americans Paul Thomas Anderson and Martin Scorsese, John Rhythm, Kira Muratova and Sergey Taraman from Russia. I wrote in the cinema- diary about how these filmmakers play with the light, how different montage helps them to tell a story and draw a portrait of the main character, how sound creates a mood for the audience and what sense close-ups, panoramas can have.

However, not only the technical side is important in the process of fieldwork but also the way in which camera helps the researcher to find information. In my case the camera provides a visual opportunity to observe and analyze the self-narrative of Alexander. Because of Alexander Maloletov is a very impulsive, emotional, stubborn, active, impatient person, the presence of my camera became a kind of catalyst for the expression of his controversial personality. Alexander is a television journalist, so for him the presence of the camera doesn't trigger a reaction of fear or embarrassment but in fact increases his self- control. There is a popular view that individual offers his performance and puts on his show «for the benefit of other people». He can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality that he stages is the real reality (Goffman 1956:

17). At the beginning of my fieldwork I noticed how my protagonist was always trying to differentiate between him as a real Alexander and him as Alexander should be during the filming. Alexander was looking for me with the camera (if I followed him or was somewhere far away), maybe he was afraid to be spontaneous, his facial expressions and gestures were drawing some dramatic role (for example, when he was in the cemetery at the grave of his grandmother). He watched too carefully what he said, with what intonation he said, how the shirt he decided to wear that day looks. One of the roles that my main informant was always trying to «play» as a theatrical character was humorist, the «soul» of the party. One social situation when Alexander and his wife meet with Velsk poets at a picnic in the countryside Hozmino - proves my observation. During all this day he joked about the fact that his wife Elena is a very conflictive woman and that she doesn't cook at home and he is constantly hungry. It looks like that Alexander organized a small show to put his colleagues, fellow poets in a cheerful mood.

During interviews Alexander didn't try to be someone else. Perhaps, he was «playing» only when he was as a member of the process of communication, when it was important to create a certain image for him. This is the conclusion I made after our long conversation about the siege of Leningrad during the Great Patriotic War. Alexander remembered his distant relative who as a child experienced one terrible, hungry winter of the siege before she was evacuated.

*One day she took an old aluminum water can and we went to the river Neva. It took about twenty minutes to come there. Then she told me that in the winter of the siege she had gone this way for about an hour. She was completely weakened. Then my aunt brought me to the Pulkovo Heights (a chain of hills in the south of St. Petersburg). The view from these hills was amazing, all Leningrad is clearly visible. It turns out the Germans in 1941 directly shot and killed people from these Hills. Later I became more and more interested in the history of my country and my family. When I lived in Leningrad with my second wife Nina and I was trying to study at the technical university, I always walked in the streets and saw «chamomiles». So I called older, kind women in white panama hats on their gray heads, those who survived after the siege of Leningrad. (A. Maloletov, 22.06, 00171).*

The voice of Alexander was shaking and I saw tears in the corners of his eyes. Before me and my camera was a man and his naked emotion, his pain. In this case the process of filming and my question about the past was a needle that irritated the «wound» and removed the mask of the cheerful Alexander Maloletov. On the other hand I recognized the truth of the words of Jean Rouch – «the anthropologist has at his disposal the only tool which offers him the extraordinary possibility of direct communication with the group he studies – the film he has made about them. Film is the only method I have to show another just how I see him». (1974: 43). I as a researcher can only guess and only partially draw the border between sincerity and the performance of my protagonist. My

perception of the world is the second lens (after the camera) through which I look at the reality.

The fieldwork camera helped me not only to draw a portrait of Alexander, to observe him in different social situations but also to see the image of the city of Velsk and the people that live there. I especially liked to film in the early morning or the evening. I tried to see the urban environment as a mix of poetic images that will be able to give the audience the opportunity to find new, non-trivial meanings. For example, my camera filmed a large spider web on the wall of an old wooden house. This natural image reminds of the process of the editing, the picture of the montage. The cut from one shot to another may, among other things, convey action- reaction, make an effect of continuity or of time passed, visualize a shift of perspective, make a jump from the whole to a part or vice versa or perform a flashback. Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev gave this explanation of the montage in the article «Can film show the Invisible? The work of Montage in Ethnographic Filmmaking» (Suhr and Willerslev: 2012: 284).

It looks like that the life course of Alexander Maloletov is built on the principle of the montage where there were and there are many various meetings, events, conflicts and stories which represent searching for happiness. This model is closer to the interpretation of the American film director D. W. Griffith (1915): montage was first and foremost used to depict organic «unity in diversity», in which parts act on and react to on each other, threaten each other, and enter into conflict before unity is eventually restored (Deleuze 2005:31).

In an interview Alexander described himself as a person «made» of different pieces.

*That is, I am who I am. Yes, maybe I can be angry, there are even flash of hatred. I don't think that I am the destroyer. I know exactly one thing about myself - I have never had in my heart the idea to do a bad thing to someone. Involuntarily I hurt someone, that is for sure. I think that there are no «images» in me, I don't have something a whole, I am made in pieces, probably so. (00022; 01:31. 18.06).*

### **3.5 The film as a documentary and lyrical essay: the relationship between the film and the text.**

My master's film «In Search of a Pink Seagull» was created in the style of the documentary-lyrical essay. In the center of the narration is the story of Alexander Maloletov, his path from «easy», alcoholic happiness to «hard» happiness through struggle and suffering. This is also a story about how a literary, expressive, poetic, powerful, artistic word can save a person, give him strength and inspire him to change his life course. As an author I intentionally tried to hide myself from the viewer's eye. That's why a special cinematic approach was invented before fieldwork began. Alexander writes a letter to himself to the past. He has an honest dialogue with himself, with his past, while

still keeping the hope that someone will probably read this letter someday. At the end of the film the viewer sees the last words of Alexander's letter –«Well, the letter is over, maybe someday someone will read it. I want to believe in it».

It is important to say that Alexander accepted the idea of the letter optimistically and with enthusiasm. Even before filming, he constantly complained to me that he was missing a person with whom he could talk openly. The letter became not only one of the interesting cinema findings of my project but also a chance for Alexander to express his feelings. However when I call my film a documentary-lyrical essay, I do not only pay attention to the letter that Alexander writes to himself. It is also important for me to show that the film is curious from two sides: as a visual message and as a text message. The viewer looks and listens. The episode when Alexander visits his friends from his alcoholic past is one example. (00584). The mise en scene itself is very bright in its picture: desperate, homeless, lonely people are sleeping on the floor or on a mattress in a room with a weak light, with a crust of bread on the table and a disgusting smell is everywhere. Nevertheless the speech of the heroes is the most important part in the episode. Alexander asks his friend Vladimir Tonkovsky: «Who does lie on the floor and hides under the blanket? » Vladimir calls this man Tyko Vyalka (as it turns out later, this is the nickname which was given to the man because he comes from the Nenets district. And Tyko Vyalka is a well-known Nenets Soviet artist and writer). Later Vladimir also jokes, looking at the one who hid under the blanket on the floor: «The Chukchi people with plague are waiting for the dawn». This joke, in fact, contains a realistic metaphor. Friends from Alexander's past and really hide from the «sunlight» in both direct and figurative senses. They consciously choose not to fight with alcoholism.

The film and text became important forms for search and presentation of ethnographic knowledge. My documentary-lyrical essay allowed me to tell the story of Alexander Maloletov in more emotional way. The text of the master's thesis became an instrument that deepened and concentrated attention to certain social situations, helped to find a focus in the analysis of information.

#### **4. Theory**

This chapter presents anthropological theories on which I based the writing of the research project.

##### **The life course.**

This concept is connected with the individual level construct on the one hand and with global socio-historical changes on the other hand. Theory developed in 1960 but early researcher was done on this subject in the 1920 (Thomas' and Znaniecki's «The Polish Peasant in Europe and America» and Mannheim's essay on the «Problem of

generations»). The International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family mentions that research done in the 1970s and 1980s continued to incorporate themes as well as to focus attention on historical changes to life patterns, the consequences of life course experiences on subjective well-being, the interlocking transitions of family members, and integrating kin and age distinctions, among other things (Burton and Bengtson 1985; Clausen 1991; Elder 1974; Rossi and Rossi 1990). As a concept, the life course is defined as «a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time» (Giele and Elder 1998, p. 22).

In my project I mostly refer to Glen H. Elder, Jr., Research Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, an important figure in the development of life course theory, methods, and research. His most serious study in this sphere is the book «Children of the Great Depression» (1974/1999) where the author writes about the generation that grew up in Oakland and Berkeley, California during the Great Depression (in the early and late 1920s) and was involved at home and abroad in World War II. Glen Elder observed in his articles to events that are closely connected with social change, life pathways and individual development as modes of behavioral continuity and change. These pathways represent the most distinctive area for exploration, they refer to the social trajectories of education, work and family that are followed by individuals and groups through society (Elder: 1998).

