

## **On Love: remaking moral subjectivity in post-rehabilitation Russia**

Jarrett Zigon  
(hopefully soon to be forthcoming in AE)

### **Abstract:**

This article address the moral experience of love as it was lived by two former rehabilitants of a Russian Orthodox heroin rehabilitation program in St. Petersburg, Russia. As a contribution to the growing literature on the anthropology of moralities, this article argues that love is a demand around which moral experience, and thus moral subjectivity, takes shape. As such love is a singular particularity that entails the struggle to ethically remake oneself in the face of an unavoidable demand, the response to which has consequences for both oneself and others.

**Keywords:** morality, ethics, subjectivity, love, Russia

This is a love story. Or perhaps better put, it is a story about how for some love is a demand around which their moral experience, and thus their moral subjectivity, takes shape. Love here is an event that, once it occurs, shapes how people think of and live their lives. In this sense love is, as are all moral experiences, singular and particular and must be sustained by means of a fidelity to the life trajectory established by this founding evental demand. Similarly, love entails struggle and risk; and thus love is the quintessential moral experience. For in its singular particularity love entails the struggle to remake oneself in the face of an unavoidable demand, the response to which has consequences for both oneself and others.

In this article I focus specifically on two individuals, both of whom recently returned from a Russian Orthodox Church-run heroin rehabilitation program, and the way in which

love was central to their ethical attempts to remake their moral subjectivities in the midst of struggling through their everyday lives in St. Petersburg. **Indeed, rehabilitation in this Church-run program, with which I did research in 2006 and 2007, is primarily considered a process of ethically remaking moral subjectivity, which among other things entails rehabilitants cultivating new bodily, emotional, and cognitive sensibilities for being in the world with themselves and others.** Some of the characteristics of this hoped for new moral subjectivity are increased self-control of one's emotional world, responsibility toward oneself and others, and the ability to engage in what is called normal social relations with others, just one example of which is a loving relationship with a person of the opposite gender (XXXX 2011). More than any other current or former rehabilitants I came to know during my research, Zhenia and Misha accepted love as the ethical aim in the process of remaking their new moral subjectivities.

Although for over a decade a few anthropologists have explicitly attempted to delineate an anthropological approach to the study of moralities (e.g., Parish 1994; Howell 1997; Laidlaw 2002; Robbins 2004, 2007; XXXX 2007, 2008, 2009; Lambek 2010; Faubion 2011), in the last several years morality and its related concept of ethics have increasingly become central to some anthropological work (e.g., Wanner 2007; Fassin 2008; Pandian 2009; Mattingly 2010; Throop 2010) and for many more have become new keywords in anthropological writings in general (e.g., Fischer 2003; Ticktin 2006; Evens 2008; Mookherjee 2009). What seems clear across the spectrum of these writings, however, is that there is very little agreement on what these concepts mean or how they could be analytically employed. For some the concept of 'moral' seems to be a replacement – often in its adjectival form – for the concept of culture, and is apparently used as such because the former seems to

denote something closer to intersubjective experiences of actual persons than does the more abstract and potentially reifying concept of culture. For others the concepts of ‘moral’ and ‘ethics’ are used in ways that reflect anthropologists’ own assumptions of what these concepts mean as they critically engage with their research material in often politically motivated ways. Finally there are those who more or less adopt an already well-established philosophical approach, such as neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, and apply it in the analysis of their research.

My past work, as well as this article, to a large extent differs from these. Most specifically I am concerned with providing an anthropological approach to the study of morality for discerning what *counts* as morality in any particular local assemblage. In doing so I have tried to provide and consider imperative to an anthropology of moralities a framework for recognizing the *form* of moral experience with which we can then discern specific content. Without having such a framework for recognizing what counts as moral experience, we are left relying on the application of an already worked out philosophical system such as neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics or the interpretation of our research data through the lens of our own moral assumptions, or some combination of these two. Such approaches, and particularly the latter two, are not acceptable in other kinds of anthropological foci and analysis, such as the anthropological study of religion or kinship, therefore we should not find it acceptable in our research of morality.

Having this concern for working out, articulating, and refining the limits, if you will, of what counts as moral experience in any particular assemblage, I have elsewhere delineated an anthropological approach to the study of moralities (e.g., XXXX 2007, 2010, 2011). This approach attempts to understand local moral ways of being by going beyond thinking in terms of totalizing moralities particular to one society or social arena, for example, a heroin

addiction rehabilitation center, and recognize that all situations have their own unique moral assemblage (XXXX 2008a; 2009a; 2010a; 2010b; 2011). This is most easily seen, I have argued, by considering these assemblages constituted by three different aspects of morality – institutional and public discourses of morality (e.g., the Russian Orthodox Church institutional discourse or diverse media discourses) and the singular embodied dispositional moralities of individuals that are unique to their particular life trajectory. I have further argued that every singular moral assemblage also produces a unique set of ethical practices individuals can utilize in moments of dilemma or moral breakdown (XXXX 2007; 2009a; 2010b; 2011). Thus, this approach makes a distinction between the discursive and embodied moralities that are more or less nonconsciously enacted, and the reflective ethical practices and tactics individuals and institutions engage in during moments of moral breakdown. This methodologically-useful theory provides a framework by which anthropologists in the field and afterward during analysis can make important distinctions between different moral discursive traditions and singular embodied moralities within particular social situations.

