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Memories of Leningrad's Blockade: Testimonies from Two Generations

Historians who turn to orally-transmitted materials are usually primarily interested in the extent to which facts may be reported in the narratives, as well as in the way that certain 'typical' historical realities are reflected in people's memory. Oral history is a valuable repository of information often omitted from standard historical narratives, and also provides rich evidence of how historical events and circumstances were evaluated by those who lived through them.¹ That said, the historian himself or herself may well know considerably more about the events described than the informant — always assuming the latter is not a professional historian. Thus, the actual factual content of such narratives may be open to question.

In any case, it is possible to look at oral history in a different way: to attempt to reflect on the sources of the evaluations given and to focus on the entire process of narration, the way

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¹ On the importance of oral history as a source for material about evaluation, and the emotional side of experience generally, see the contributions by Larry Holmes and David Ransel to the round-table discussion in *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*. 2006. No. 3. [Editor].

that the story is constructed. Admittedly, this approach brings difficulties of another kind, since it is impossible, even hypothetically, to take into account every element that has influenced the selection and interpretation of material, all the more given that the processes of selection and interpretation of material have taken place at a range of different times — when the event was lived through in the first place and over the course of the informant's life since. In addition, many different sources other than personal experience are involved in the construction of any narrative. And, of course, the interaction with the interviewer also contributes to both construction and selection, resulting in the final shape that the lived experience takes in a particular narration.

During interviews with survivors of the Leningrad Blockade conducted by researchers from the Centre of Oral History, European University at St.Petersburg, in 2000–2003, informants were given the freedom to choose topics and to construct their narration by themselves. They knew beforehand that we were interested in recording their life histories, and particularly their experiences during the Blockade. However, the interview itself was not directed by a sequence of questions and answers; intervention on the part of the interviewer was avoided as far as possible. Interviewers began by asking informants to speak about the Blockade, and sometimes also asked them how old they were when the war began. They then allowed the informant to speak freely, generally avoiding asking questions before the informant had come to a natural conclusion.

The resulting stories usually consisted of several sections, divided by reference to specific themes or eras, but linked one to another by means of certain framing devices. Inside those sections, a variety of different rhetorical or narratological strategies were to be observed — passages of straight narrative alternated with descriptive, evaluative, or generalising passages, and so on. When addressing the interviews, I supposed these shifts in rhetoric to be at some level deliberate, and therefore of analytical interest. Specifically, I paid attention to considerations such as the following:

- i. the fact that this or that topic appeared in the narrative and that, within a topic, this or that detail was mentioned;
- ii. the fact that the topics appeared in precisely this and not in another sequence, and the narrator passed from one topic to another at a given point;
- iii. the fact that certain persons, realities and circumstances were mentioned while others were ignored, and that certain evaluations were expressed at different points in the story.

Elements in discourse construction of this kind lay bare the intentions and associations that the narrator is expressing. Analysing them can reveal, for example, the image of reported events in a narrator's memory; the level of his or her competence as a narrator, and the means he or she uses to give coherence to the text; about self-presentation and auto-stereotyping, and the sources of the facts and evaluations cited (that is, the different 'voices' that can be traced in the given narrative, for example, traces of Soviet official discourse).

My starting point, then, is the conviction that every move in a narrator's monologue is explicable in terms of how the narrator understands the general goals of narration, the expectations of the listener, and the appropriateness of this or that move in the current context. Even monologue narration thus represents a kind of boiled-down dialogue, departing at every point from a listener's hypothetical questions and expectations. Strange as it may seem, this idea appears to be applicable even to 'monolithic' texts that are reproduced in the same form hundreds of times over, such as the speeches made by war veterans to schools (the so-called 'lessons in courage') that were organized during the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s as a way of celebrating Victory Day or other notable anniversary, e.g. the lifting of the Leningrad Blockade in January 1944.¹ I often encountered this type of text when working with interviews, most particularly in the monologue section at the beginning, and even here the text had to be understood as an exercise in imaginary polemic, an answer to a sequence of questions posed by a non-existent interlocutor.

Thus, even when the interviewer is silent, the dialogical nature of discourse remains: instead of answering real questions, the narrator has to hypothesise by him- or herself what it would be appropriate to say, step by step. For some informers who are not accustomed to produce coherent monologues, such activity is a difficult task, involving a search for words and for meaning. Indeed, some interviews failed altogether in achieving coherence. In such cases the researcher had to ask questions actively and thus to intrude upon — and so critically influence — the construction of meaning. The biographical interview focusing on an informant's personality and his or her narrative strategies (strategies of self-presentation) works

¹ The anniversary is sometimes given as 25 January and sometimes 27 January. The former appears to be celebrated in Leningrad/St Petersburg itself — see e.g. the newspaper *Nevskoe vremya*, 26 January 1995, reporting on the unveiling of a monument to Blockade survivors in Park Pobedy (Victory Park) the previous day. However, an exhibition at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art in 2005 commemorating the anniversary began on 27 January <www.museum.ru/news/archive/RCN022420040129.htm>, and Western sources such as the World War Two Multimedia Databases <<http://www.worldwar2database.com/html/leningrad.htm>> also give this date. [Editor].

well only in cases where the informant is capable of laying out a continuous narrative, and has a basic conviction that narrating a life history is worthwhile.¹

Unlike a literary text as such — say, a piece of prose or poetry, where the non-arbitrary character of elements and of the whole structure is linked to the author's primary intentions — an interview is a more spontaneous and simpler text. However, the unifying devices in oral history interviews can also be the subject of analysis, for one can find some dominant topics and ideas outside the interview to which reported events and evaluations are related (starting from common sense and other more specific 'coherence systems', as Charlotte Linde calls them) [Linde 1993]. At the same time, a listener's interpretation of the story told by a narrator and that narrator's interpretation of events may well diverge, especially when (as happens in monologue) the listener does not 'correct' the speaker's version of events by breaking in with questions.

The extent to which a text is perceived as meaningful and coherent depends on several circumstances, of a kind that are both internal and external with respect to the text. It is not enough to understand words and phrases in themselves. Often, in order to be able to understand that, for example, reference is being made to the same field of realities at several different points in a text, it is necessary that the listener share not just the narrator's linguistic experience, but also his or her cultural competence. Following Harvey Sacks's usage [Sacks 1995: 246 ff], we can say that this shared competence enables the listener to perform correct 'membership categorisation'.

When the speaker has grounds to suppose that the listener is lacking such competence, he or she builds the narration correspondingly. That is why when, say, a young girl the same age as the narrator's grandchildren is conducting the interview, the result, in some cases, is likely to resemble, at least to begin with, an official speech as given to groups of schoolchildren. The writers Daniil Granin and Oles Adamovich, when doing work on their oral history project dedicated to the Leningrad Blockade during the mid 1970s, were hence from some points of view in a more advantageous position than researchers now would usually be. The material that later became part of their famous *Book of the Blockade* was narrated in the form of interviews with survivors carried out by Granin and Adamovich themselves: both were members of the war gen-

¹ I would like to emphasise here the fundamental difference between this method and the methods used in the classic ethnographical interview, which is focused not on an informant's personality as such, but on general cultural models and on details of which the informant may not be normally aware — these only come to light in response to a researcher's specific questions.

eration, and Granin had been in active service on the Leningrad front. Membership of the same generation as their interviewees, and shared war experience, meant they were able to establish their 'legitimacy' as interlocutors right from the beginning. Yet, at the same time, many things that would have seemed obvious and familiar to these old Leningraders probably passed without being mentioned, let alone described, precisely because they were speaking to people of same the generation. Conversely, the very fact that the researchers who conducted interviews within the European University project were all young people may well have provoked informers to articulate things that 'everybody knows' (i.e. everybody of their own generation), and hence supply information about them.