Life course as an approach for analyzing historical influences on lives and developmental processes inspired Elder and his colleagues to formulate key contributions of life course theory. Researches write about socio-historical context, an individual's own developmental path is embedded in and transformed by conditions and events occurring during the historical period and geographical location in which the person lives. (Mitchell: 2003). Person doesn't live in a social vacuum, so the surrounding reality is a determining factor in his life-course. But human agency and personal control are also important— people make choices, decisions in their life according to social circumstances and opportunities. In this case, a person can actively fights with social forces, make plans and set goals, he is not a passive member in the structure of the society.

The individual is not a character from the novel by Antoine de Saint Exupery's «The Little Prince», he doesn't live on his own planet with his rose. His social experience is linked and dependent on different levels. Macro-level events like wars, radical political changes in the country can influence on relationships in the family. In addition, family members can also synchronize or coordinate their lives with regard to life planning and matters related to the timing of life events. This can sometimes generate tensions and conflicts, particularly when individual goals differ from the needs of the family as a collective unit (Mitchell: 2003). Research has concentrated on understanding the influence of social network ties on the life course.

Another key-idea in the life-course theory is timing of live. Researchers understand age not only as a part of the life span but also as subjective understanding about the temporal nature of life. Elder writes about trajectories, or sequences of roles and experiences; transitions, or changes in state or role. Examples of transitions include leaving the parental home, becoming a parent, or retiring. Transitions often involve changes in status or identity, both personally and socially and thus open up opportunities for behavioral change. (Elder 1996:8)

Last but not least, researchers write about how the past experience can organize future life-projects. Past can affect later well-being, socioeconomic status and mental health.

## **Happiness**

Happiness as a concept can be a central part in the discussion about human flourishing, self-identity and collective and individual well-being. In my research project, I drew on the ideas of Neil Thin, Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, who tried to ask new questions - anthropologists have been reasonably explicit in asking questions like ‘what is a human being?’ and ‘what does it mean to be a person in culture x?’ but they have been conspicuously silent on questions like ‘what is a happy human being’ or ‘what does it mean to be a happy person in culture x?’ (Thin 2005: 8). Neil Thin understands happiness in three directions:

Motive:

happiness is a life-goal or incentive for action and hence is a concept through which people organize their understanding of the meaning or purpose of human life in general, their ambitions, plans and;

Evaluation:

happiness is central to our evaluation of our own quality of life and that of others and hence is central to cultural values and moral theories even if sometimes only implicitly so;

Emotion:

happiness refers both to temporary pleasures (ie: the brain’s reward system) and to enduring mental states of subjective well-being and so is conceptually central to the experience of diverse emotions.

I think these three interpretations are closer to my hypothesis which tries to find links between the process of a discovering happy life and a social process of constructing and understanding self-identity which develops in new social experience and activity, relationships with individuals from different milieus. Alexander always reflects on how changes in his life course influenced on his self-perception and his tries to find happiness, to find his way.

## **Memory, identity and self-narrative**

One of the parts of empirical data that I discovered during the fieldwork is past life-stories of Alexander. There is a category of personal memory which P. Connerton describes as a memory that figure significantly in our self-descriptions because our past history is an important source of our conception of ourselves. Our self-knowledge, our conception of our own character and potentialities, is to a large extent determined by the way in which we view our own past actions.(Connerton 1989:22). Memory is a dynamic, sensitive, mythical process and an individual can preserve his vivid recollections, to make them not abstract with words, images, sensory experience and bodily practices and ceremonies.

Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey write that emotions and identity are also bound into memory as articulated through the interplay of embodied action and material objects. (2011:13). Alexander Maloletov lives in an atmosphere of nostalgia, he always tries to remember feeling of happiness in the past events and compare them with his present life-course, to see the difference between him before and after the alcoholic disaster and to observe how people perceive him now and in the «dark» periods of his biography. R. Jenkins calls this describing identity- our understanding of who we are and who other people are, and, reciprocally, other peoples understanding of themselves and of other. It is a very practical matter, synthesizing relationships of similarity and difference (2008: 18). It means that identity is not something that has already been given to person; it is a way he engages with reality including interactions with people and with the self, how uses resources which gives the life course. And the reality in which Alexander lives now is very fast; the speed, scope, depth and wonder of changes are driven by scientific and technological innovations. Humanity is going through an active process of globalization, urbanization, active migration flows, «brain drain», a wave of terrorist attacks. Nowadays any information is easy to find, send and receive.

In this post-modern world with collages of different meanings, the «little man» can feel himself lost; self-narrative can become an opportunity to present a position in the reality. Marianne Gullestad writes that self-reports contain not only descriptions of objects and events but also descriptions of the author's subjective feelings and thoughts. These texts provide useful social and cultural information, for example, ideas about how the individual uses available cultural resources for the creation of images of self and society (1996:36). However, oral and written narratives are almost always very lyrical, poetic and intimate in style, content and linguistic composition. Facts cease to be facts, they are replaced by imagination and emotional security – the individual protects himself from the traumatic and unpleasant memories. For this reason Nigel Rapport in his book quotes Sartre: the self and the world can be described as unfinished projects; this to return to Sartre, means that individuals come to be free even from their own past, for in the ongoing history of interpretive self-narrating, the remembrance of the past, and its meaning, are in no way fixed. (2003: 30)

## **Self-presentation**

Also in my work I use ideas from the theory of the American sociologist Erving Goffman who saw direct connections between identity and social interactions. The artistic nature of Alexander Maloletov allows me to say that sincerity and theatrical behavior are mixed in his personality. That's why it seems interesting to analyze his performance - all the activities of an individual which occur during the period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers. (Goffman 1956: 32). I pay attention not only to the personal front but also observe backstage where my informant can forget about roles, lines and boundaries and have a rest. One of the most interesting is to observe impression management when a performer leaves the back region and enters the place where the audience is to be found, or when he returns from there, for at these moments one can detect a wonderful putting on and taking off of character. (Goffman 1956: 123).

## **5. «Personal memory museum» as a condition to be happy in the present**

This chapter presents analysis of recollections about the family of Alexander. Almost all the members of his family have died (mother, father, stepfather, sister, grandmother, grandfather) and almost all their life courses had been very dependent on the socio-historical context of Russia. This «dependence» is very much influenced by the relationships within the family of Alexander Maloletov, his childhood and his attitude about the historical memory of the country. Also in this chapter there are examples of the cross-connection between the architectural image of the city with individual human memory.

### **5.1 Stories from the family archives in the historical perspective**

The portrait of Alexander can be called intertemporal and interspatial. I immediately «saw» this idea in the appearance of Alexander: he smokes a cigarette with writing USSR on the package, his favorite perfume is «Troinoi odekolon» (this perfume was very popular in the Soviet era and during the anti-alcohol campaign in 1980 alcoholics, including my protagonist, drank it), he likes to wear black jeans and white shirts (gifts from «bandits» - Alexander calls people who were illegally engaged in business in Velsk in the perestroika time), his speech is full of prison jargon (in Soviet times Alexander has been in a prison because of the theft and the fight in a bar). At the same time in the pocket of his jeans there is an expensive mobile phone, according to Alexander, to keep up with modern life and take beautiful photos while fishing. These signs from different time periods draw a portrait of my protagonist as a person who is «collected» on the principle of montage: details from past experience are organically linked with the experience of the present life.

However not only appearance but also a personal memory means for Alexander Maloletov an important source to construct self-knowledge and happiness. He has a significant fear of losing the past.

*I struggled with forgetfulness when I drank alcohol.. I felt this horror, my brains lose control. At that moment I was starting to think about a woman or about something else. I was trying to stop this stream of forgetfulness but it was very hard not to lose some thread of narration. I think that a person needs memory. Can an individual be happy if he forgot his mother, his grandmother? Alexander Maloletov (22.06; 00163)*

These words from the interview reminded me of the reflections of the American neuropsychologist and neurologist Oliver Sacks, who, in the book «The man who took his wife for a hat» describes medical stories of patients that suffered from partial or total loss of memory. Sachs wrote that memory is our being. Life without memory is not life in general. Memory is meaningfulness, sense, feeling and even action. Without it we are nothing ... to be ourselves we need to «have» ourselves: to have our own life story, remember the inner drama, the narration. (Sacks: 2010) Memories about his family took a very serious place in the personal museum of memory of my protagonist. He mentally returns «there» every time to feel himself like a happy child, to see parent's faces and ask for forgiveness.

In Alexander's room there is an old black-and-white photography on the wall that shows his grandparents. About his grandmother Maria Guryeva, who was born in 1893 in the family of the priest, Alexander speaks with warmth. She worked as a librarian at the House of Culture in Velsk (Дом Культуры), had a very strict character and loved to read Russian fairy tales to her little grandson at night. Alexander remembered how grandmother went to stand in the queue early in the morning to get the sugar and to give it to him and his sister Irina. In the post-war period, during times of deficit, a ration card system was implemented in provincial towns to help manage the allocation of products.