This approach also necessitates that we call into question the usefulness of the standard terms of our inherited moral vocabulary. In his discussion of the shared assumptions and similarities between moral relativists and absolutists, the philosopher John Cook points out that both moral relativists and absolutists treat “the words *right*, *wrong*, *good*, *bad*, and *ought* as the primary moral terms” (1999: 130, italics in original). He continues that ultimately any relativist position that wants to separate itself from absolutist claims would need to adopt another moral vocabulary. While I’m not particularly interested in relativist/absolutist debates, my research on diverse local moral and ethical assemblages in Russia strongly suggests that these traditional moral terms are rarely evoked and seem to play

only an occasional if any role in motivating individuals in their moral lives. What are important, however, are a whole range of concepts – from fair and unfair to desire and self-interest – that act as motivation and explanation for ethical practice and moral experience. Love is just one more of these diverse and wide-ranging concepts.

In this article I hope to show that moral experience can only be understood if we come to recognize the limits of what makes such experience possible in the first place. By focusing on the ways in which Zhenia and Misha struggle to enact discursively framed idealizations of love, we can trace the ways in which they attempt to ethically practice love as a tactic for remaking their moral subjectivities and constructing new life trajectories. What we also see, however, is that such attempts are not always enacted out of feelings of doing right or good, but are better understood as oftentimes enacted out of such motivations as desperation, hope, a desire for another kind of life, and sometimes simple self-interest. Moral experience, then, can only be understood from an anthropological perspective when it is recognized that such notions as ‘good’ and ‘right’ are far from the only motivation in ethical practices.

## **Love**

Ethnographies of love – and particularly what is called romantic or intimate love – have been rare and because of this there remains a gap in the understanding of how such love is experienced cross-culturally (Jankowiak 1995: 1; Venkatesan et. al. 2011: 213). Recently, however, there have been several attempts to go beyond the long held assumption that romantic love is a recent cultural construct of modern Western society (Jankowiak and Fischer 1992; Jankowiak 1995; Lindholm 1998; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Jankowiak 2008). In doing so, many of these studies tend to make the opposite assumption – that is, romantic love is a (near) universal feature of human being which becomes manifest in diverse

culturally specific ways (e.g., Jankowiak 1995; Lindholm 1998; Rebhun 1999; Jankowiak 2008). Such universality is explored through the ethnographic research of local practices such as marriage (e.g., Rebhun 1999; Mody 2008), the balancing of romance and sex (e.g., Jankowiak 2008), or the emotional expression of intimacy and desire (e.g., Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Röttger-Rössler 2008). These studies, then, seek to fill in the (near) universal capability of romantic or intimate love with the content of local experience.

Although to an extent some explication in this article of the diverse local discourses of love in Russia will be necessary, this article is not primarily about love as such. Rather, I intend to explore the moral experience of two persons as they struggle to enact love as the motivating ideal for ethically remaking their moral subjectivities. Thus, in this article I consider the fidelity to this ideal of love to be moral experience because of its centrality to Zhenia and Misha's ethical attempts to remake themselves. To be clear, I do not intend to analyze the moral dimensions of love, for instance, its possible relation to notions of trust and exclusion (cf. Collins and Gregor 1995). Rather, as the motivating ideal of Zhenia and Misha's ethical projects, love here could be considered similar to the way in which the anthropologist Rane Willerslev (see: Venkatesan et. al. 2011) makes a Deleuzean distinction between what he calls the virtual and actual plane of love, in which the former stands as the impossible ideal sought in each cultural, historical, and singular manifestation of the latter. As a motivating ethical aim, then, love is that which guides moral experience in ways that may not always be contained by the local as moral and ethical assemblages are always open to the possibility of the impossible.

The possibility of the impossible is, in part, what allows love to be such a strong motivating ethical aim, and thus to figure centrally in moral and subjective transformations.

Thus, Elizabeth Povinelli (2002: 230-1) provocatively asks “[w]here would the I be without [the] intimate form of reflexivity” initiated by the subjectivization processes of “modern forms” of intimate love (see also: Povinelli 2006). Similarly, Michael Hardt has recently argued for a political concept of love that deploys both reason and passion as motivation for political transformation and continuity, ultimately arguing that we “lose ourselves in love and open the possibility of a new world, but at the same time love constitutes powerful bonds that last” (2011: 676). While not entirely satisfied with love’s radical transformational potentialities, Lauren Berlant (2011: 687) to some extent agrees with Hardt in acknowledging love’s normative role in attuning moral and political motivations. Similar to these ethnographically sensitive theoretical interventions, my intention in this article is to explore the ways in which love stands as the ethical ideal central to projects of transforming and remaking moral subjectivity.