To date, a considerable range of official documents relating to the Blockade has been published, including reports filed by NKVD agents (edited by Nikita Lomagin). A big album of photographs (edited by Vladimir Nikitin) appeared not long ago, and some personal documents of outstanding interest, such as diaries, have also entered the public domain.¹ It is possible — and often very fruitful — to read the interviews from the European University's oral history project against the background of those publications, especially given that some of the informers themselves have read a good deal about the Blockade, and while narrating their personal experience may implicitly or explicitly refer to evaluations and ideas expressed elsewhere.

In the most prominent publications about the Blockade experience, such as the writings by the famous writer and critic Lidiya Ginzburg, reflections on the impact of inhumanly severe hardship on human psychology and behaviour generated deep insights and anthropologically valuable conclusions. The materials collected in our own oral history project also sometimes raise important moral issues to which easy answers cannot be given. In turn, such issues are often pivotal for narrators themselves. It would be reasonable to suppose that published materials may not only have influenced the factual content of some interviews, but also brought about a kind of sensitisation of the speakers with respect to certain controversial psychological and moral aspects of the Blockade experience.

The main recurrent topics that are used in the interviews and generate the 'coherence systems' present in the texts, and which are present across many interviews from our corpus, are as follows (the titles have been assigned by me):

¹ See the bibliography on the 'Leningrad Blockade' website set up by the European University, St Petersburg: <<http://www.eu.spb.ru/oralhist/biblio.htm>>.

Lucky chance;
Life is not limited to physical survival;
Divine protection;
Hunger and related issues;
Through the eyes of a child;
The impact of Blockade experience on life today.

These different topics are present to a different extent in the three groups of interviews (with those who experienced the Blockade as children, as adolescents, and as young people) that I have set out below. For example, *Through the eyes of a child* is relevant only to the stories told by informers who were children during the Blockade.

The reader will notice that many of the quotations from the interviews could have been placed in more than one section. My choice follows, or at least attempts to follow, the choice of quotations made by narrators themselves, departing from the place that these passages occupied in the overall structure of a narration, from the associations present there.

Selective quotation of this kind obviously means that the place which references occupy in the overall structure of the texts is obscured. However, a structural analysis of all the interviews quoted would not only be a hopelessly ambitious task, but would also essentially be redundant to the topic of intergenerational difference in how the Blockade is presented. I will therefore sum up my observations relating to this issue in the last part of the article, trying to draw some conclusions concerning the way in which representatives of different generations give shape to their Blockade experience by means of oral narrative.

The quotations from the interviews have been translated from transcriptions that mostly retained hesitations and some particularities of oral style, though not to the degree usual for transcriptions as used in linguistic analysis as such. For instance, pauses and their length are not indicated. Translation into English makes the meaning more transparent and the text easier to read, though at the expense of partial omission of some purely conversational fillers and specific discourse markers that can hardly be directly translated. Square brackets indicate additions and comments necessary to fill in contextual gaps (e.g. references to material already cited at some earlier point in the interview). Round brackets contain comments on the state of the informant and, when necessary, details addressed to narrators in the quotations. Informants are referred to by their first name, initial of last name, sex, and age in 1941 (e.g. 'Valentina S., f., age 8').

'Lucky chance'

Though not many interviews are wholly centered on this idea, almost none do not include an episode of lucky escape from death, or a mention of something that allowed a person to survive, or contributed significantly to his or her survival. In principle, each Blockade story has to answer an unspoken question about how the narrator survived in those circumstances when so many people around died. 'Lucky chance' offers a convenient explanation for survival, though the same kind of events and circumstances that are evaluated as 'Lucky chance' can also be explained in terms of 'Divine protection' (as will be made clear below).

The 'Lucky chance' referred to most often involves the unexpected appearance of food or a near escape from death:

I began running. I had been standing at the entrance door, and the shell exactly reached the place where we had been standing. But no-one was hurt, we girls used to talk about it all the time afterwards, our teacher got all of us to the basement in time. And then I ran home, under a shower of shells falling on the street. And after I had children, I used to come [to this same spot] and say, 'Look, that's where I ran with the shells showering round me, and then granny [i.e. the informant's mother] gave me a good shaking [i.e. as a punishment] that I'd gone running off [breaking a prohibition on being out while there were air-raids on]. And another time, a shell hit the roof of our house and a piece of shrapnel ricocheted off a wall, flew through the window and fell on Mama's pillow. Mama kept it for a long time, it was a long piece, like this (indicating). Later we lost it. But you see, we weren't fated to die. That shrapnel hit Mama's pillow while she was out at the munitions factory. It came whistling in and went right into her pillow, ended up stuck right there...

Int.: *Amazing.*

Inf.: *Well, things happen by chance like that. It was meant, you see. Everything depends on fate. Not on us (Aelita V., f., age 12).*

In this passage, two separate episodes are interpreted as 'Lucky chance', and the informant then makes a generalisation related not only to these two episodes, but also to earlier stories supporting the interpretation of 'Lucky chance'. In such cases, the 'Lucky chance' theme can act as an organising principle of the entire narrative: an entire series of episodes is set out, to be followed by a generalisation, which may also provide a link to the next 'Lucky chance' episode, as here:

I worked it out once. Ten times or so I had a hairbreadth escape from death. The only thing that saved me was some lucky chance that helped me in the very last moment. Because once a shell hit the next-door

flat, just a partition wall away. It blew up right next door, but luckily the impact went in the other direction. Though I did get thrown out of bed (Anatoly M., m., age 9).

The fact that extra resources remaining from pre-war days (building supplies such as wallpaper paste, for instance) could be used as food substances in the new emergency, is also treated as a case of 'Lucky chance':

So what saved us? My father knew someone who worked as a groom. And he brought us ten kilograms of bran. In return for a bottle of vodka. And my mother cooked some of this bran every day (Evgenia I., f., age 12).¹

My mother had some Madeira wine, and by the way it was the Madeira that saved me then... I had fits and when I got one at home she used to give me a teaspoonful of Madeira. And when I was in hospital too. All the people around, and the doctors, when I got well again, regarded it as a miracle (Igor L., m., age 18).

It is worth noting that access to extra resources of food, wood and safety that could be seen as logical and predictable (e.g., because of an informant's social position, status-linked privileges), is associated with 'Lucky chance' only in stories narrated by those who were small children during the Blockade.

Divine protection

Several interviews within the European University project were conducted with people who openly declared their religious convictions and belonged to a Baptist community (some of them had joined it relatively recently, in after-war time). Also God is mentioned in many other interviews too, these ones are structured around the idea of survival thanks to the Lord's protection and help. Here, the coherence of the stories is provided by a religious alternative to the 'Lucky chance' idea. As is well known, 1943 saw an official softening of attitudes towards the Orthodox Church, leading to the re-opening of seminaries and of churches, including some in Leningrad. Members of other churches, such as the Baptists, also benefited from this rapprochement. In the following narrative, an informant who was a child during the War puts her own gloss on the new status of religion:

¹ The continuation of this extract is particularly interesting in terms of the intersection of different temporal levels and narrative voices, including later reinterpretation from a didactic point of view (see also the section on 'The impact of Blockade experience on life today' below): *'So I said: "Mama! Keep 200 grams by for when the peace arrives, so we can remember then what that bran tasted like!" That was in November, and then things got... well, really awful. But we did have some firewood. So my brother and I dragged it up to the hall of the flat and sawed it up and then chopped it into small pieces out in the yard. (Turning to her granddaughter). You know, your Mama [i.e. the informant's daughter] was amazed when she heard that: imagine me being able to chop wood!'*

All people become equal during the Blockade. All the Communists, they prayed to the Lord, all of them. I saw it with my own eyes. My own teacher, a person who'd insisted louder than anyone that God didn't exist — I saw her crossing herself repeatedly and praying (when during a shelling we took refuge on the staircase of some building). You see how grief turns out to unite people and makes them listen to reason, so to speak (Alla I., f., age 9).