During my fieldwork when the Russians celebrated the main Orthodox holiday «Three in One» I went with Alexander to the cemetery to visit his grandmother. It seemed that Alexander intentionally put on a black shirt to pay attention to this «dramatic» filming day. When we came to the grave of his grandmother, he asked her: «Well, Grandma, let me have a smoke with you? ». He started a dialogue with her about the past, about his feelings. Alexander remembered her strong and kind character, how she protected him from hooligan acts from the hooligan acts of his childhood friends and how he dreamed of being buried closer to her. Usually people don't talk with the dead in the cemetery; it is a moment of silence and deep sadness. I thought that Alexander perceives himself as a hero of the documentary and he is obliged to say something, to share thoughts because I am making a «movie» about him. Also when we were in the cemetery Alexander asked his grandmother to forgive him that cross on the grave is not painted and that he came here many times when he was drunk and cried. In this social

situation to me as a researcher was important to understand that it was impossible to distinguish between the moments when Alexander was really sincere and when he tried to add a dramatic effect to what was happening. All these characteristics always are mixed in individual. One thing I found out for sure: Alexander believes that the grandmother brought him up and that she spent with him most of the time not the mother. It was important to answer why it has happened.

Alexander's mother was Maria Maloletova, she worked as a store manager in Sevdvinlag. Sevdvinlag (25.09.1940 – 04.09.1946) is a state institute that was helped implement the policy of repressions and regulated the system of forced labor camps in the USSR. (Smirnov: 1998 <http://old.memo.ru/history/NKVD/GULAG/> 07.10. 2016). The work in the store was a good opportunity for Alexander's mother. The woman could bring some food to home and feed her children: a son and a daughter Irina from her second marriage with a Greek man. Alexander remembers that he often shared salmon and chocolates with the neighbor's children. Maria Maloletova was very busy and always worked which is why Alexander spent time with his grandmother. The socio-historical situation in Velsk changed the structure of relations within the family: the role of «mother» of the child was passed on to the grandmother. Societal and individual experiences are linked through the family and its network of shared relationships (Elder 1998). Maria Maloletova was a respected person in the Velsk, she was the head of the Veterans Council. She was a talented florist, taking part in city competitions. Maria Maloletova died when she was over eighty years old. I found a lot of her diplomas in the archives of the city museum.



*This is one of the diplomas that Alexander's mother had. The diploma is «For success in the work and because of the 60th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution».*

The form of narration, in which Alexander shares memories about his mother, is very ambiguous. In the interview with me Alexander sadly talks about the disappointment that his mother has experienced.

*My relationships with my mother.. What can I say? I was an alcoholic. I could steal the carpet, cut-glass bowl, my mother's fur coat. My stepfather offered to whip me away but my mother always was with me ... To be honest I think she forgave me because she saw the way of glory of Pistol (it is a nickname of the protagonist since childhood). She loved to go to the presentation of all my books. (Alexander Maloletov. 18.06; 00038)*

On the other hand, when we visited the old house of Alexander where he lived until his marriage with Elena, I was watching a completely different self-presentation and the presentation of the past. The old, wooden house with large windows on the Soviet street inspired my protagonist to again go back in time. In the book «Death, Memory and Material culture» there is a quote by the French philosopher and art critic Gaston Bachelard: to remember the home is to recover the intimacy experienced there, the thoughts and sensations that were particular to it (2011:79). Alexander paid attention to the apple tree that grew in the yard for many years ago. He laughed loudly, got up quickly before the camera (it seemed that he is comedian at the evening show) and in an artistic style began to tell that reminds him of this tree. He gesticulated energetically, was «playing» with a height of voice, joked, parodied himself in an alcoholic past and was almost dancing in front of the camera. Alexander told the story of how he used the mother's garden for his own business. For example, he sold apples and bought alcohol. Also Alexander remembered that his mother was very fond of flowers. It was her great love. *«And I was a bastard.. When I needed the money, I cut her flowers and sold them. There weren't any flower shops in Velsk and people bought flowers from the «hands», from those who grew plants in the private garden». Alexander.(19.06; 00259)*

Alexander's father was Fedor Maloletov who was born in 1910 in the Smolensk region. There he worked as a post driver. In November of 1937 Fedor Maloletov was arrested in accordance with the 58 article (counterrevolutionary activity), he was given 10 years in the labor camp and sent to Velsk in Sevdvinlag. It is important to mention that the grandfather of Alexander Maloletov - Maloletov Jeremiah was also arrested in December in 1937 and was killed in January of 1938. The article 58 (counterrevolutionary activity) became the reason for the arrest and the murder.

Velsk remembers repressions during the Stalinist regime. There is a railway station Moscow-Kotlas-Vorkuta line. This road was built in 1940 by people from labor camps in Sevdvinlag. In the book «The Stalin Years» Oleg Khlevnyuk notes that the the number of camp and others detainees seems to have peaked at around four million between 1939-1940. The death rate in camps was about seven per cent per year, meaning about 55.000-75.000 death in the purge years and 250.000 at the peak in 1942 when the whole country was under stress because of the Nazi invasion. Terror and force were two

of the basic methods for creating the Stalinist system which tried to solve political and economic problems – ensuring Stalin’s personal power, activating industrial production and creating social stability. People who were repressed were divided in two categories: those to be immediately arrested and killed; those to be imprisoned in labour camps or prison from eight to ten years. In Velsk Fedor Maloletov worked as an accountant in the organization «Selhosnap»; he was one of those who built the railway Moscow-Kotlas-Vorkuta.



*Example of article about the persecution in Velsk and Velsk district from the archive of the city museum.*

Alexander doesn't know his father well because he died when Alexander was a child. He smoked «Kazbek» brand cigarettes, when he came home from the work he liked to eat soup, smoke a cigarette and then leave a cigarette butt in the plate. Alexander's father bought his first bicycle «Eaglet» and gave him 10 rubles for the birthday holiday. In those time, it was a lot of money (for comparison, an ice cream cost 8 kopecks). During the conversation about his father, Alexander rarely looked at the camera, thoughtfully was looking out the window and made great breaks in sentences. In front of me I saw not a joker but a man who regrets about the past. Alexander told me that he blamed himself for the fact that he was not able to visit his father's grave. Fedor Maloletov was buried in the Daugavpils (city in Latvia). Paul Connerton writes that there is an important connection between the concept of personal identity and various backward-looking mental states, thus the appropriate objects of remorse or guilt are past actions or omissions done by the person who feels remorseful or guilty. (Connerton: 1989: 22).

A significant place in the personal museum of memory of Alexander Maloletov is devoted to memories about his stepfather. Boris Migunov was one of the men who took part in the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). After studying in Molotovsk (now Severodvinsk) he became a member of the ski battalion and went to the Korelskiy army front. In 1942 the battalion was transferred to the Stalingrad army front and given a military mission: to observe a German tank «Tigr» which was taken by the Soviet

artillery. During this observation, the Germans attacked the battalion and a battle began. Boris Migunov received a Medal (Order of the Red Star) for the victory in this military operation. His last fight during the Second World War was in the Second Ukrainian Front. There Boris got a very serious wound and spent a lot of time in the hospital. Alexander told me this story.

*The first thing that impressed me was when stepfather came to my family. I was a 17-year-old kiddo. It happened before the army. When we went to the bath house, I saw the hole in his body, in my opinion, on the left side. Perhaps he was shy in my presence. His last wound was terrible, he got it when he raised the remnants of the battalion. He launched an attack wearing a white officer's short fur coat. This is not a beautiful film, this is real life. A German sniper saw that he was an officer and shot him with a shell bullet. It knocked his ribs.. (28.06; 00585)*

It is interesting that Alexander was focused only on the military career of the stepfather. He spoke about his life after the war without much interest, like how Boris Migunov came back in the Velsk, worked as a teacher of painting and drawing and drank alcohol with Alexander. Perhaps for my protagonist it was important to keep in the mind the heroic image of the stepfather who fought bravely in the war and defended the motherland. This positive portrait also appeared from teenager memories; in fact Boris Migunov sparked Alexander's interest in fishing trips which is nowadays a great hobby for Alexander. In the archives I found an article by Alexander that he wrote about his parents in 1993. In this article, the author remembered not only the military way of Lieutenant Boris Migunov but also his school love Maria who he met again after the war.



*This is an article about Alexander's parents.*

Memory as a mental category is used in the life course of Alexander as a unique mechanism by which he makes himself happy in the present. He always remembers his happy childhood with his grandmother, military exploits of his stepfather and the uncle (he has written many poems and short stories about it) and he remembers his mother and convinces himself that she forgave him for his all alcoholic troubles. He needs this

personal memory museum to not feel alone in his current, not exactly a happy family life with his wife. The way Alexander chooses to present the experience of the past is always different. This monologue of self-disappointment, these jokes - all can describe the complex eccentric nature of my main informant.