The way in which love figures in this article, then, is not unrelated to a recently published debate about the place for love in social and anthropological theorizing (Venkatesan et. al. 2011). The motion put forth in the debate – the anthropological fixation with reciprocity leaves no room for love – initiated a discussion that for the most part centered on whether love is best left to be studied in its diverse local manifestations or if it could have a place as a heuristic concept through which analysis of local phenomenon could be initiated. Suffice it to say that in this article I side with the latter position in that while local notions of love may flesh out, as it were, the contours of the moral experience I am analyzing, love primarily stands as the concept through which I can better understand the motivations behind Zhenia and Misha’s ethical practices. In this sense, love stands in this article much in the same way as “the good” might stand in other analyzes of local moral and ethical assemblages.

As in these analyzes it is understood that “the good” works at the analytic level for understanding local motivations and aims, so too in this article love is the analytic concept through which singular moral experiences are sought to be understood. Thus, this article is also an attempt to expand the analytic concepts available to studies of moralities beyond that of good, bad, right, and wrong so that the burgeoning anthropological study of moralities is better situated to disclose the diverse moral ways of being in the world.

In this article, then, I will adopt and adapt the concept of love as explicated by the philosopher Alain Badiou in the attempt to utilize love as a heuristic concept in the **hermeneutics of moral experience**. According to Badiou love is one of four fields of truth (art, science, and politics are the other three) around which a subject and a subjective life trajectory can be formed (Badiou 2001, 2003). Subjectivity and the truth that sustains it take shape, according to Badiou, through fidelity to the consequences of what he calls a founding Event that is both singular and particular (such as an amorous encounter). Thus, neither subjectivity nor truth exists prior to this founding Event, and both only come into existence and must be continually sustained through a process of fidelity that Badiou calls ethics. In this sense, Badiou rejects abstract and totalizing moralities and instead posits singular “ethics-of” particular subjective truth-procedures such as love.

In Badiou’s view an Event initiates a truth-procedure because it is potentially available to anyone and thus universal. Nevertheless, not everyone necessarily recognizes the truth of an Event and, in fact, many persons may never experience an Event as such. Thus, according to Badiou, these persons never become subjects in his sense of the word. This is where I differ significantly from Badiou in that while recognizing the significance of such phenomena as particular events, moments, encounters, and dilemmas in the life trajectory of persons –



what I have elsewhere referred to as moral breakdowns – I reject Badiou’s view that such events are so rare and exclusive. Rather I agree with Caroline Humphrey in her anthropological reading of Badiou that there are particular moments or events in everyone’s life that open them “to a radically different composition of the self, a switch that has a lasting effect and involves the most significant – but not all – ways in which that person conceives of her or himself” (Humphrey 2008: 371). These events, as opposed to Badiou’s Events, do not demand fidelity to an undeniable truth-event, but rather demand that one do the ethical work necessary to readjust one’s life trajectory to live the consequences of the event. In this sense the event demands fidelity to it as an ethical-event.

It is here specifically that I differ from Badiou in that in this article I will show that the demand of the event of love initiates not a universal truth-procedure, but an ethical-procedure; an ethical process by which new moral subjectivities are attempted to be cultivated. In this article, then, I consider love in just this way – as the evental demand that initiated an ethical-procedure, or the moral experience, that Zhenia and Misha attempted to maintain fidelity to as they struggled to cultivate new moral subjectivities. What will become clear, however, is that the demand of love that both of them felt far preceded their encounter with one another; that is, Zhenia and Misha had both already accepted the demand love posed to them as an ethical aim before their coming together. It is likely that both of them first felt the demand of love as it emerged from the rehabilitation process and that it was the fidelity to the ethical-procedure initiated by their response to this demand that led to their amorous encounter. In what follows, then, I will trace their respective ethical attempts in their post-rehabilitation lives to maintain fidelity to this demand and the way in which this led to their coming together.

## **Love is all around**

Romantic love was a common theme of discussion and desire among the many persons I met during my research. William Jankowiak (1998: 4) defines romantic love “as any intense attraction involving the idealization of the other within an erotic context. The idealization carries with it the desire for intimacy and the pleasurable expectation of enduring for some unknown time into the future.” In post-Soviet Russia very similar discursive articulations of romantic love (referred to as love from here on) have increasingly been associated with the further desire/demand of heteronormative marriage. Within the moral assemblage I investigate here, this link was specifically emphasized in both the dominant moral discourses as well as by all persons – staff, rehabilitants, and former rehabilitants – I heard speak or spoke with on the topic. Thus, rehabilitants and ex-rehabilitants often expressed a desire to find a partner of the opposite gender who would love them and who they could love in return. Staff often made love, loving relations, and the “skills” of love central to art, talk, and film therapy sessions with the goal of marriage oftentimes emphasized as the expected outcome. And Father Maxim, the priest that runs the small rehabilitation center about twenty kilometers from St. Petersburg known as The Mill, often spoke of that pure divine love that should inspire and be at the core of the love between a husband and a wife.<sup>1</sup>

This focus on love is not surprising considering its centrality to the various discourses most commonly assembled in the Church-run program and the networks reaching out from this assemblage. Russian Orthodox theological and institutional moral discourse, for example, posits that marriage between a man and woman is the natural relation of harmony that fulfills God’s plans for the unification of the “two different modes of existence of one humanity” (*dva razlichnykh obraza syshchestvovaniya v edinom chelovechestve*) that each gender embodies (ROC 2000: X1). Just as Father Maxim spoke of the pure divine love

necessary between a husband and wife, Orthodox moral discourse emphasizes that this harmony of marriage can be based only on the “true love (*istinnaya lyubov*)” that reflects the love God has for humans. Thus, marriage is described as a “little church” within which – in a reference to St. Paul – the man is to love his wife as Christ loves His Church, and the woman is to obey her husband as the Church does Christ out of love for Him (ROC 2000: X5-6). Thus, from the Orthodox perspective it is a Christian moral duty to marry, and to do so in a way that reflects God’s love for humanity (see also: Philaret 1936; St. Theophan 1996). In fact, unlike in the Catholic tradition, a Russian Orthodox priest, before he is allowed to actually become a priest, must marry.