Although the observation that 'all the communists' were praying is certainly exaggerated, firm religious or quasi-religious convictions certainly conferred an advantage in making suffering meaningful, and perhaps in also in surviving:

And then the moment would come when Mama said, 'Well then, children...' — and we used to go to bed — without undressing, in case there was an air-raid and we had to go to the shelter. 'Let's pray, because we ate the last of our food today, and we'll die tomorrow.' ... I recall I was praying, I was the eldest in the family. And my two brothers and Mama were praying too. The next morning, we heard someone knocking at the door and then mother's elder brother appeared on the threshold of our communal apartment. He'd come back on leave from the Front, he was a staff officer. He'd come to Petersburg to visit his family and leave them his monthly food ration. But when he arrived back home, he found his family wasn't there, they'd been evacuated. And then he remembered he'd a sister, our mother, living here [in Leningrad] too. So he came to us, God brought him to us.¹ And his monthly food ration, I'll never forget it as long as I live. Bread, food concentrates, cereals... It was a miracle. Well, I was a child then, I looked at things this way: we'd prayed, and the Lord had sent him to us. And later, when those supplies ran out, the Lord let my mother find a silo trench, there was a state farm field near where we lived... and Mama made cakes out of the silo mass. ... That is, God sent us many things in many ways, so that we could survive, because we relied on Him and on Him alone (Yury G., m., age 8).

The following particularly vivid recollection of an incident involving a little girl from a religious family, then aged four, also cites what appears to be a pure miracle. It is interpreted as a sign of God's help:

Once our little Ruth came home and said, 'Mama, you know, I've just seen this little heap of dried crusts out there on the grass'. Mama thought she was having hallucinations: 'Ruth, darling, that can't be right. Who would leave bread lying round now?' But Ruth insisted, she kept asking if she could pick up the crusts, and in the end Mama said yes, simply to

¹ For a recollection of this same motif — food meant for someone else being passed on to one's own family — but without the religious colouration, see Boris Firsov in *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*. 2006. No. 3. P. 353.

keep her quiet. And she really did bring back a whole bag of dried crusts. They lasted us several days, we ate them up bit by bit. That was a help, too. It was a gift of providence, it was, and we thanked God in our prayers for all he'd done for us (Zinaida L., f., age 4).

Life is not limited to physical survival

The extreme conditions of the Blockade switched people's interests and attention to food and physical survival, and many narrators dwell upon topics that were considered taboo under Soviet power, e.g. the criminal and immoral behaviour that people were sometimes driven to by extremes of suffering (see the section on 'Hunger' below). However, because post-Soviet mass media discourse often dwells on the sensational details of the Blockade, including cannibalism, it has become important to some narrators to underline the opposite facet of the Blockade and to emphasise that the people belonging to their circle remained human despite all the challenges. Though survival is the central question, this is not always treated as physical survival exclusively.

In Soviet days, Blockade life was depicted as necessarily involving a sense of higher things: listening to patriotic verses by Olga Berggolts, or Dmitry Shostakovich's Seventh ('Leningrad') Symphony, on the radio, and going to the theatre. Published diaries such as Ginzburg's show intellectuals analysing their own moral image in the light of the psychological changes accompanying starvation. In our interviews, the ability to remain human, to cultivate spiritual values, is mostly understood to be related to humanity in personal relations, in the first place, and to the ability to cultivate interests reaching beyond getting something to eat, in the second:

You see, even during the Blockade... people still managed to live. In very peculiar conditions, of course. But at every possible opportunity, they remembered they were humans. It's like those green plants you see growing in cracks in the tarmac. At the least opportunity, a shoot forces its way through. That's what people are like too... and life found its way through during the Blockade too. You see what I mean? That's why I can't agree with people who base everything they say about the Blockade on those three months [December 1941, January and February 1942, when conditions were at their worst]. When everything happened, right to the point of cannibalism. Yes, I know that did happen (Andrei K., m., age 12).

Andrei K.'s story is remarkable in several respects. It is constructed around four dominant topics — the narrator's identity as a musician, the narrator's mother's feats in dealing with the demands of everyday life, and 'Lucky chance', as well as the central topic of how 'Life is not limited to survival'. This narration polemicalises, both openly and implicitly, with popular stereotypes of the Block-

ade and Blockade survivors. In a seemingly paradoxical manner, some aesthetic highlights are found by the protagonist of the narration (that is, by the narrator when he was 12 years old) even in episodes of the most painful kind. Thus, he describes, for instance, his deep impression of the picture he saw in a frozen room of his apartment where the windows were broken by bombardment and where the snow that covered the dead body of his father glittered in the moonlight. Along with such highly personal details brought about by his artistic sensitivity, some more common indications of a 'non practical' existence also appear:

Even in the hardest times we kept reading. One had to keep busy. We used to read together. There was a big volume of Pushkin, his poetry. And at home we had many books. So we not only burnt books [to light the stove], we also read them. (Andrei K., m., age 12).

The use of books as fuel often appears in these stories. People describe what books they used and how it was done (in order to stoke the fire with books you had to tear out single pages and roll them up, not put the entire book into the stove). Interestingly, the quoted passage from Andrei K. immediately follows his recollection of a neighbour burning Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in the stove that all the dwellers used together in the communal kitchen where their life concentrated during the grimmest period of the Blockade. The big black volume of Pushkin mentioned in the quotation is a book well known to the war generation. It was published in a huge print-run as part of the large-scale official celebration of the centenary of the poet's death in 1937, and it still can be found in many Russian homes.

Reading is thus regarded as an activity symbolising a kind of moral victory, a challenge to hunger, an alternative that 'we' (= survivors from the narrator's family) offered to '*lying down and waiting for death to come*':

I read Dumas. I remember that I then re-read all Dumas, with the light of that primitive oil-lamp. So, you see, we didn't lie down and wait for death to come, we lived as fully as we could in the circumstances. We tried to survive. And if we had just lain down, as many people did, we would, of course, not have survived (Aelita V., f., age 12).

Another aspect of the recollections of the Blockade people is the idea that relations between people remained at some level fully human, despite the inhuman hardships to which they were exposed. Some 'Lucky chance' episodes may also be included in this line, for example, those that involve unexpected kindness from a stranger. Take the story of a girl who was carrying a small pot with soup for her father through frozen Leningrad:

I had got to Aptekarsky Island when suddenly a soldier stopped me and told that my cheek was showing the first signs of frost-bite. [...] I

put those pots on the ground and rubbed my cheek with the muff. And all that time he was standing by me, waiting [thus protecting her from possible attempts to steal the soup that was in the pot]. (Weeps). I don't know. I appreciated it greatly. I remember it as an act of sympathy and compassion. And my father survived [thanks to the soup] (Mira R., f., age 11).

In the quotation below, the informer touches upon the very sensitive topic of the right attitude to adopt towards people who had collapsed in the street. The idea that ignoring them was routine and thus did not involve elements of moral choice is interpreted in many interviews as indifference (see also my section on Indifference below); however, same facts may be seen from a different angle and be given explanation and a sort of bitter justification.