## **5.2 Map of the city Velsk and the mental map of memories of the individual**

*I just love this city. I like to be here, I feel comfortable. Where can I find such friends? I have a life behind me and I think I am here and it is the right place. Today it is mine and everything around is mine. I «entered» and I don't need to go somewhere. (Alexander Maloletov, 20.06; 00324).*

My main informant was born in Velsk but after his second marriage he moved to Arkhangelsk and then to St. Petersburg. But now he has lived in Velsk for more than twenty years. Everyone knows Alexander Maloletov, many stop when they see him in the crowd and begin a conversation with him. The form of self –presentation during the interaction of Alexander Maloletov can be described as a charismatic attack or gentle aggression. I found this kind of the impression management strategy in the construction of identity in different social situations, even during meetings with unknown people in Velsk. It was the June 19; Alexander Maloletov was walking in the street when he saw a man who sold vegetables and fruits. Alexander, for some strange reason, greeted him and began to talk with him. At first, that stranger was taken aback. It turned out that this stranger was from Georgia but had lived in Velsk for eight years. To my surprise Alexander began to speak with this man in Georgian language. Many years ago Alexander was spending summers in Georgia. My protagonist just in jest, asked the stranger to give us a watermelon! And the Georgian calmly answered: «Ok». «Alexander Maloletov really has some charm», - that was my first thought in the head.

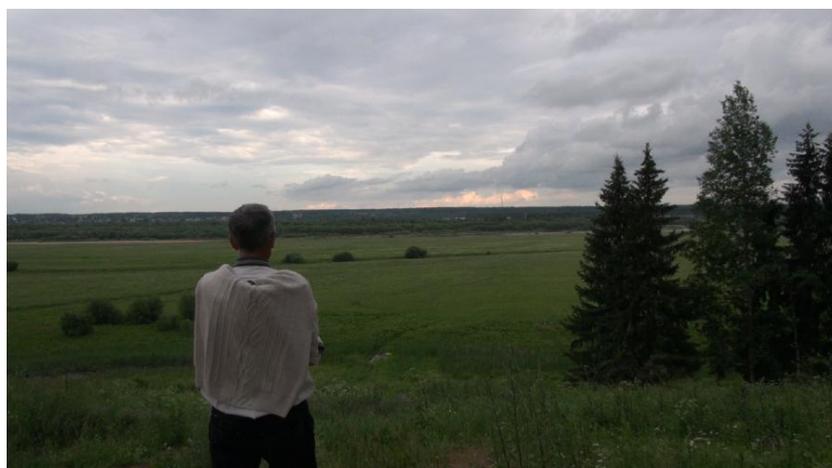
The urban environment of the Velsk can be seen not only as a space for communication, as a geographical location but also as the material form, social practices and cultural representations of these locations. Architectural objects from the city's past become «artifacts» that construct the architecture of the internal memory of the individual, associated with his happy and unhappy recollections. At the same time places represent not only events in a life course but also the socio-historical context. During my fieldwork Alexander and I passed by the stokehold where he had previously worked and here he began the story: *«In the nineties Velsk was heated by stokeholds and basically they were worked with the coal. This work was hellish and time was difficult. Some teenagers began to come to me in the stokehold. Their parents were in despair and started to drink alcohol. This was a huge problem. I took more food from home for these children, I made them to help me work - to put the coal in cars. There was a cafe «Stasik», not very far from the stokehold. One of these unhappy teenagers stole money in*

*the cafe. So he got into the prison. The moment of «perestroika» was a crime against people...». (22.06: 00151).* It is interesting how Alexander evaluates the radical changes in the country that took place in Russia in the nineties. He evaluates them negatively and mentioned an example how of government planning destroyed families in Velsk.

With a smile in front of the camera Alexander talks about the cinema «Peace» («Мир») which was one of the popular places for young people in the years of Alexander's youth. It is important that this geographical place is not only associated with movies. *« It was a central place where citizens could show what they were wearing. I remember that it was like a model podium. We stood on the porch, smoked and looked at girl's clothes. One example - I was already living with my beautiful wife Valentina. In the Soviet time people had the opportunity to exchange berries for money and I did it, I bought a kotonovy (Alexander uses English word "cotton"), costume in the shop of import things. I thought I will surprise the audience. In the movie theater I saw that there were three «rows» in the same costume as me ». (22.06: 00178).*

This story is also the story about social problems in the Soviet Russia, specifically about the global deficit of goods. At this time the social phenomenon of the «Soviet queue» appeared. (Osokina: 2005). Queues for specific goods could be really long and lasted from the early morning until late at the night. People even hired a special person (tramitador) who could stay in the queue for them. Also there were black-marketers (from one of them Alexander Maloletov bought the imported cotton suit) at this difficult time in the USSR. Speculators (in the Soviet Union they were called as «фарцовщик») were buying goods abroad and then selling them in the Soviet Union. The process of underground buying was called «fartsa» («фарца»). Pavel Romanov, a professor of social anthropology at university in the Saratov, writes that many black marketers were also foreigners. Foreigners appeared in the late of 1950s in Leningrad, they were mostly Finns because of the alcohol companies in Finland. Soviet citizens secretly bought imported things from Finns and soon a whole system of stable trade relations has organized. (Romanov: 2005)

The water meadow Vaymish is the favorite place for Alexander in Velsk.



The map of the city Velsk is very connected with Alexander's memories and also with his emotions. Maps are representations of landscapes and complex artifacts of the negotiation of identity and place. These artifacts attempt to represent memories, meanings and a sense of belonging as well as a process of social relations and interactions. (Stewart 2003: 72). For Alexander Maloletov his hometown Velsk becomes a global architectural «sticker» that reminds him of happy moments in his life course. *«I am old and happiness is here too. After the winter the meadow is not much filled with water which means spring came. I spent the winter, I am alive. It is a favorite place. This is the timepiece of my life periods: the winter, the spring and the meadow. Will I see the meadow next year? I don't know».* (22.06: 00185).

## **6. «Easy happiness» - the alcoholic tragedy or the non-conformist life course in a communistic country**

This chapter of the research project will focus on the concept of «easy happiness» in the Alexander's interpretation. Can alcoholism have not only negative effects but also positive results? Does poetry as a creative act protect against physical and mental destruction? What did it mean for a person to be born, to grow up in the communist country and family and to continue to lead an absolutely non-stereotypical life course? This chapter tries to find the answers to these questions.

### **6.1 The alcoholic drama**

*I was born in a family without alcoholics if I talk about my grandfather, mother, grandmother. Yes, father and stepfather were alcoholics. Yes, before the army I didn't drink and then... how has it happened? I had shyness in relationships with women but when I drank I had confidence in myself. Secondly, I left Velsk and was in big cities, like Arkhangelsk and St. Petersburg. There were restaurants and brilliancy, as I wrote in poems... And then loss in love, problems at home, problems at work. And then there were not restaurants and brilliancy; there were lotions, colognes, which I drank. And yet you are an alcoholic, Maloletov... I was in the trap.* Alexander Maloletov (20.06: 00301)

Speaking about his dependence on alcohol, Alexander uses the concept of «easy, one-time happiness». In the letter that he writes to himself to the past from the present, he says: I discovered the curious concept "one-time happiness" with the size of a bottle. First I found it in a small mug of beer and then my need in dangerous euphoria was growing... I drank not only vodka but colognes, varnishes, lotions and glue BF. The jaw of alcohol has devoured my life: I lost everything that a normal person has. Alexander has experienced this physical and emotional feeling of «easy» happiness, one-time happiness for more than twenty years, until 1996.

During my fieldwork, I was able to visit the place where Alexander and his friends from the past often spent time together. He told me that nowadays he also continues to have good contact with these people because he trusts them. At first I was filming in the

street where Alexander and three men were sitting on the bench and remembering the past, laughing a lot and being really happy to meet each other. It was interesting to pay attention to their body language, Alexander didn't sit on the bench but instead he stood near to friends and took a position like the leader of the company. The men drank pure alcohol; at the same time my main informant remembered how he drank a lot of beer in Leningrad. In an anecdotal form Alexander talked about how he, being drunk, found himself near to the expensive, presentable hotel in Leningrad. He wanted to go to the toilet but the doorman didn't want to let him into the hotel. Finally an agreement was reached. Alexander was able to get what he wanted but his dirty boots left many traces on the floor. He felt very confused, there were many people around. The strict doorman made Alexander wash the floor. This monologue was more like a cheerful, thin story, a little legend rather than a truthful narrative. However, the effect of this story was significant, all Alexander's friends laughed loudly.

After a nostalgic time outdoors, they all went to the «house» where the alcoholic friends of Alexander Maloletov live. We came to the old wooden house without light. I saw a small room, very dark, dirty and with a disgusting smell where two men were sleeping on the floor. At this moment took place, I think, an important conversation between Alexander and his friends.

– *You still drink, still drink.*

– *It's funnier with drinking.*

– *Yeah, of course.*

- *Life is boring without it, Sanya. (00584).*

In this short dialogue I can see the meaning of «easy» happiness for these people and for Alexander in the past. First of all, it is an opportunity to forget about inner problems, the opportunity to become free from the daily routine and troubles. I noticed that among the friends with whom Alexander Maloletov drank alcohol in the past there is an interesting lexical item; they give each other nicknames. Tankes is one of the closest alcoholic friends of Alexander in this environment. It is a nickname that was given to man because of his surname Tankovskii. These nicknames made me think that in front of me were not people at all but «holograms» because all these men looked so empty, miserable, lonely, lost, without dreams and ideas and rather broken, they haven't found their place in the society.