Similarly, in post-Soviet Russian public discourses of love and marriage, there is much emphasis put on the necessity of doing so and doing so properly. Indeed, as a result of the perceived demographic crisis of post-Soviet Russia – that is, the steady decline in the ethnically Russian population – there has been widespread governmental, media, biomedical, as well as Russian Orthodox Church discursive and policy-oriented support for traditional nuclear family-based practices of love. Social scientific research on gender and family relations in the post-Soviet period suggest that these discursive and practical strategies are having some effect. For example, this research shows that not only is marriage between a man and woman increasingly expected and desired by Russians, but relations within the family are expected to be traditional and hierarchical, that is the man is expected to dominate the family unit (eg., Vannoy, et. al 1999; Ashwin 2000). Thus, whether from the institutional discourse of the Church or government or the public discourses of, for example, media or friend and familial networks, rehabilitants and ex-rehabilitants are part of an assemblage that

is saturated with discursive expectations of finding and experiencing love in a traditional family unit.

Discursively, then, love is all around; in practice, less so. Love is that elusive promise that so many in the world struggle to grasp, in the process our subjectivities become significantly shaped by this desire as well as by the many enactments – both failed and realized – of this desire. Perhaps this is even more so for the former drug users I came to know in St. Petersburg.<sup>2</sup> For many of them love cannot be simply confined to this elusive promise, neither can it be dismissed as a skeptic might as the constructed fantasy of Hollywood and pop songs, rather love for many of these former drug users is intimately connected to their other desire of no longer using heroin. Many of the rehabilitants I met at The Mill, and this is particularly true of the women, had a partner – husband or boyfriend – back in the city, and so the problem of love for many of these women became: how could this already established relationship support my attempt to stop using heroin and thus support an attempted change of my moral subjectivity? For those many more rehabilitants who did not have any partner waiting for them back in the city, the question was something like: how can I prepare myself so that I am open for finding a truly loving relationship that supports my new moral subjectivity as a former drug user? For both sets of rehabilitants, then, love is a central ethical dilemma around which diverse ethical techniques for reshaping their moral way of being in the world focuses. Such a process entails significant ethical work to reshape their emotional, linguistic, cognitive, and bodily way of relating with others and themselves. **In other words, love is that around which moral experience takes shape.**

This ethical work occurs across the spectrum of therapeutic, religious, and ethical interactions occurring in the Church-run program. For example, a male rehabilitant named

Boris made love central to his various interactions with others at The Mill, so much so that women eventually started to avoid him at all costs within the small spatial confines of the center because of their increased annoyance with his attempts to “negotiate” love between them. Love was also a topic Boris often brought up in various therapeutic sessions and staff members took this opportunity to try to help him reshape his emotional, as well as his conceptual, relationship to the expectations of love and a loving relationship with another (XXXX 2010, 2011). From the perspective of the staff, as well as several of the women at The Mill at this time, Boris did not understand or respect the depth, mutuality, and intimacy of love, but instead conceived of it in instrumental terms as a means of stemming his desire for heroin. Love was a way to replace one desire with another. This is in fact a common way for rehabilitants and ex-rehabilitants to consider love, and much of the ethical struggle around it entails coming to embody a capacity to love as an end in itself rather than as a means to sobriety.

Therapeutic sessions are not the only place ethical work centers around love. Father Maxim and the deacon working at The Mill regularly find ways to emphasize the distinction between what the Russian Orthodox Church calls fornication, or loveless sex outside of marriage, and the pure love of married life that is the condition for the only appropriate kind of sexual life. This is done in seminar-like discussions as well as intimate conversations between, for example, Father Maxim and one of the rehabilitants in the priest’s office or even during confession. Love is also often discussed among rehabilitants themselves in informal contexts such as smoking, chatting while working, or during rest periods while looking at photos. Although much of this talk tends to focus on the problems and questions faced by those who have a partner waiting for them back in the city, still those who do not may seek

advice from others on how to make a relationship work or how to find a partner or simply if they know someone appropriate to set them up with. Discourses and ideals of love, then, are all around the lives of these rehabilitants and ex-rehabilitants. The problem, however, is how to “find it,” how to experience it, and how to live it. This is a problem that extends far beyond the boundaries of the Church-run program and, in fact, comes to characterize the everyday lives of many once they return to the city.