Apart from fright, horror, and savagery, there was kindness, too. Kindness and humanity between people. It was there. And if someone tells you that it wasn't, that's simply not true. And when sometimes somebody starts to say that people just collapsed and no one approached them, it wasn't because no one wanted to help the fallen person. Imagine, here I am walking along, and someone collapses right in front of me. I realise that if I try to get this person up, I'll collapse as well and I'll never get on my feet again. That's why I walk on by. Very often that's what the explanation was. But kindness and humanness did exist... It's important we don't just recall nightmares (Galina I., f., 18).

Compare this to the following, paying attention to the word 'doomed', which refers to an important category in the Blockade mentality:

One day I had to go out somewhere, I had to cross the river by Troitsky Bridge. All of us those days were wearing two overcoats. One was not enough, it was so cold, I don't know where people got the second overcoat, maybe from relatives who had died already. And I had my overcoat on, and over it, another one, firmly belted. And... I remember that I slipped and fell. But I wasn't doomed, I had some force in me left. I crossed the bridge and fell. People passed by, no-one offered me a hand, but they said sympathetically and urgently sympathy and as a kind of an order said to me, 'Get up! Get up!' It was both an expression of sympathy and the only help they could afford. Or I understood it that way, at least (Anzhelika K., f., age 20).

It is worth noting that such reflections come from people who were young adults at the time of the Blockade and so had to account for their own behaviour in circumstances when the normal way of things had been considerably modified compared to the usual pre-war mores and habits. The level of humanity one could afford had been reduced to verbal encouragement of anyone who had fallen down.

Self-sacrificial acts on the part of family members and relatives should also be mentioned in this section:

One morning she asked me to come up closer and said: 'Tamarochka, take the bread that I'm keeping under my pillow'. It was small like this, one hundred grams — Blockade bread weighed heavy, you know. First I refused, but she said, 'Take it, go on. I don't want it, don't need it. Borechka has died, so you should survive, at least'. And that small piece... Aunt Klava died that very day, but that small piece of bread may well have saved my life (Tamara S., f., age 11).

Hunger

Hunger is always in the centre of the Blockade narratives. Thus, one of the most remarkable published diaries of the Blockade, Alexander Boldyrev's *Osadnaya zapis* [A Record of the Siege], is almost exclusively dedicated to food and eating, day by day. Boris Mikhailov's autobiographical book *Na dne blokady i voiny* [The Blockade and the War: Lower Depths] contains an extreme interpretation of the Blockade situation as organised genocide by the Soviet authorities who, it is alleged, did not use all the opportunities they had to assure food supplies to the city because they had a political reason for not doing so. According to Mikhailov, people in Leningrad belonged to one of three categories:

- those whose nutrition was guaranteed by their social position, that is, those who were regarded as valuable by the authorities;
- those who had access to alternative sources apart from the ration cards and could survive because of it (among them those who were engaged in criminal and near criminal business with food); and
- those who were on the bottom, the vast majority of the population, who only had their ration cards and thus were doomed to a death of starvation, because the ration did not provide enough calories to survive.

The fact that around a third of Leningrad's actually did die of starvation, and that the number of deaths of starvation was roughly twenty times higher than the losses caused by shelling and bombardments, inclines one to think that Mikhailov's classification has a good deal of substance.¹

The actual scale of the tragedy was appreciated by contemporaries and survivors. Referring to his diary of the Blockade times, one of

¹ It is interesting to note also that survivors belonging to category 3 quite often recollect that they were saved by contact with someone in category 1. I myself interviewed a woman brought up in Leningrad (b. 1931) who lived through the worst period of the Blockade, and who recalls help from someone at a factory making buttons who was able to supply the organic mass used for manufacture as a foodstuff, from a naval officer admirer of a neighbour who brought gifts of tins rescued from a shipwreck, and so on (CKQ-0x-03 PF5, 6). The supply hierarchy carried over a supply hierarchy that had operated since the first days of Bolshevik power, when differential rations were established according to social usefulness and/or social need. [Editor].

the informers who annotated all the events in the life of his communal apartment (he even had a plan of the apartment as a part of his diary), told the following in his interview:

I wrote down that a third of the neighbours in our apartment had died. And I came to a conclusion — not a wholly reliable one, I'm sure, because a reliable conclusion would need a valid sample, and my sample was 55 persons, not enough to understand what was going on in the city as a whole — but when I saw that a third of the people in this apartment had died, I went round saying that a third of the city population had died too (Igor L., m., age 18).

Each interview contains information on the sources of food and the substances that were used, often with detailed instructions on how to make, for example, a galantine out of joiner's glue. The period from late autumn 1941 to late spring 1942 is always described in terms of changes of norms of food supply. For many weeks bread became the only product delivered in the shops and available on ration cards, with all-day- (sometimes all-night-) long queues and with no guarantee of receiving the ration anyway. Where and when the radio worked, the most awaited voice was that of Andreenko, the functionary responsible for the city food supply, who announced the additions of the bread ration norm and news about delivery of this or that product available on one's ration card.

Some of those who did not belong to the 'lower depths' took care not to show off their relatively healthy appearance in public:

And when I went outside, my sister said, 'Tie your scarf tight, make sure your cheeks are covered'. Because those days I got fed at work, so I still looked well (Antonina B., f., age 19).

The context of this passage (part of a generally rather disjointed account) does not allow one to interpret it definitely, whether as an attempt to avoid envy (or aggression from potential cannibals), or as an expression of shame.

In search of proteins, since autumn 1941, people made use of every opportunity they had, including pigeon hunting, but starting with animals that were available without the need to hunt:

A moment arrived when it became very bad. And the first cat we ate was our own. It was terrible, of course, and I went outside, I cried and all that, but we had nothing else we could do. Papa did it, skinned it. It has the taste of rabbit. People ate cats at that time, you know. The second cat we ate, it was our neighbour that recommended it. One of the other people in our apartment was Semyon Borisovitch Vymenets, a very good person. He was Jewish, but very... the kind of person one rarely meets. In a Russian church the priest said once in the sermon that the Russians should take this Jewish

man as an example.¹ He helped many people. And he said to my father, 'Lyonya, I've found a cat at Fontanka embankment. Two old ladies there have a good cat. I have it all arranged, and the ladies believed me when I said we want the cat to fight the rats. So they'll give you the cat. But could you please split it with my brother?' The brother had three children. 'Half to you, and half to my brother.' My father said fine. We were glad. And that was the second cat we ate (Lidiya S., f., age 16).

The food rationing system during the Blockade was based on delivery of products according to ration cards, with norms of delivery being different for industry workers, other kinds of employees, non-working population, and children, and varying across periods of the Blockade. Without the cards, food was available only on the black market and — rarely and in limited amount — in workplace canteens. Survival thus directly depended on one's ration card, and that is why cases of losing a card, or being the victim of a theft or a swindle, are always part of Blockade memories.

When a relative died, the rest of his monthly ration card was usually taken by his family (or given to those who were contracted to bury the body). Here is a rather typical story:

She had a baby that was born in '41. She had no breast milk. She got a ration card for the baby. And when the baby died, she kept the body, as I was told, between the window frames. But she still kept hold of the baby's ration card. Later, in spring, she had to bury her (Igor L., m., age 18).