It is important to mention that «easy» happiness has influenced relationships within the Alexander's family. For example, Alexander's mother had to live in constant stress and be a «guard» to preserve the calm daily life. *«The wife of the son of the stepfather Nina gave him (stepfather) on his birthday party two bottles of lotion for shaving. And I was drunk and I heard what my mother told to Nina: "Nina, are you a*

*fool? They will drink together these bottles" ... I left the room and with my stepfather we drank these bottles. My mother then called to Nina and complained on us».* Alexander Maloletov (18.06: 00039).

## 6.2 «Superfluous person» in the system of the Soviet life

After the army, the trajectory of Alexander's life course dramatically changed. It was a negative trajectory which eventually turned around and moved into a positive direction. Life trajectories can be charted by linking states across successive years ... each trajectory is marked by a sequence of life events and transitions, changes in state that are more or less abrupt (Elder: 1985, 32). The fact that Alexander Maloletov gradually became an alcoholic influenced his portrait as a social person. Soviet society didn't perceive alcoholic as a potential «hero», active and optimistic fighter for the communist future.

«Easy, alcoholic» happiness was absolutely the opposite of the concept of happiness in Soviet culture. Soviet happiness was firmly located in the future—which in turn was invariably referred to by such adjectives as 'bright' or 'happy'. This might, indeed, be described as the central idea of Communism as understood under Soviet power: universal happiness will arrive at some (unspecified) point later on, but for now everyone has to expend all their energy in ensuring the arrival of the bright future. (Baiburin and Piir: 2008, 224). Soviet literature also proved this idea: there are the final sentences of Arkady Gaidar's famous story for Soviet children, Chuk and Gek: 'What happiness was, everyone understood for himself or herself. But at the same time everyone also knew that they had to live honest lives, to work hard and to love and cherish that huge happy land that was called the Country of the Soviets.'

A meaningful text, the official law («Об усилении борьбы с общественно вредными паразитическими элементами») appeared in 1957 in the Soviet press. This law was about adults who were leading an antisocial, «parasitic» way of life. There was no clear understanding of who were the «parasites», the Soviet government didn't give explanations but among the offenses could be alcoholism, prostitution, unemployment,



hooliganism, private enterprise, political dissidence and fartsa (sale of imported items). «What is common among Gypsies, prostitutes, drunks, black marketers and mods? .... Characteristics of their social isolation are connected with their otherness, in stark contrast to the recommended Soviet way of leaving». (Lastovka 2011: 221) The negative way in which alcoholics were presented for Soviet society can be seen in the illustrations from the famous Soviet and Russian

satirical magazine «Crocodile» (1922-2008). (<http://old-crocodile.livejournal.com/254941.html>. 05.11.2016)

Richard Jenkins writes that it is not enough to send a message about identity: that message must be accepted by a significant number of people before an identity can be said to be taken on. Identity is constructed in transactions at and across boundaries. (Jenkins 2008: 44) In this case the dialogue between the alcoholic and the Soviet political system didn't happen, the boundary wasn't crossed. That's why the Soviet government organized the policy against these anti-social elements as «parasites»; there were medical-labor dispensaries (лечебно-трудоустрой профилакторий) to which people were sent on treatment from the drug dependence and alcoholism. Alexander Maloletov was to one of these dispensaries. According to him it was a criminal organization that encouraged drinking alcohol. «*There I drank much more alcohol than I drank in freedom... It was worse to be here than in the prison because the prison has strict control over the alcohol*» - Alexander Maloletov. (20.06: 00301) Alexander remembered how he made wooden kitchen accessories, sold them to employees in the dispensary to buy alcohol.

At the beginning of perestroika (1985-1987) there was extensive anti-alcohol campaign in the Soviet Union, the slogan «Sobriety is the norm» (Трезвость-норма жизни) became the main ideological direction of this campaign. Prices on the vodka increased by three times; many vineyards were destroyed. Later the former head of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev said in an interview with Russian media (РИА новости) that this reform wasn't effective and it could be compared with an ax's blow on the head. (<https://ria.ru/society/20150515/1064595240.html> 09.02.2017) My main informant told that in these historical conditions he has found ways to make illegal alcohol, once he drank acetone and experienced hallucinations: «*I came home and the door in the toilet suddenly disappeared, a pub in St. Petersburg appeared before my eyes. And people walked but they didn't talk. I realized that I was at home but I saw another city...*». Alexander Maloletov (22.06: 00173)

### 6.3 Happy people born under the Soviet star!

The researcher Neil Thin writes that happiness is a key significance in the ordering of society. He noted that all cultures have concepts of subjective well-being which are strongly linked with individual and collective aspiration and purpose. (Thin: 2005). Happiness had become an ideological element in the propaganda of communist ideas and the Soviet way of life. Political leaders of the USSR including Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev used propaganda to paint the image new Soviet man. The Communist Party has published a special document «Moral Code of the Builder of Communism» («Моральный кодекс строителя коммунизма») in the 1961. There were principles that every



Soviet citizen should have. For example: to love the socialist USSR, socialist countries, hard work, teamwork. (<http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/250607>. 17.11.2016 ). In this case it is interesting to see communist posters which were very popular in the Soviet era. They often demonstrate healthy, laughing babies that already be happy simply because of the fact that they were born in the USSR.

*Signatures of the poster was the following – Happy people born under the Soviet star!* (From the Internet).

Thus the socio-political category of «forced happiness» was formed in the Soviet Union. Newspapers wrote bright texts about the new discoveries made by explorers, the building of new cities in Siberia and the Far East and the great flights of Soviet pilots. «The Soviet Union hourly creates heroes...The atmosphere in our country is full of heroism.... (From the newspaper «Pravda», July 25, 1936».) (Demidova: 2012: 51). Alexander Maloletov shared with me memories how he dreamed of becoming a brave pilot or sailor in his childhood. He liked to watch Soviet films about heroes such as "The Baltic Sky" («Балтийское небо»), "Heavenly slow runner" («Небесный тихоход»). He also remembered another film that depicted with a brighter Soviet ideology. «*There was a film «Communist» (1957). The man carried bread to his native village, this bread was hardly found. Suddenly the locomotive has stopped without firewood during the trip. ....The authors of this film perceived us as idiots. This film character took a simple saw and went into the forest where there were huge trees. I explain now: cutting down a huge tree requires special technology and a modern saw ... Most importantly that this man cut down so many trees, as if a group of people worked there with him. Why was it necessary to show such unrealistic nonsense to us?... Such nonsense they showed to us and we saw it with open mouth*». Alexander Maloletov (22.06; 00174)

Marianne Gullestad writes that it is important to understand what human beings receive from other people, and how they creatively refashion and adapt the knowledge, values, and ideas, they receive. (Gullestad: 1996, 31) Identities cannot be analyzed a given labels. They are achieved through the reflexive use of resources that each life course provides. In this case a family becomes recourse for the individual. Alexander Maloletov said in an interview that he grew up in a communist family, especially his mother very faithfully believed in the political ideas of the country. When Joseph Stalin died in 1953, she along with the grandmother, stepfather cried for a long time - shared my main informant. Since childhood Alexander's parents liked the idea of making him an active member of the communist society.

The story of Alexander Maloletov is unique because it shows a dichotomy between feeling and meaning, body and mind in the terms of emotion, in this case emotion of happiness. How a person evaluates, conceives of and pursues (or not) happiness can say much about how he lives, what values he has and what the cultural context is. Happiness is not only as a «lighthouse» that gives the person a sense of orientation in time and space. The goal is not only to reach the «lighthouse» but also pays

attention to the «journey» to the «lighthouse». The life course as a journey is full of disappointment, sorrow and suffering, fighting with different life circumstances. That's why anthropology concentrates on emotions as both biological and sociocultural in nature. Clifford Geertz wrote that not only ideas but emotions too, are cultural artifacts. In the 1970s and early 1980s cultural anthropologists and like-minded philosophers elaborated the position that since we can't get inside other people's heads and hearts, we must instead work out other people's definitions of emotions. (Leavitt: 1996).