### **Zhenia and Misha**

The first time I saw Misha it was at the post-rehabilitation meeting I call the Sunday Club that takes place every Sunday afternoon back in the city. After the awkward beginning of introducing the American researcher to the small intimate therapeutic group of eleven former rehabilitants, most of whom were male, the meeting began and as I would eventually come to realize went more or less as it always does. As is normally the case the first hour or so of the meeting was spent going around the circle of participants having them introduce themselves and saying a bit about their past week including any particular joys, problems, successes, or setbacks they may have experienced. When it was finally Misha’s turn to talk he introduced himself, told the room that he is a drug addict (a label all in the room adopt no matter how long it had been since they last used) and HIV positive, and then immediately began to tell how concerned he is that he will never find a wife, that he thinks no woman will ever be able to love him because of his past, and the fact that he is HIV positive only increases the likelihood that no woman will ever love him. Over the course of the next year I would hear Misha and several others say more or less the same thing many more times.

By this point Misha had been in the city for seven months after having spent eleven months in a parish and first rehabilitating at The Mill. As is the case with many of those

returning to the city after rehabilitating at The Mill, with perhaps some additional time spent at a parish, Misha was having a difficult time adjusting to a sober life in the same social context in which he had been using heroin for seven years. One of the techniques to work through this difficulty that Misha and other rehabilitants are taught at The Mill is to find new networks of friends and interests to become a part of. This is just what Misha did by becoming very close friends with Max and Sasha, two other ex-rehabilitants, and eventually working with both of them at a local hospital as a repairman and a palliative care volunteer.

Within weeks of this first meeting I attended, Misha, Max, and Sasha opened their network to me and allowed me access to many of the intimacies of their private and social lives. What became clear is that the three of them spent a significant amount of their free time together and in some ways were more like family than friends. Max and Sasha moved into an apartment together, and for a short time considered founding a commune for ex-rehabilitants in the city. Misha and Sasha had actually become quite close while at a parish together, and the two of them met Max at the Sunday Club. They soon discovered that they had much in common because of their shared experiences living at a parish, and quickly became close friends. Although they spent much of their working and free time together, this friendship could not replace the desire each of them had to love and be loved by a woman and to marry her. Max, in fact, already had a fiancée but she was rehabilitating at a nunnery nearly one thousand kilometers from St. Petersburg and the priest who had become his spiritual father continually urged Max to be patient with his desire to marry until they were both ready for it. Sasha and Misha continued to wait and hope that one day they would find someone, and Misha articulated this more often and more desperately than anyone I met the entire time of my research.

That is except for Zhenia. Zhenia began attending the Sunday Club meeting about a month after I first attended. Like most who attended the Sunday Club Zhenia had rehabilitated at The Mill and then went on to spend seven months in a nunnery, where she could take advantage of the only opportunity provided by the Church-run program to extend the rehabilitation process beyond the three months possible at The Mill. Like most returning to the city and the social context of their drug use, Zhenia found it incredibly difficult not to be swept back into her old life of using, and so she took advantage of the fact that her grandmother lives in Odessa and went there to live for the summer. Eventually she did return to St. Petersburg and a few weeks later began attending the Sunday Club.

Like Misha, Max, and Sasha, Zhenia opened herself to me in ways that many others would or could not, and allowed me access to her lifeworld as a former drug user trying to remake her way back in the world. As with Misha, Zhenia was convinced that love is the only possibility for her to remake herself and once again be able to live what she called a normal life. Zhenia often told me about the importance of family and how her own had been supportive through all her troubles, but she also told me that what she really needed was the love of a man who would always be there for her, to hold her, and to help her regain her place in the world. It was this kind of love, so she told me, that really mattered. It seems that this kind of love was always important to Zhenia as, in fact, it was love that had first led her to use heroin. When she was eighteen years old her boyfriend at the time, the man she expected to marry, began using heroin. At first she did not care about his use but as he increasingly broke dates with her and would not return her phone calls, she slowly became jealous and began to wonder what could be more important to him than her. To satisfy this jealous curiosity



Zhenia tried heroin for the first time and only stopped several years later when she entered the Church-run program.

Zhenia continued to attend the Sunday Club every week and became one of “the regulars.” Eventually she became friends with Misha, Max, and Sasha, soon afterwards Zhenia and Misha became a couple. This surprised no one, including me, since both had made it abundantly clear in both private conversations to me (and I assume friends and perhaps family members) and public therapeutic discussions that it was important to them to find someone to love and marry. They had each heard and responded to the demand of love as an ethical aim in their respective projects of ethically remaking themselves, and in their coming together they finally felt as though they had responded fully to this demand. In just a few months, however, Zhenia and Misha slowly began to isolate themselves from Max and Sasha, and when Zhenia became pregnant the two of them married without telling Max and Sasha beforehand. Soon afterwards Zhenia and Misha no longer communicated with the others at all and the two of them disappeared from social circles. Max, Sasha, and everyone else who knew the two of them all believed that they had begun using heroin again.