The shops where rationed food was delivered, bread shops in the first place, were often scenes for dramatic events, and not only because many hours of queuing did not guarantee one would actually get one's rations. The queue was also where loss or theft of cards would come to light, and where violent fighting with desperate bread robbers would take place. Children and adolescents were frequent victims of such incidents:

On the way home from my mother's work, I went into a bread shop. I had two overcoats on, and I wanted to buy bread... I remember getting the cards out of my pocket. There was a whole range of cards, not only the bread ones, but they only gave bread those days and no food was available by other cards. So I took out the card and a girl came up to me, I remember her, she seemed grown up to me, she came up to me and said, 'Let me help you buy the bread'. And I gave her the cards. I gave her all the cards. She bought me two days' ration of

¹ This kind of rhetorical construction ('S/he was Jewish, but still a good person') is still widespread in colloquial Russian usage. The implicit anti-Semitism of such expressions is not usually felt by speakers and listeners.

bread, using the worker's [card, i.e. the one belonging to the informant's mother] and the child's card. And she returned the cards to me. But later I found that she'd taken all the bread cards for the rest of the month. I think this was in February [1942]. And when I found this I went out to the street and bawled. I remember that a militia man approached me and asked [what had happened], I told him. But what could he do? He ... he didn't do anything. He simply went away (Regina K., f., age 8).

Adolescents and the young brought to extremes by hunger are the usual protagonists of the stories of desperate attempts to steal someone's bread in the shop. It was common for thieves to put stolen bread in their mouths immediately despite the reaction of the other people present in the shop. As several stories testify, this reaction could often be a violent display of mob law that terrified the onlooker and remained engraved on his memory:

The shop assistants knew me, the shop was downstairs in the block where we lived. I gave them the ration card and the string-bag, and they cut out the card, weighed the bread, put it in the bag, tied a knot on the bag and tied the bag to my hand. Because [in the shops there were cases when someone] snatched bread out of someone else's hands. Once in my sight a boy, a young man, took someone's bread and put it in his mouth. You cannot imagine how they beat him. But he did not get up before he ate it. A hungry man cannot control himself, you know (Lidia S., f., age 16).

...the poor girl, how they were beating her, I felt so sorry for her, I didn't know how to help. She took someone's bread. Imagine, she was covered in blood, they were kicking her, I couldn't look at this. And injured as she was, she did not stop eating until she'd eaten it all, she was just so hungry. And I thought, when the war is over I will eat kasha and bread, kasha and bread, eat my fill (Maria V., f., age 23).¹

In the bread shop, the shop-assistants often added small pieces of bread in order to make up the exact weight. The makeweights probably seemed sort of 'extras' not included in the main ration: the latter would be strictly divided between family members. Near the shop counter, there were persons begging makeweights as charity. However, given the small size of daily bread ration that in the most difficult period was 125 g for non-working citizens and children, the makeweights were significant, too. Who ate the makeweight, and when, was a decision sometimes involving a moral choice. In the story quoted below, the makeweight in question belonged to the bread returned together with the ration card to someone who had lost their card in the street:

¹ However, contrast the above two quotations with what is recorded by Grigoriev in the section on indifference, where people in the shop are said not to have interfered.

I went to the street and near the door I saw the ration card. At that time — this was 1942 — finding a ration card...! What did I do? I went back to school and asked if anyone had lost their card. They said... it the charwoman had, in school we called them 'nurses'. So I went to the shop and bought the bread for that day, a small piece, brought it home and the next day I took it to school. And what I'll remember all my life, what's fixed in my memory, in my soul, is my thoughts about that bread. I wrapped it in a newspaper. I thought, what it would happen if I ate the makeweight? Would it be fair or unfair? And I don't remember if I actually ate it or not. I think not. (Laughs). Somewhere... I don't remember, but that thought, I kept it with me all my life. I thought about that makeweight, would it be fair to eat it. So you see we tried to live the right way (Weeps) (Aelita V., f., age 12).

On numerous occasions informers told us about acts that were perceived by them as shameful and remained so in their memory. Such acts are often related to hunger and food, and are explained with reference to how a child's consciousness was affected by hunger (see also the section dedicated to the Blockade through a child's eyes below). Lidiya Ginzburg provided a fine analysis of a sort of split of personality that occurred in adult minds: while evaluating the acts of other people, a person follows normal notions of accepted 'ethical routine', and, say, criticises pilfering, whereas when this very person acts herself in the same way as the persons criticised, her own act is regarded by her as accountable in terms of the extreme circumstances and thus accidental, not a product of her core personality.

In our corpus of interviews such stories about potentially shameful occasions were told mostly by those who were children during the Blockade. The theme of the child's consciousness altered by hunger is illustrated by narrators with stories about waiting for an additional piece of bread at the bed of a much loved relative who was about to die. Typical is the following story:

When he [the narrator's father] was dying, all my thoughts were about the skillet on the stove. In the skillet, his ration of bread was being cooked, it had been cut into small pieces. I was looking at the bread, while my mother was trying to feed him hot water. And suddenly Mother says, I remember it clearly, 'That's all, our Papa is dead'. Later she told me that in the minutes before he died he kept his eyes on me. 'What are you looking at?' she asked. 'At my son.' And that was all. And as soon as she told me our Papa is dead, I asked 'Mama, may I eat this bread?' I knew it was his portion (Victor W., m., age 7).

Through a child's eyes

Interviews with Blockade survivors who were children and adolescents during the War often contain an attempt to show how the Blockade was perceived from a child's point of view. Such accounts do not stop with description of how ordinary children's deeds and occupations were modified by the Blockade life, but often reveal thoughts, ideas, and preoccupations peculiar to children's minds. This was not always the case, however, because it was not a general understanding among the informants that researchers were likely to be primarily interested in their personal experience. Many appear to have considered their own life stories as quite mundane and thus not worth a detailed account. Instead, they would speak about the Blockade as a whole, using all the sources of information they had had access to (including summaries of material they had read etc.), and mostly delivering information on their personal experience while answering the interviewer's questions.

Informants who reflect on their children's worldview readily recollect their dreams and aspirations. Blockade children's dreams included abundant meals after the war (varying from kasha to a Lend-Lease can of condensed milk a day), as well as heroic feats on the front and, particularly, catching a spy:

We wanted so badly to catch a spy. I remember once we saw from our dormitory someone signalling this way, dot-dash, dot-dash, with a torch. Now a long light, a dash, and then a short one, a dot. Oh, that must be a spy! We crept out unnoticed. And it turned out to be the door of a toilet: when someone came in, it flashed, because the black-out curtain was torn (Maria Z., f., age 9).

Spies giving signals with rockets during air raids to direct Nazi bombardments are mentioned in many interviews and Blockade diaries. Although few people actually saw any spies captured, almost everyone noticed (or thought they did) the signal rockets being fired during air raids. After the war, a novel and then a popular film were dedicated to the subject of adolescents hunting enemy agents (*The Green Chains*).¹

The sense of distance from children's ideas and perceptions that is lent by the slightly ironic tone often adopted by narrators makes us see the traumatic events of the War in a still more shocking light — particularly in the second case cited below, about a girl from a Baptist family:

We lived in the ground floor, and people living further up the building [during air-raids] usually came to our place, not to the shelter. And I

¹ Stories of this kind were also widely published in the 1930s, and particularly during the 'spy mania' years of 1937–1940. [Editor].

either hid myself under the table, or... somewhere else where I had no fear, the toilet, that was the safest place in my eyes, I went to the toilet and closed the door with the hook. It seemed to me that I would survive anyway, even if a bomb hit our house. If the door was closed with the hook, the war could not enter (Valentina S., f., age 8).

We started to pray. I was the first to pray in this way: 'Oh Lord, why don't you take me? Please, take me first [before other members of the family]! You said in your Word that you can take [any of us to you]' Lyuba interrupted me: 'No, Lord, please, take me first!' And then little Verochka, too: 'Lord, I want to come to you!' And she was only three years old. And so we had fights over who could pray the hardest [Russian: 'molilis vdraku'] to be taken by God first. We did it so sincerely! But our elder sisters and Mama kept silent. And when we opened our eyes, we asked them, why don't you pray for us? And they just looked at us, with tears running down their cheeks. And when we said 'amen', Mama told us to go to sleep: 'The Lord has heard your prayer, now go to sleep and tomorrow you will see who will be the first.' We went to bed quite happy. In the morning, I woke up: 'Oh, but I'm alive, God hasn't taken me yet.' Verochka and Lyuba, both of them alive — why? what's wrong? [Next day, same as every day,] Nina and Raya [her elder sisters] are about to go to college, Mama is already at work. So are we going to stay here alone again all day? Nina and Raya say to us: 'Just you pray to the Lord. He can take you during the day, too, not just at night. Remember, He took Seryozha [their brother] in the daytime.' When we heard this, we rejoiced again and prayed, asking the Lord to take us without fail (Alla I., f., age 9).