#### **6.4 Hooligan poetry as the «life saver»**

In the letter that Alexander Maloletov wrote to himself he remembers: *during the alcoholic slipknot there was one question in my mind: «where can I find something to eat and to drink again». I was totally degraded.. My first rhymed lines in the poem threw me a lifesaver. They were written on the piece of the paper in the stokehold where I worked. From that moment my hand created more and more poems all days and nights, even though they were clumsy. It was the first step on the way to not the «one-time» happiness.*

In this case I can observe the concept of flow, invented by the American psychologist Mihaly Chiksentmihay from Hungary. The flow is a mental condition in which a person is absolutely focused on what he does. For Csikszentmihalyi, enjoyments are activities in which we become totally immersed and absorbed in, we lose track of time, and we are not conscious of the self and its efforts as we lose ourselves in these activities. As he points out, these activities need to be pleasurable at the time but they are considered significant, valued, and enjoyable as we look back on them. (Meadows: 2013: 149) At some point, my main informant wanted to get away from the company of his alcoholic friends and poetry gave an opportunity to see himself in the different way. Alexander began to reflect on himself and his first poems were only autobiographical, they told stories about his relationships with the father, his mother, about the fishing, his childhood, alcohol loneliness and despair, romantic ups and downs with women.

*Yes, it is too late*

*Pink Seagull I cannot find.*

*And the joy of meeting*

*With unknown*

*I cannot experience anymore.*

People in Velsk perceived Alexander only as an urban madman who begged for money to buy alcohol but gradually they started to open up to him as another person, an extraordinary poet. Andrey Gulyaev, the editor of the city newspaper «Velskie vesti» («Вельские вести» in a conversation with me remembered one curious case: *«It was ninetieth, the winter. I was driving the car and suddenly Alexander appeared on the*

*street.. I stopped, jumped out of the car and heard from him: «Andrey, I want to drink, buy, please, me vodka. I will create poem about you». I was surprised by such impudence, joked about it. While I was in the shop he was writing the poem.. And then during 6-7 minutes he was reading it...Very interesting text». (17.06; 00 629)*

The process of the searching for «hard» happiness became not only synonymous with suffering or pain but also with the great opportunity to «open» his eyes and look at the self and the world. This situation is similar to what the American sociologist Randal Collins calls emotional energy. It used as a way of discussing how emotion drives behavior. He conceptualizes emotional energy on a continuum: a high end of positive feelings such as happiness and solidarity... The self-awareness that individual is a happy person inspires him to do energetic activities, close and constructive interaction with people. (Turner 2005:11)

The unusual Alexander's life story and his poetic talent began to attract the attention of very different people in Velsk. Alexander Maloletov made the contact with the famous poet Richard Krasnovskii and the director of the city bank Viktor Lipkin. They helped him to win the alcoholism in the hospital and gave money to publish books. As a result, there are five books of poetry and prose. During my fieldwork I read Alexander's poems, as well as reviews for all books. Audience perceived his poetry as rebellious, unusual, hooligan, with fresh metaphors, not always «beautiful», maybe too dramatic. After my main informant has put alcoholic lifestyle behind him, it seemed to me that his mind opened to the world and to people. He began to satisfy his «intellectual hunger». He started to write poems about the blockade in Leningrad, the Great Patriotic War, the Chechen and Afghan war.

About the Afghan war.

*You will have a dream about Afghan*

*Where the death is waiting for her prey.*

*And you have a dream about the helicopter,*

*That was called a black «tulip».*

It is important to understand that Alexander freed himself from alcohol dependence as soon as the policy of perestroika ended in the Soviet Union. His life course cardinally changed in the social- historical context, as well as the life of his family. «My mother and stepfather were Communists. When perestroika began my mother constantly talked about the past, she thought that their life was better. But my stepfather began to «wake up». One day he was very drunk and the media had again started to present information about Stalin (about repressions in the years of Stalinism and other crimes). My stepfather told my mother: «Maria if I knew that he was a bastard, during the military attack I would have been screaming: not For the motherland and for

*Stalin but For the homeland and for Velsk!» ... My stepfather was broken». Alexander Maloletov (22.06: 00173).*

## **7. «Hard happiness»: results of the protagonist's battle**

This chapter reflects on the question why the «hard happiness» of Alexander Maloletov can be seen more as «social happiness». I analyze various social situations, coming to the conclusion that the sense of self-usefulness is one of the main value orientations in the life course of my protagonist.

### **7.1 Journalistic empathy**

Alexander Maloletov discovered not only «easy», one-time, alcoholic happiness but also he found «hard» happiness: *And the main thing is fact that I managed to "jump out" of alcoholism. I just was dying every day at the end of my mad, black alcoholism. It is happiness - I came back and step by step came to the present day. My world has completely changed. New people, friends appeared in my life. I have been in the hell. Then how can I define this happiness? Of course it is hard. Nobody gave me this happiness on the plate. I made it by myself. Alexander Maloletov (20.06: 00301)*

My camera is dusty and dirty. If it had an «allergy», it would have just «sneezed» non-stop. It is very noisy around and the bright sun blinds the eyes. Alexander begins his journalistic hunt. He runs out onto the road, pronounces something loudly. Thus he stops a huge, overweight vehicle, similar to a clumsy, mechanized caterpillar. Alexander doesn't say polite a "hello" or "forgive me"; he instantly throws information at an unfamiliar subject. Alexander said that he was making a TV-report about road problems because of the new bridge. He needs a comment from drivers. It is interesting that such a verbal «attack» doesn't frighten a stranger. On the contrary, after a few minutes he agrees to enter into the conversation. It turns out that the driver's name is Eugene and he works as a long distance trucker. «The first time I came here in the winter and my car climbed on the «mountain» on the bridge very difficulty.. I see that local drivers who convey the forest are also struggling with this problem. How do you manage with this hill on the bridge? » - Eugene. As soon as the man finished talking, Alexander immediately hugs him strongly. This is the first journalistic success today, the comment is caught.

Alexander managed not only to discover a poetic gift but also skills for journalistic activity. He began to publish articles in the city newspaper «Velskie Vesti» (Вельские вести), first autobiographical columns with stories about fishing and then articles about the social problems in Velsk. During our meeting in the local café Alexander told me one story. One old man who lived near to his flat, had taken part in the war and had been awarded USSR State Award, the highest medal that could be given to sailors by Ushakov. His wife died and he started to drink a lot but he was a very good person. When

winter came and there was only one battery in his little flat that didn't work at all. Alexander knew about this situation from a neighbor of the old man. Alexander came to visit old man and realized that he was freezing. My main informant wrote a bright note in the newspaper and the city government helped old man.

Citizens didn't see Alexander as a madman who begs for money on the street anymore. They began to trust him and often asked him for a help, especially when Alexander began to work on television. In his letter Alexander confesses: *Happiness for me now is a feeling that somebody needs you. I came to this conclusion in the time when I began to practice journalism. Citizens of Velsk often ask for help from me and my camerawoman Marina. We are like Chip and Dale from the cartoon for them.*

Alexander leaves behind the role of the leader or the «captain» for a while when he begins to interact with his colleague, camera-women Marina Petrova. I would describe her as serious, calm and even shy. There is an amazing mutual understanding between them as colleges; this could especially be observed when Alexander recorded his stand-up. Marina advised him to check his appearance and he again joked.

- Legs, shirt, cigarette.
- Fuck, oh, listen, in my opinion, everything is buttoned.
- Are you ready?
- Yes.

The work continues the next day (June 30, 2017). Alexander interviewed Victor Sheryagin, the head of the municipal formation «Velsky Municipal District». I made a curious observation in the morning when I met Alexander. For such a serious interview Alexander put on a frivolous, black T-shirt with the inscription «Jack Daniels» (a type of the American whiskey). It is obviously that he always erases any social boundaries in the interactions with people. Sometimes it works, passionate and even impudent manner of Alexander's communicating inspires people to share the opinion. As soon as we entered Victor Sheryagin's office, Alexander immediately began his impatient monologue: «Start with the bridge. Then say that everything will be fixed when major repairs will be done. Be sure to mention it». Victor Sheryagin was embarrassed. He constantly looked away, awkwardly smiled and excitedly rubbed his hands. However, the energy of Alexander's speech gave the necessary «kick» for his confusion; a clear comment about the road problem was given.

Journalism allows Alexander not only to use his incredible communication skills but also to help people. However, this opportunity to help is made more difficult by the fight against the editor of Velsk television. Velsk television station is very small and it exists on money from commercials. Alexander very often has to fight for the broadcast time. This year Alexander Maloletov became a member of the Arkhangelsk department

of the Union of Journalists of Russia (Союз журналистов России в Архангельской области).

## **7.2 «The anomaly of the heart»: to make happy everyone who is outside the family**

In this subchapter I will pay attention to the Alexander's relationships with his family (wife, son and grandson). I analyze social situations such as the arrival of a son and a grandson to the city festival in Velsk and scenes from the everyday life of my protagonist and his wife Elena. Also I will focus on the social situation of a fishing trip and analyse happiness as an emotion that is felt by my protagonist. Why does Alexander so need in this time of close contact with nature and the river?

### **7.2 (1) Smoking Universe and relationships with the wife**

Erving Goffman writes that the way how an individual interacts with others can show not only his social portrait but also the «setting». The «setting», including furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it. (Goffman 1959:32).