But before all of that there was the demand of love. Love was the one central theme that ran through both Zhenia and Misha’s articulations of their attempts to remake their respective moral subjectivities. *These articulations of love more or less matched very well Jankowiak’s definition of romantic love given above, and also tended to echo the culturally predominant link between love and heteronormative marriage articulated in slightly different framings by diverse institutional and public moral discourses within Russia in general, and the moral and ethical assemblage of the Church-run program in particular. Prior to entering rehabilitation both already had embodied moralities that were open to the possibility of love,*

but it seems clear that sometime during the rehabilitation process love emerged as an eventual demand that became for each of them the primary ethical aim of their post-rehabilitation attempts to remake their respective moral subjectivities. While it is certainly true that their experience in the Church-run program helped discursively frame the possibilities for maintaining fidelity to this demand, as will be seen, the way in which this fidelity was maintained exceeds any of these particular framings. For both of them, then, love was the ethical aim around which a new life could be built, and it was in the attempt to maintain fidelity to love that they came together. In what follows I will trace some of the articulations by both Misha and Zhenia of their respective attempts to maintain fidelity to love. What becomes clear, I suggest, is that without a focus on this fidelity, it is impossible to understand the post-rehabilitation moral experience of these two individuals and their respective attempts to remake their moral subjectivities and their very way of being in the world.

### **The Daily Journal**

In this section I will closely consider various entries Misha wrote in a daily journal he kept for me over the course of two months. This journal provides rich insight into the diverse struggles – moral and otherwise – that Misha faced as an HIV-positive former drug user who recently returned to the city, neighborhood, and everyday life that was once the scene of his drug use and criminal activity but is now where he struggles along in his ethical attempt to remake his moral way of being in the world. In the selection of entries that follow, Misha’s struggles with making money and maintaining various part-time and off-the-books jobs, his attempts to remake relations with his parents, and his struggles with health problems related to being positive with both HIV and Hepatitis C will all be evident. What I want to highlight for the purposes of this article, however, is how Misha’s concern with finding love is a constant

theme throughout his entries that in a sense transcends these diverse struggles. While money, family relations, and health issues are constant struggles, it is clear from these entries, as well as from other experiences I have had with Misha, that love stands as the one possible cure all. Misha is never certain if he will ever be financially secure, mend ties with his parents, and he is very certain he will never be healthy again, but he always knows in that way that only the emotive body can know that love is the one thing that can make this life of uncertainty worth living. Love for Misha is that one ethical aim or ideal according to which he could live that would make this life not only bearable but livable. But as these entries show, even the very possibility of finding this love comes upon one originally as perhaps the most uncertain of experiences . . .

*October 17, 2006.*

*Maybe I should start with the beginning of the day, but maybe I should not, we'll see how it goes. Since morning I was in a good spirit, work was so good with raking leaves and the weather so fine. But here, this guy calls me and tells me that there is no need for me to help today. At first I think I was happy because I had no place to run to any more. But then I started having second thoughts about it, started thinking of how I should spend this whole day and I had this idea – a bad one – to go home and get some sleep and I knew this was not going to end well. So I come home and there is no electricity, some kind of maintenance is taking place. I started to fade away, time was 2 pm. I called a friend of mine and we agreed to meet at Botkin hospital and we did. And so I come to the hospital and there is this nurse there that I really like, and I thought I would ask her when she gets off and this event happened that I cannot even describe. I missed her, she*

*said she was leaving and I was waiting for the doctor, I wanted to go after her, but I stayed, I think I am in love.*

*Then I got to the doctor, got everything, but I was thinking about her the whole time and still am. Her name is Olga, she has very beautiful eyes, hair, a very attractive figure, face, nose, she has a child and lives in the suburbs, but that is not an obstacle, but there is one, that I myself am not healthy, I have HIV, this is what is stopping me.*

The day begins for Misha like any other with one of his several odd jobs – raking leaves – but soon takes an unexpected turn - his services are no longer needed for the day. As a day laborer scraping together what amounts to five to fifteen dollars per day, Misha’s financial security is precarious – so too is his time, for he never knows when he will or will not be called off to yet another low-paying menial job. But he uses the time well even though he does not describe it as such, for Misha is often very low on energy because of his HIV status and it is likely that this is why he so easily took advantage of this time to sleep. It is also why he decided to go to the hospital later that day, and it is this unexpected sequence of the day that brought him and Olga together for a brief moment in the hospital lobby.

This encounter was not an Event in the sense that Badiou would use the concept, and, as it turns out not an event in the sense that I intend it. Misha, however, did describe the encounter as an “event” (*sobytie*); as an unexpected and unknowable moment in which he “thinks” he fell in love. It will soon become clear, however, that he did not. But this brief moment would stick with Misha and shape much of his thoughts and acts and the writing he did of these in the coming week. This fact, then, as well as its place in the temporal trajectory of his eventual amorous encounter with Zhenia suggests its role in opening new possibilities

for emoting, imagining, and desiring that are significant aspects of the ethical work necessary in the maintenance of fidelity to love. It is possible to surmise, then, that the ethical work Misha did on himself in maintaining fidelity to love through his encounter with Olga helped found the possibility for Misha's openness to and ability to sustain his encounter with Zhenia in the near future.