Blockade schoolchildren met many specific challenges, starting from going to and from school under fire, to doing lessons in a shelter, and trying to avoid the constant thought of the dinner they would get in the school canteen getting in the way of work. But the schoolchildren's world of the Blockade also involved the same preoccupations as any peacetime world. Boasting and teasing continued, though with a different content:

Once [at school] I felt an urge to boast. Hunger was a banned topic, so could I boast? I said that in morning I had eaten rice kasha. The bell rang, and, you know, we always greeted the teacher at the beginning of a lesson, all children were expected to stand up. So I stood up and fainted dead away, I was so hungry. I came to myself in the school doctor's surgery. I was lying on a couch. And I heard voices from behind the door. Then I was given something to drink and I went back to the classroom. I came out of the doctor's, and the boys said to me, 'Liar, liar, your hair's on fire'. And then they said, 'She said she had kasha to eat, but that didn't stop her fainting, did it?' (Tamara S., f., age 11).

In quoting the passages above, it was not my intention to suggest that the specific 'child's eye view' of Blockade is mostly presented by the informants ironically. This is not at all the case. At least as often, acutely traumatic experiences which deeply influenced the narrator's personality are represented:

I entered my home, and no one was there, it was empty. It was so terribly sad, I will never forget this sensation. A kind of breaking to pieces inside my chest. I was twelve years old, and that feeling, no Mama, no Papa, no...my granny had died in July, no one was there, I was completely alone. And I started to cry loudly. It must have been... I don't know, a fit of hysterics. I was screaming and shouting. And suddenly a girl appeared in the apartment. A young girl. 'What's happened? What's happened to you?' I was sobbing. Through sobs I told her I had no one with me. She looked at me for a long time and then said, 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, why are you screaming so loud? Everyone has something to grieve about these days. But you're making so much racket I could hear you out in the street and you made me come and ask what was the matter.' After that, I never sobbed, never cried, right till the end of the war. You see I was so ashamed that everyone was grieving and feeling bad, but it was just me crying my eyes out about it (Tamara S., f., age 11).

Indifference

We have already commented on the topic of people collapsed in the street. The same explanation for not helping them that was present in *Life as not limited to physical survival* section (=not sacrificing one's own life on the off-chance of saving a stranger who is almost certainly doomed anyway) may be evaluated in a different way and placed in a different context, namely, as an expression of indifference:

In the bread shop, while we standing in the queue, suddenly someone collapsed, the whole queue sort of staggered back, as they couldn't keep him standing on his feet, and the person was left lying there on the floor. Complete indifference. It is interesting psychologically... there was an interest in knowing what was going on [in the outside world, i.e. war news etc], but none in the life of other people. So, here's someone lying on the floor, and all people do is to take off his shoes, or somebody takes his clothes, but most simply pass by. Maybe it's not only indifference, though, maybe there's also the fact that you don't know what to do with him. How can you get him up? He's collapsed, but you cannot help him. If you start trying to pick him up, you'll fall down there too, by his side (Igor L., m., age 18).

This forced divergence from 'normal', pre-war, ethical practices caused moral suffering and was discussed at the time, too. One woman remembers a story that happened with her aunt (the inform-

ant herself was then about ten), and which impressed both her and her aunt very deeply:

And she was on her way to work, and dead bodies were lying everywhere, and she said there was a man lying there still alive who said to her, 'Lady...' or... I don't really know what he called her, but anyway, he said, 'Give me your hand, you see, otherwise I will die of cold here!' She bent over him and said, 'I'm so sorry. I've got a daughter, you see. I can't give you my hand, I'm so weak I can hardly put one foot in front of the other. But I have to get to the factory where I work and then get back home. And I just don't have the strength. You'll pull me down, and then I'll be there on the ground with you.' She turned her back and went on. And she didn't give her hand to that man. And when she came home, she told us this story, crying. Was it a sin? Yes, it was a sin. But what else could she have done? (Tatiana K., f., age 10).

At the worst period of the Blockade, children were warned not to approach strangers in the street. Indeed, in one of the interviews we recorded, the fact was mentioned that elders explicitly prohibited children from approaching people who had fallen in their sight in the street, because those fallen could be cannibals who were trying to trick potential victims. No wonder that Blockade children often recall their real or imagined fears of cannibals and report cases when they had to escape from strangers who were pursuing them in the street. Similar stories (e.g., escaping from a person with an axe) are also told by some of the 'adults'.

In some interviews, we meet the same problem of indifference seen from the point of view of the victim experiencing the crude reality of other people's lack of concern:

Then a boy entered [the bread shop], taller than me and very dirty. I noticed that... he had no mittens and his hands were so dirty, almost black. And he walked in with something in his hands... it was a bottle he was holding by the neck. He kept approaching people in the queue one by one and asking something, and everyone said, no, no, no, no. He came up to me and asked, 'Listen, I have some paraffin here, don't you want some? I can exchange it for bread.' 'No, I don't want any. We already have paraffin.' Although in fact we didn't, but anyway... He went along the line asking everyone once more, and returned to me. 'No, I don't want any'. He went off and stood a little way away from me. And so I waited until my turn came, they cut off a section from my ration card, weighed the bread. And just as I went to put the bread in my bag, he swooped down on me and grabbed my rations with his dirty hand. Of course, I grasped the bread as tightly I could and pushed him away. He fell, and I fell on him. And he kept pulling the bread towards him, while I kept trying to get it so he couldn't break off a piece. And we started fighting on the floor. The queue stood still,

I don't remember if they showed any reaction at all. No one, nothing. Or maybe it only seemed like that to me, I don't know. Not a movement, not a sound, nothing. So we were there puffing and rolling on the floor. And I was gripping that bread for all I was worth, because I knew if he got hold of it, he'd put it in his mouth right away, the ration was so tiny. And I don't know what I did then, I managed to hurt him so he slackened his grasp and I could pull the bread out of his hands. I took it and went out immediately. I even didn't look at him, couldn't be bothered whether he got up or not. And already on the street, I saw that on the bread there was an imprint of his dirty finger. ... At home I didn't say anything, but when no one could see me, I cut out that imprint of his fingernail. I couldn't eat it, though I was very hungry. I hid that small piece somewhere (Vladislav G., m., age 11).

According to this account, people waiting in line did not react to the incident, as if nothing had happened, and remained silent. Lidiya Ginzburg in her Blockade memoirs wrote about those silent dystrophic queues of the Blockade's hardest period. Since emaciated hungry people passed many hours, sometimes a whole day, in bread shop, desperately waiting for bread, they had no energy even for socialising, not to say intervening in fights.¹ When the imminent danger of death by starvation was over, starting from late spring of 1942, the queues changed: people started talking (and Lidiya Ginzburg was an attentive analyst of that talk).