Most of the time, Alexander spends in his room which he ironically calls the «monastic cell». I invented the image of the «Smoking Universe». You just open the door and immediately an acrid, smoking smell tightly «hugs» you. Alexander smokes "Prima" brand cigarettes, which appeared in the USSR in 1970. The Smoking Universe is very dirty: black socks are lying around on the floor, the bed is unmade, the shells from sunflower seeds and pills from various medications are scattered on a small bedside table. There are photos of Alexander, his parents, his wife Elena, his grandmother and grandfather on the wall with old, yellow wallpapers. There is a stuffed fish with a cigarette in its mouth on the window sill. There are many icons, a book of poems by the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky (Nobel Prize winner), a coffee can from «Nestle» that serves as an ashtray on the table. In the letter Alexander writes that when he leaves the room, it seems that he is getting into an alien space - the world of his wife Elena. There everything is always clean and in the order. Elena is an accountant. They are still together after 15 years. Alexander writes that this woman with beautiful green eyes helped him to become a man, not an egoist. And he went to work in the boiler room in Velsk despite the age in crisis moments of their family life.

Elena and Alexander live in the same apartment but they exist in different worlds. Sometimes have meetings in the kitchen or in the bathroom. Elena without much enthusiasm agreed that I could spend one evening in their house. It was an ordinary summer evening. Alexander shaved and then went to the kitchen where Elena had

already prepared supper, a fish with a salad. He habitually took the plate and went to his room while asking his wife for 200 rubles for cigarettes. And a stormy dialogue began.

- When we settled together, you swore that you would feed and support me.
- Piss off, Maloletova, bugger off. A fat cow, fuck.
- Here you are old fart, greedy bitch. (she gives him money)...You wanted so bad to get married.
- Go fuck yourself.

They weren't shy about the camera or in my presence and then I realized that such conversations were a very common thing for both of them. When I worked in the editing room, I had strong doubts about whether or not to include this episode in the film. Was it ethical to be so close to Alexander's family life? Is it right to show such a "naked" relationships to other people? This scene is included in the final version of the film. During the editing I understood that if I hide this dialogue, I would deceive myself because I would not show the reality but only the pretty model of the reality. Also words from Alexander's letter convinced me. He confesses that he needs such an explosive woman. Elena with her discipline, strict character and pedantic attitude towards the cleanliness of the house regulates the fussy existence of the creative Alexander. Alexander is sincerely convinced that he needs Elena. From her point of view it is difficult to give the same answer. In an interview with me she said: *«Search me; I for instance don't remember such super happy moments, just existence. - What does it mean to live with Maloletov? - I'm not sure but it's hard perhaps. I'm alert all the time, I never know what to expect. Therefore, I don't know»*.

Alexander has married 6 times but, according to him, he had only one beloved woman. Her name was Valentina; she worked as a nurse in the Arkhangelsk hospital. He lost her because he spent a night with another woman. All his life Alexander was a nomad in his love stories and only with Elena he became a family person.

## **7.2 (2) Meeting with son and grandson**

During my fieldwork I always observed how Alexander easily and quickly creates contacts with strangers; he is always open to the world and ready to help as a journalist and just as a person. I saw this is his empathy, which can also be called a «creative empathy». He doesn't only experience other people's feelings but sometimes he tries to help to ease someone else's pain. However, I named this chapter «The anomaly of the heart» because Alexander's empathy isn't connected with members of his real family at all. For them he is often closed, he is not friendly in relationships and prefers to be lonely in his Smoking Universe.

In his letter Alexander reports the following news: *«I saw my son Slavka one year ago but I have not seen my grandson Miroslav for 8 years. My son called and said that they would come for a couple days to Velsk. To be honest, I didn't go into raptures. However, a strange excitement bubbled up inside me»*. I tried to learn something from Alexander about his son and grandson but it was useless. He always avoided this topic even in conversations without the camera.

In the evening (24.06.2017) I was with Alexander on the road, waiting grandson Miroslav and son Vyacheslav. The sun was already setting. Alexander smoked, met every passing car with a nervous glance and shared his thoughts with me: *«He (the son) may not like something. If it starts, fuck him. There will be Mirka though; so, we cannot sort out our relationships. I am worried now, my grandchild is an adult, you know. I saw him as a child ...»*. Most likely Alexander was worried because he didn't know what to do in the social role of the grandfather and father, what to say, how to behave after such a long separation. When the car carrying Miroslav and Vyacheslav finally arrived, we just went quietly to home. I could see a certain tension between Alexander and his son.

The next day was a city holiday in Velsk, the day of St. Cyril. Children rode on bicycles, ate ice cream, adults listened to music and had a rest. There were trampolines, small fair counters, a shooting gallery. I managed to spend only a couple of hours with Alexander, his son and grandson because then Miroslav became tired and they all went to home together. I felt that Alexander wasn't happy that I spent time so close to them with the camera. For the first time in my fieldwork, he wasn't a "fan" of my camera presence, so he tried to limit my contact with his family. Perhaps Alexander wanted to spend more time alone with his family or "hide" his conflicts with his son or his own self-disappointment from outside view.



Alexander's son Vyacheslav drank beer and smoked in a T-shirt with a portrait of the famous Jamaican musician Bob Marley. He hardly spoke to his father but he constantly reminded him that everyone in Velsk had books of poetry by Alexander and he didn't. At that time the grandson Miroslav saw a small turtle at one of the fair counters and asked Alexander to buy one turtle. The artistic nature of my protagonist found

expression in this social situation. For a long time Alexander didn't agree with this "deal" because he was embarrassed by the price. He entered into a polemical dialogue with the seller.

-Listen, you. Do you know who am I?

- No.

- My grandmother was a gypsy. Are you a gypsy as well?

-Yes.

– Do not try to fool me!

Despite the fact that Alexander bought a turtle for his grandson and Miroslav was really happy with a small living creature, it's hard to see in this the act of a loving grandfather. It seems that Alexander felt very uncomfortable with son and grandson. When they were going home, he even took Miroslav by the hand not in a kindly way but with detachment and a cool-headed.

### **7.3 Fishing trips like the meditation**

In my opinion, one of the most important discoveries during my fieldwork was the opportunity to get to watch Alexander's reflecting, his sincere monologues where he shares his thoughts and feelings. Recently Alexander wrote to me on one of the social networks (Russian Facebook) to tell me that he had begun creating short stories about the time that we spent together in the summer. Alexander is sure that my appearance in his life inspired him to write again, to do something actively in journalism and to leave his room more often (the Smoking Universe). In some way it can be said that my presence and my camera became a kind of emotional catalyst that has prompted Alexander to engage in creative improvisation of his behavior and self-presentation both when communicating with people, when communicating with himself (a letter to self).

According to Alexander the river Vaga (the river in the Vologda and Arkhangelsk regions of Russia), gives him peace of mind. Almost every day early in the morning he takes his fishing tackles, buys a few packs of «Prima» cigarettes, canned food with a stew, takes coffee in a thermos and goes for fishing. In the letter Alexander writes that he has never set a specific goal, like choosing a profession or having a normal family. There was only one thing – a hope for a Russian “maybe” and a long wandering around the North searching for himself. On the river he always finds peace and silence.

On July 4 Alexander along with his two friends Vladimir and Valery went on a fishing trip. I was with them. When our car stopped in the field, my eyes fell in love with the beauty. The sunset is like a ripe pomegranate. There are swallows which make their nests in the cozy, grassy «houses» of the slope. On the other bank of the river Vaga there is a noisy bird market of gulls. The summer sky is high and free. I can hear the whisper of

grasshoppers in the field. After we arrived at the right place Alexander being a good experienced fisherman immediately began to «organize» a place. He proudly took out fishing tackles, rucksacks with the food, home-made seats from the car. It seemed that it was important for Alexander to demonstrate to everyone that he is a leader, he knows what to do and when. He cuts the bread, prepares sausages and the tea from the thermos, started to speak with friends who timidly stood next to the table: «Gentlemen, have you forgotten what people in Georgia say? All on the table is all yours». After a short lunch Valery chops the firewood, Vladimir talks to his wife on the phone and asks about the football match the he missed today because of the fishing trip. Alexander carefully prepares the spinning and smokes, listening to the voices of gulls on the opposite bank of the river Vaga. It became dark very quickly and my camera can hardly distinguish people. The river literally "divided" men, each of them went to his "place". I could only shoot Alexander near the fire when he drank tea. He hasn't yet caught a fish but he felt something amazing – «That is happiness, indeed. You don't need to think about anything, screw everything. It can't be explained, it can be felt only, so you'll love it».

The dawn allowed my camera to "open its eyes." The morning landscape was surprisingly relaxing. Seagulls didn't cry like they did in the evening. It smelled of the dew. Alexander once again was smoking and preparing the bait for a fishing tackle. The bait was bread with spices and corn. At this very moment (when I found a more or less comfortable position on a slippery, earthen shore), something unexpected happened. Alexander was incredibly happy because he managed to catch a very small fish that he most likely will give to his cats. «Jesus! Saint Nicholas!! Thank you for the gift, I need to kiss the cross, probably. Nikola heard my prayers», - Alexander said. It was a moment in which I as a researcher could observe the happy state of Alexander. A man who had lost so much in his life was finally happy because of such a small catch. He grabbed the little fish in his fist, kissed a cross on his neck and was smiling for a long time.