*October 18, 2006.*

*So a year flew by since I last shot up. I don't know, but today I found out that the guy who sold it is in jail, I should be happy, but I feel so sorry for him, a classmate of mine turned him in, but that is irrelevant.*

*And the most important thing that happened today was that I got myself together and went to the hospital and asked for Olga and I told her that I really wanted to go walk her to the subway, but could not because I was waiting for the doctor. I also told her something I had not. She had asked me "why did you come?" and I told her I was there for the doctor to check my eyes, but today I told her that I came to see her, because I really wanted that. I was sitting in a hospital and waiting for her like a fool. I sat there thinking how it would all happen, thinking about it and it turned out all differently. I spent about 20-25 minutes with her, we were in a hurry to get to the train station, I don't know how this is all going to end. I got all sad when she left and I just started walking and walked. Walked around turning these thoughts over in my head. Then I ended up home. Ate. Then a one-time job turned up, thanks to Natalia Aleksandrovna. To cut it short, I am going to sleep, because it is a hard day tomorrow.*

This entry is a bit unclear in terms of what exactly happened when, but what is clear is that the unexpected encounter with Olga the day before had impacted him enough that this day was spent planning, worrying about, writing about, and being with her. The encounter and what he described as his love for her significantly shifted the way he made his way through this day. Misha, in other words, is attempting to ethically respond to this encounter by changing his trajectory through the world, and yet as he sees it so much stands in the way of realizing this love; for as Misha sees it someone like Olga would never be interested in someone like him – an HIV positive former drug user without a steady job and very little experience of a so-called normal life; what would *she* want with someone like *this*? Is this why he lied to her about why he came to see the doctor? Perhaps, after all, truth-telling is not always a virtue in the attempt to live this particular kind of ethical trajectory. Perhaps other kinds of ethical techniques are necessary in this attempt, such as struggling with emotions such as sadness and feelings of foolishness, as well as the courageous virtue of going to her in the first place and attempting to get to know her. Like all singular ethical trajectories, love entails its own ethics.

*October 19, 2006.*

*I tried doing something different. I handed out leaflets today, it was not hard to hand them out, but to get over yourself and I did it and I even liked it, to cut it short, it was interesting.*

*There were worries in my soul by the end of the day, when I had already gone home and gotten some money. At home my mother said to me “give me half of that,” and I did not like it much because this is money I just made for myself so I even lost my temper a bit. But here, in the end of the day I bought myself a hat.*

*For some reason I have not thought about Olga all day, I guess nothing is going to happen between us. What am I talking about? I still have some kind of hope in my soul.*

*Anyway, for now I am really tired and want to go to sleep and I still have to take pills.*

Only two days later and Misha is already beginning to question his proclaimed love for Olga, but he catches himself and remembers that in fact he still has hope. But this hope is perhaps too easily missed as Misha is clearly occupied with other concerns in his life and days – scraping together some hard earned money doing menial jobs that he must “get over” himself to do, negotiating difficult family finances with his mother and still finding a few spare rubles to buy himself something he wants, and the ever present fact of his bad health caused by the HIV that keeps his energy so low and, in his view, keeps women from loving him. Living a life in which he must struggle so often to simply make it through the day, the impact of the encounter with Olga reveals itself in the very fact that it remains central enough to write about and stands as one possibility of hope in his entry. **But the question is becoming more and more obvious: is it Olga as a person or is it love as an ethical ideal that is truly guiding Misha’s moral experience?**

*October 24, '06.*

*. . . There was this thing today, I was looking out the window and I saw young girls driving rather good cars and I thought oh, would it not be great for me to be with one of them. I wanted to get Olga’s number through one person, but it did not work, I will have to do it myself. Just now I had an idea to write to some really good people.*

*My health is so-so, jumping from 36.7 to 38C. I really am approaching a door I have many times gone by, I think I already know what life it is and I only have to pick the right keys, and there beyond that door there is a hard and very interesting sober life. Thank you.*

Several days have now gone by and Misha once again remembers Olga. And in this remembering we seem to witness an important ethical shift that reveals that the encounter with Olga may not be that life-altering encounter Misha at first hoped it would be. For in the course of a week she has moved from the status of his love who shifts the very way in which he moves through his days, to someone who it seems he is reminded of as he desires the company of other women and their good cars. Is it the women or the cars he desires or both? Is he able to separate the two in his awareness of desire? The ambiguity is reiterated in the next paragraph as Misha anticipates a change in his life, a change for the better that is indeed possible if he can only make the right choice. But what is this choice and how to make it? How to make this choice while always walking this fine line between health and illness? And finally for our purposes, how, if at all, does Olga figure in this choice?