Another sort of indifference was one towards the dreadful events taking place all around. The Blockade circumstances made children less sensitive, or, to be more accurate, the psychological trauma already experienced from the overflow of horrors brought relative insensitivity to possible future ones. Adults also got accustomed to things that might seem difficult to get accustomed to. Thus, after some months of the Blockade experience people gave up going to shelter when the air raid siren went. Generally, indifference or lack of fear is mentioned in many interviews, sometimes in the context of accounting for the most dreadful experience of the Blockade and, by association, explaining what did not provoke fear any more:

There [in the communal apartment] lived two old ladies, two sisters. They died. And until Spring they were lying in their room. And I was alone in the apartment. [...] It was cold and they were like in a morgue, in a cold place. And I had no fear. In those times, no one was afraid of anything. When I went by Kamennooostrovsky prospekt, that very day when my mother [did not return from work], and... on the follow-

¹ However, one should contrast this with accounts of how anyone who snatched bread was badly beaten, such as the one quoted above.

ing day I closed the apartment, the room, I closed everything up. I never came back. I came to that place much later, in forty-five. But there was nothing there. There was no house in that place, in forty-five. And so that day I walked down Kamennooostrovsky prospekt, and there were so many snowdrifts, and almost each ten steps you met a dead body, they lay in different postures. I had no fear. And when you think that after the war, or now, I would never have gone anywhere near a corpse. No, I simply couldn't. But then, I had no fear. Nothing. I even used to move them to look at the face, hoping it wasn't going to be my Mama. I was eight. No one was afraid of anything those days (Regina K., f., age 8).

But one should note that this 'indifference to everything' is largely a figure of speech. In the same interview only slightly earlier, the same informant had also recalled the fear of shelters she felt after having once witnessed a bomb hit in a building:

I was afraid of shelters. I was very afraid. Once a bombardment hit us at Leo Tolstoy Square. And the public order squad started to herd the passers-by into a shelter. And I screamed, I screamed and didn't want to go to the shelter. I only agreed to stand in the entrance of the house. I still see very clearly that entrance door where... where I cried that I would not go to the shelter. Because I'd once seen a direct hit at Gislyarovsky prospekt, and the shelter all buried in debris [of the destroyed building]. After that I was terrified of shelters. (Regina K., f., age 8).

Forced heroism

On many occasions the topic of heroism did not appear in stories except in direct response to a question by the interviewer, who, in the last part of the interview, would ask about the informant's attitude to, and opinions about, the status of *blokadnik* [Blockade survivor]. This category was used by social security services to determine the right to some additional rights, and *blokadnik* identity repeatedly became an object of public debate between representatives of different groups of people who belonged to it. These were: 'defenders of Leningrad' (who had worked in munitions factories or taken part in defending the city; they were decorated with the medal 'For the Defence of Leningrad'); the civilian population ('citizens of Leningrad under the Blockade') who lived in the besieged city all the nine hundred days or at least for some considerable period before evacuation; and 'children of the Blockade' who did not work during the Blockade.

The first two categories in particular are often contrasted in debates about the relative merits of survivors. At the same time, the idea of the heroism of the city as whole, not only of the military, but also of civilian population, has been a part of official discourse. Along with

it, there always existed a popular notion of everyday fortitude and high morale that allowed lives to be saved, and which did not seek recognition from the authorities. To express both ideas, sources are available within 'Blockade discourse' broadly understood (including poetry, songs, etc) that are readily relied upon by narrators — compare this informant's reference to the poet Olga Berggolts:

Do you know what I want to begin with? With the words of Olga Berggolts. So that to make clear my position during the Blockade. [She wrote:] 'I have never been a hero, / Never aspired to be famous or decorated. / Breathing together with Leningrad, / I lived my, not a hero's, life'. That was my position (almost crying). That is, we shared the life of Leningrad (Evgenia I., f., age 12).

Among the things which made survival possible, narrators mention behaviour on the part of their close relatives, most often mothers, that is evaluated as heroic. Descriptions of such behaviour is often related to the search for food and for opportunities to save children. Key details illustrating selflessness are supplied:

We survived thanks to my mother, she was always trying to... to get something somewhere. She managed to get an additional work, and this is after building work, and they worked much more than 8 hours. After work she'd go to the canteen and wash up the pots. She got no pay, only she did get the crusts from the bottoms of the pots, the crusts of burnt kasha. She brought them home to me in a small glass jar. And when she came home, she asked if I wanted them hotted up. I said no, I ate it up just as it was, in seconds (Valentina A., f., age 6).

Here the mother's acts, not Lucky chance or Divine interference, are seen to explain survival. It is interesting that the word 'heroic' in this and similar evaluations is not necessarily a fruit of retrospective interpretation. In Boldyrev's diary we read (23 December 1941): '*Marianna displays wonderful heroism. She has arranged to get...*' (and a list follows that includes, among other, a litre of beer and the right to get a bottle of wine from the Soviet Writers Union); or (30 January 1942): '*The bread was brought by heroic Marianna, she had stood in line from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m.*' (sic!).

Several informers observe that the very circumstances of the Blockade life were such that the attempts to accomplish one's usual duties toward one's neighbour became outstanding feats and could be interpreted as heroic. Children thus were seen as heroic too:

And this boy, Vavila, disappeared in January of 1942. His sister Tamara told me when we met on the staircase. Tamara was the same age as my sister. I was surprised, 'How, disappeared?' — 'He went to the bread shop and didn't come back. No bread, no cards.' I asked, of course, if they'd gone to the militia to search for him. 'We did search, but we didn't find him. And now we don't have any bread,

nor any ration cards.' It was really terrible. It was a tragedy, to lose your ration cards. [In springtime,] we found Vavila while we were removing snow and ice from Bolshaya Moskovskaya street [during a city-wide cleaning campaign]. We found him in a snowdrift. He was lying on his side, clasping the bag with bread to his chest. He was gripping the ration cards in his fist. And we realised what happened. Probably, when he was returning from the bakery, he felt low, maybe, he felt giddy as the dystrophic often did. Usually, people would sit down to wait a moment so that to regain their strength. Perhaps he sat down on the edge of the snowdrift and then lost consciousness or fell asleep. Then, no doubt, he slipped down. And got covered with snow. And that was all. When we opened the bag and took out the bread, we saw that it was black and as hard as a piece of wood. But it wasn't mouldy. That bread, obviously, had nothing in it that could grow mouldy.¹ That bread. But what really seared itself into all of us is the fact that the portion of bread we found in his bag also had a small makeweight stuck on it. Looking at this makeweight, most likely each of us thought that if Vavil had eaten it, he might possibly have survived. But he couldn't allow himself to. He knew that when he brought the bread home it would be divided among three persons. The makeweight would be divided, too. And if he had eaten that makeweight, he would have eaten from his mother's and sister's share. And even dying of starvation, Vavila could not allow himself to. We gave the bread to Tamara, as she could steep it in water and eat it, and we buried Vavila as he was, with the ration cards in his hand. This eleven-year-old boy — actually, he wasn't even eleven, that was before his birthday — for me he has remained a symbol of Leningraders' fortitude. Fortitude and selflessness (Anatoly M., m., age 9).

However, looking from a distance and reflecting on the circumstances of a whole generation of Leningraders who were adolescent during the Blockade, more than once our informers proposed a view explaining the Blockade life without alluding to the notion of heroism at all. Here is a concise formulation of it:

I must tell you one thing. You know, basically, my generation, we didn't think — and we still don't think — that we were doing anything great. Well, of course, there was a war on. And, of course, we happened to get mixed up in the Blockade. Things just turned out like that. But we didn't display any special heroism. We did what all the others did. We went to work at kitchen gardens, we worked where we could in industry, but everyone did the same, and we didn't see anything specially frightening, surprising or heroic in all that. Well, I don't, at least (Oleg A., m, age 13).

¹ The Blockade bread of the worst period of the War was made with additives that are not normally used in food products, such as sawdust, glue, etc.