## **8. Happiness and the constructing self**

In this final chapter I will try to outline the term happiness as I have used it in my research project. I will connect understandings of the emotion of happiness in the interpretation of Alexander Maloletov to the emotion of happiness as a bodily feeling and as a cultural meaning.

### **8.1 What does happiness mean?**

The first barrier to understanding the category of «happiness» begins on the lexical level because dictionaries (in this case English and Russian languages) give different definitions of the term. Happiness is a feeling, showing or causing pleasure or satisfaction, it is a version from the Cambridge dictionary. The Oxford English dictionary writes that happiness is the state of being satisfied that something is good or right, synonym of satisfaction. And satisfaction is the good feeling that you have when you

have achieved something or when something that you wanted to happen does happen. Also in the anthropology, sociology, philosophy and sociology it may be used as a blanket term to include all positive feelings about the self, as a synonym for subjective well-being. The latter is consistent with the term «happy» in common English usage, which refers to a transient, positive state of mind that has been caused by a specific experience, such as a pleasant social interaction (Boniwell 2013). All these tries to define happiness prove the idea from the introduction in the book «Pursuits of happiness: Well-being in anthropological perspective» that happiness is not one thing; it means different things in different places, different societies, and different cultural contexts. (2009:1)

Happiness as an emotion is connected with positive feelings like joy, bliss, or rapture, fortune, luck or success. These categories are characterized as single and short experiences of feeling happiness. It is interesting that Russian dictionaries (authors Ozhegov S., L. Efremova, D. Ushakov) define happiness as a long-duration positive mood trait which is more closer to my empirical data. They define happiness (счастье) as a feeling and a state of complete and higher satisfaction, creativity; a feeling of joy; state of contentment, well-being, joy of the fullness of life, of life satisfaction. During an interview my protagonist Alexander Maloletov mentioned the following:

*Last time I talked with my friend Angelica (Angelica Dolinina, filmmaker in Arkhangelsk) and said that I was probably a happy person. I am 67 years old, I look at people with the same age and many of them have illnesses... Yes, I am happy but I am afraid of losing it. What do I need more in my life now? I have friends with whom I have good relationships. I have a job that is very difficult to find in contemporary Russia. (18.06; 02022)*

In my research project Alexander looks at self from the outside, watches his life course with all its troubles and happy moments and at the same time he lives in the present and reflects on what is happening to him. Happiness in this case is not a momentary sensory experience, it is a complicated emotional state that a person is able to evaluate. In the work «Explorations in Mental Health: Psychological Perspective on Joy and Emotional Fulfillment» there is a similar idea that happiness can also be a judgment or a cognitive evaluation of life. When Goethe wrote – I am happy and I would like to live over again, he was referring to an overarching evolution of his life in its entirety (Meadows: 2013).

My master paper is focused on happiness as a psychobiographical concept, a lens through which we think evaluatively and narratively about people's selves and lives. The enjoyment of life becomes significant, and is culturally legitimated and structured, through life reviews and life stories (Thin: 2013). That is why it is very important to give my informant chance to become the narrator of his life course because even the interpretation of happiness is a story about social life rather than about internal states. Alexander Maloletov distinguishes between two types of happiness, «easy» and «hard»,

when he was alcoholic and when he stopped drinking and opened new reality. In such a way happiness is a metaphorical «meter» for his own life course. For me as a researcher it was interesting to observe the role of happiness at that moment, how the emotion became a part of the process of the social construction of new identity. Happiness is understood as becoming what we are essentially are. (Meadows: 2013). In Alexander's life course finding happiness is also a road to finding himself.

Last but not least Alexander's search for the happy life is similar, in my opinion, to the path through suffering in the context of Russian Orthodox culture. *I remember that Remark (the German writer) has the idea that we can talk about happiness for five minutes but about misery for a long time... You know what happiness is, only if you have experienced suffering.* A.Maloletov (20.06: 00301). This thought that the only way to achieve happiness is through suffering is close to the concept of suffering in Russian Christian theory. Suffering is one of the key ideas in the Christian theory about happiness. Researchers write about a positive and a negative model of suffering: pessimism including works by Nietzsche, Weber, Weil, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Sartre, and Arendt and positive view is in Existentialism, idealism. The positive model holds that suffering has a redemptive role to play in human life, as if from affliction there can be derived some unexpected gain, new perspective, or beneficial alteration. Pain can be seen as a kind of liminal region through which we can pass from a worse to a better place. (Davies: 2011: 190)

Christianity is called the religion of suffering. Suffering helps person overcome pride and perceive the world in the right way, to divide real moral and material values. There are events of martyr life of the first Christians and the suffering of Christ in the center of the Christian tradition; patience, humility, forgiveness and love of enemies, kindness – all this person should have in his soul. This idea is captured well by Martin Luther in the following passage: God works by contraries.... A man feels himself to be lost in the very moment when he is on the point of being saved. Man first cry out that there is no health in him. He must be consumed with horror... In this disturbance salvation begins. When a man believes himself to be utterly lost, it is only then when the light shall break. (Davies: 2011). However, it is important to say that in Christianity along with the idea of suffering there is a concept of humility (смирение), which means taking all that the God and the fate give. Alexander didn't accept this idea: he always tried to fight with own laziness, selfishness, alcoholic dependence and later, as a journalist, he fights with social problems in the home city.

## **Conclusion**

During one of the seminars about the results of fieldwork, I said that the letter "a" has a great importance for my research project. In this case, it contains two adjectives: **academic** and **artistic**. Since I was writing a master's paper, not a fiction, it was very important to follow the logic in the narrative and to be able to argue my thoughts and

discoveries, to analyze, referring to the scientific literature. This started to be especially true when the concept of happiness became the main topic in my work. The first difficulties began with a lexical level: what does happiness mean? During the seminar my classmates expressed different opinions. One of the curious versions was that happiness is the moment when a person opens a bottle of champagne at the celebration. It doesn't last for a long time, it is a short moment of happiness which can be measured in a few minutes. But what will happen if we understand happiness as a long process in which it is possible to observe the way of searching happy life and to notice connection between the individual, a unique life course and the society. My research project discovered happiness not only a short, bright, emotional flash that brings pleasure, satisfaction and joy. Happiness is not so much a result but a way how to achieve the result. In my work I call happiness as a psychobiographical lens through which the researcher can find a person's story and even his life course with all transitions and trajectories.

My work is focused on the life course a representative of the generation of 1950s - Alexander Maloletov from a small, provincial Russian town Velsk. He distinguishes two kinds of happiness: «easy» - alcoholic euphoria and «hard» - a fight with the dependence and the return to a normal life. Such a bit naive, poetic interpretation pushed me to analyze the concept of happiness not only at the level of personal story but also in the socio-historical context. During the analysis of ethnographic observations, work in the archive, I managed to see «conflicting» relationships between an alcoholic happiness which Alexander Maloletov has experienced for twenty years and communistic happiness in the Soviet ideology. The life course of Alexander Maloletov, his reflections in the letter, his answers during our conversations, my observations of his daily routine, prove the idea that happiness is also a field of a struggle. Alexander lived both in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, his individual happy life course was very dependent on those crisis moments that were in the country. However, my protagonist «fought» not only with very changeable reality but also with his own laziness, selfishness, despair and powerlessness. The process of discovering happy life became also a social process of the constructing self which was developing in the social experience and activity, relationships with individuals from different milieus. It was a path from a lost, homeless person who is suffering from an alcoholic dependence to a journalist, a poet, a fisherman, a stoker and a family man. But I must say that this is not a way that is similar to the final title in a film like « happy ending». Alexander's hard happiness in the present can also be called as a certain territory of the struggle. That's why, for example, I introduce the idea – «The anomaly of the heart», speaking about how Alexander creates contacts with members of his family.

During my fieldwork I came to the idea that happiness is also a concept that is very much connected with the nostalgia. A person can live in the present but constantly he «walks» in memories, including happy memories. A great «personal museum of memory», which Alexander Maloletov constantly visits, proves this idea. Even a simple,

everyday walk through the hometown Velsk becomes for him as a time machine and architectural objects on the map are as «bus stops» during the trip to the past.

The artistic way in my research project found its expression in a bit experimental methodology. Alexander Maloletov wrote a letter to himself to the past from the present. Such an unusual form of communication allowed to draw a documentary-lyrical portrait of the main character and to get to know his thoughts and feelings very closely. Nevertheless not only the text was a vivid research tool in my work but also a provocative, unexpected, expressive camera. Filming various social situations in which Alexander took part helped me to observe his behavior, reactions to certain events and his tactics in the communication with different people. In the work I metaphorically called it a charismatic attack or the gentle aggression.

In this master paper I pay attention to the thought that happiness has a great emotional mechanism that organizes human experience. It contains strong recollections about the past, beautiful dreams and presents live-moments which can be a force for transformative change for the individual and for the collectivity.

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