The impact of Blockade experience on life today

Despite the sixty years' distance that separates the interviews from the events narrated, the world of the Blockade survivors is still influenced by their war time experiences. Thus, for instance, their image of the city differs from that of the post-war generations because they remember buildings destroyed during the Blockade and events related to this or that now non-existent place. A more elusive point, which it is not easy to demonstrate with quotations, is that having seen various aspects of human behaviour in those extreme conditions could not leave their ideas about human nature unaffected.

Reflecting on what the Blockade has changed in them, our informants constantly find traces of those times in their everyday life and their habits. Above all, they refer to the special eating habits of people who survived hunger and war:

During the Blockade I learned to eat very fast and, generally, to do everything quickly, to eat, to dress, to wash myself. I can take a bath in fifteen minutes, I cannot understand how some people do it for hours. You had to do it quickly. Before something blew up. To get your food eaten before the shell flew in and killed you. I do everything like that... and when I'm having a meal in friends' homes, they'll still be eating and I'll already have an empty plate in front of me. (Laughs). It's too bad, I know, but I just can't avoid eating everything put in front of me right away... (Marina T., f., age 11).

I've always eaten very fast since then, and that's still true today.. I never leave anything on my plate, not even a piece of bread. I eat up all I have, it's been a habit since Blockade days. [...] Once my father brought some peelings. Dried peelings of beet and carrots, I don't know where from, but they were dried. And Mama cooked a borscht. It was such a pleasure, and since then I've always loved borscht. Since that time (Valentina A., f., age 6).

One might note that these passages were not provoked by questions on the part of the interviewers, but were presented spontaneously.

The idea that the Blockade explains today's habits is used as a sort of glue in narration, often being a generalisation that gives coherent meaning to several adjacent episodes. Typical is the passage below, which comes at the end of a much longer section on the subject of hunger:

And we sank into torpor, so to speak. We just sat there, me and my sister. And Verochka, she was three, whispers to me: 'Better if Lyuba [their other sister] doesn't come back, then we'll eat her ration'. And now I realise that back then I'd have been happy to eat someone's else's ration. My God, we were crazy with hunger! It was beyond

anything normal, and it was so hard! That is why today when I pour myself some soup, I can't help crying. If I pour out some milk or serve myself some food, before I start eating, I always cry. Because I'm eating a meal, you see (Alla I., f., age 9).

Sometimes the 'personal details' of persisting behaviour may be perfectly ordinary habits that do not seem outwardly to have any particular connection with the Blockade; for example, one informant sees playing with wax, a very common practice among children, as something particularly her own:

We stopped going to the bomb shelter. We just went to the corridor from our rooms. That is, to protect ourselves from the glass [in case of a bomb explosion nearby]. And... you know, it was dark there, in the corridor. And we always took a candle with us. And I... I still have this habit, of pouring off a little of the candle wax, so the candle gutters, pouring it off and then putting it back, so that the wick burns longer (Mira R., f., age 11).

A custom ultimately dating back to and motivated by an event of the war childhood may also be retained in family life. Because of the need to justify oneself to a younger generation, the custom in turn becomes part of a family's story and of its identity:

I remember the New Year in '42. We decorated our New Year tree. And it was there when my father died, it stayed right there until April, all the needles fell off. After that, in my family we never had a New Year tree, not even for the children. Even when I grew up. Because it coincided... the tree was in the room, and my father's body was also there almost a month. Our mother couldn't remove it (Viktor W., m., age 7).

This section of the interviews seems to have particular importance for understanding the role that the Blockade experience plays for the two generations, those who were adults and those who were children and adolescents at the Blockade time. The 'Blockade children' consciously construct their identity with reference to the Blockade, and thus today's everyday life habits are seen to bear a distinct impression of the Blockade. The fact that all the quotations in this section come from interviews with the younger generation is not a result of arbitrary selection. Of course, 'Blockade adults' sometimes talk about the repercussions of the Blockade too, but mostly by paying attention to, say, health problems they have today that are traced back to the Blockade (e.g., teeth lost because of scurvy) rather than by commenting on how the Blockade experience has impacted on the formation of their character.

Memories from two generations

The term 'two generations' is an oversimplification, since the stories told by Blockade survivors in our interviews actually belong to

representatives of more than two generations. Quotations in the text above are taken from narratives by young adults who in the Blockade time were working in industry or elsewhere, by adolescents who either were working or studying at school, and by schoolchildren, or children under school age who might either be attending nursery school, or at home with their mother or other relatives, or be inmates of a children's home.

The two generations I refer to in the title are 'adults' and 'children', with the adolescents falling either into to the 'adults' or the 'children' category depending on the precise age, and also the precise experiences of the interviewer and his or her 'take' on the interview.

Differences in narrative construction and style of storytelling depend on many factors and cannot necessarily be correlated directly with the two or three age categories. But what do clearly differ in 'children' and 'adult' narratives are the domains of experience reflected in the narration. For younger individuals (children and some adolescents), the Blockade is understood first and foremost as a family tragedy, where the mother's figure stands in the centre, while one's deeds and responsibilities are mostly related to everyday life. For the elder, a broader context of work, social activities and obligations is relevant. Correspondingly, different details from the outside world remain in the memory: for some it is, say, the taste of Land-Lease sausages and condensed milk, for others, people from the 'Big Outside' who appeared in the Blockade city.

Predictably, perhaps, the elders are more inclined to general statements, while the younger people's narratives are much richer in details. Certainly, the Blockade children link the recollections of certain episodes from their Blockade childhood with information that they have got elsewhere outside their immediate experience. These links are taken from their family history and from the history of the Blockade as it is presented in various sources, but, nevertheless, the resulting picture is usually more personal and detailed.

For the elder generation, on the other hand, the Blockade experience is only a part of the whole personal history. Their autobiographical narratives include extensive sections dedicated to other periods of their lives, against which background the Blockade sometimes appears to be a dramatic episode, but not, however, the central one. They have other important things to remember about their life and personality, which had to a significant extent been formed by the time that the war started. For the younger generation, the Blockade experience usually plays a much more central role. As we have seen, it is for the younger generation that the Blockade appears especially important for their identity today. The understanding of

this importance is expressed in their interest in publications of memories and documents about the Blockade era.¹

The attitude to Blockade experience and family transmission of memories also differed between generations. Commenting on this intergenerational difference, some of the Blockade children evaluated their own narration as fragmentary and disjointed and explained that their knowledge of the Blockade would have been more complete and coherent had their mothers be less unwilling to speak about the Blockade and to answer their questions about it.

As the researchers who conducted the interviews noted,² all the interviews in which informants asked interviewers to switch off the recording for a moment, wanted to edit the transcription, or consciously left the most interesting things to say over tea after the formal interview was over, related to cases where interviewees belonged to the older generation.

Another type of differences in attitude was remarked by the Blockade adolescents. While older people (those who were already parents when the Blockade was in progress) often discussed the Blockade when the war was over, the younger generation (those who were adolescents at the time) avoided such discussions. Here is a typical statement about this:

Memory has fenced these recollections off in some very far corner of my mind. They're buried very deep inside. I remember that when all this was over, when we found ourselves in an absolutely different life, after the Blockade, I remember that when my mother started to talk about all of it with someone, I'd put my hands over my ears and leave the room. My sister did too (Natalia Z., f., age 16).

Only when the years have passed and they have become the elders in their families was the Blockade experience reinterpreted and made subject to reflection, taken out from somewhere 'very deep inside' and given new meanings that were important for the self-understanding of individuals, and of the generation as whole.

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¹ At the same time, it should be kept in mind that this difference is related not only to age group, but to issues of personal identity construction.

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