*October 27, '06.*

*I am very sad. I am tired of fighting and nothing working, I really want to find a friend of the female gender and today someone told me, because they were angry or it just did not come out right or something, that "that's why you don't have a girlfriend." Nobody had ever said that to me. I don't know why they would say that or if something is really going on. Whatever.*

*Talked to the priest, he said come when you want, it felt so good. He told me to communicate with Father Maxim.*



*And there was also a game about my sickness, a hard, interesting and sad game. In the end of the game the sickness took everything I had. To cut it short, I was tired, did not think about Olga much.*

Three days later Misha seems to have already moved past his love for Olga, and in fact this is the last time she is mentioned in his journal entries. The new life trajectory that momentarily became possible through the chance encounter with Olga has faded into darkness as one of the colorful flares arching from the initial burst of a firework fades into the black night sky. Misha has instead fallen into a state of despair brought on not only by his loneliness in the world but also his sickness – that “sad game” – that takes everything from him - his energy, his health, and the possibility that any woman would ever be able to love him.<sup>3</sup> Indeed it is unclear as Misha articulates his thoughts and feelings in this entry – is it the sadness, the desire, or the sickness “that’s why [he doesn’t] have a girlfriend”? This mysterious interlocutor may not be correct in his analysis of Misha’s plight, but one thing is for certain, the sadness, the desire for love, and his sickness can never be separated, for they have now assembled to constitute a significant aspect of who Misha has now become.

Before Olga came into his life, and again after she was gone, love was already there for Misha. It is love and not Olga that is important for Misha’s work of ethically remaking himself. **Love was that ideal that stood as the defining hope of his attempt to remake his moral subjectivity.** In this sense Olga was but one aspect of a larger moral experience characterized by the ethical desire for love. If it turned out that Olga was not the one with whom he could fully realize his new moral subjectivity, then certainly another would. As Father Maxim and other staff workers in the Church-run program had told Misha several times, he must remain patient for God would eventually send him his true love.

A few weeks later Misha wrote this entry in the journal:

*November 15, '06.*

*We came to work [at the hospital] in the morning everything was really good. Sasha came and said that big Zhenia is coming, you know her.*

*So we were painting and painting and then all of a sudden a phone call from Zhenia, she is already outside the hospital. She came and I was even at a loss. She is a pretty girl, but a very big one.*

*When we were painting we kept talking and talking with her until lunch was ready. We had lunch and the three of us went to get Sasha boots on Udelnaya. He ended up not finding anything. But I bought myself a sweater. In the end we were left with Sasha instead of just the two of us [he and Zhenia]. Got out on Moskovsky, were there for about an hour, stopped by on Leninsky. Went into the Baltic Sport [sportswear store], he wanted to buy something, all this time we were looking for a hat. Got home late, gave Zhenia my number, she sent me a real cute text message and I wrote back. That's it till tomorrow.*

### **Looking for love**

Zhenia first tried heroin out of a jealous incomprehension of how it could be that the young man she loved could be distracted from her by a drug. She soon discovered heroin's allure. Years later I met her in the midst of her early post-rehabilitation life in St. Petersburg and almost immediately love once again was central in her life – but first came her desire for death.

I wanted to die, but without hurting myself. Life was so uninteresting and disgusting. And now I don't even understand how I could think that way, because

it is such a priceless gift – to live. And there is so much joy waiting for me in my everyday life. And I will share this with you... I went to Botkin [*the city hospital where Misha met Olga and where a weekly reception takes place for those applying to The Mill and former rehabilitants meet to catch up*] and met those who were at rehab with me and I was very happy and I ran into one staff worker there who is working at The Mill at the time. And I am only thinking about him now. He conquered me. But I think I conquered him too. And he was so open with me that just after one day of communicating it seemed like we had known each other for all of eternity. And he made a very big step – he told me he has HIV. One day in communication and he is so serious about it... this openness and this trust conquered me. He is one of the volunteers, his name is Fyodor and he has been working at The Mill for five months. We communicate every day and we call each other like twenty-times a day. He was going to go to the monastery, but they left him there... they need him at The Mill.

Several times over the course of our talks Zhenia told me that in the past she had wanted to die and had made several half-hearted attempts to kill herself or, what is the same thing in her telling, to become HIV positive by sharing a needle with someone she knew was already HIV positive. But as I had come to understand Zhenia better it became clear to me that this death desire is often the opening to a narrative that soon turns to hope and the promise of a better life, and as in other stories this one centered on the discovery of love and its transformational possibilities. As I would come to learn, Zhenia was looking for love and it was perhaps this search more than anything that kept her going through her struggles with addiction. She continued with her story . . .

Just one look and that was that – right in the heart. I am so happy, but thank God, because it started to get a bit boring. And again there are so many emotions – they overflow. I can't wait for it to be Sunday. I am going to The Mill.

Boring, uninteresting, disgusting – this is how Zhenia claims she often experiences her everyday life and it is these experiences that awaken her desire for death. Luckily she finds love in the person of Fyodor and her emotions can once again begin to flow, indeed overflow (*perepolnenie*). It is interesting that many of the rehabilitants, ex-rehabilitants, and staff in the Church-run program with whom I spoke described drug use as a disease of frozen feelings, and as I have described elsewhere much of the therapy in the program is aimed at teaching rehabilitants how to once again emote properly (XXXX 2010; 2011). Emoting properly according to staff entails the ability not only to emote, but to emote within limits. That is, to have the disciplined capacity to exercise self-control over one's emotional world. Here we see that Zhenia is not exercising this self-control by allowing her emotions to overflow and as she will soon tell this should have been a sign of the fleeting nature of this love interest. But at the time she was too distracted by the emotions to see these signs.

Sunday is parents' day. I wanted to go with Lida's mother to see Lida and now there is another person for me to see there. I am counting the hours; and they are lasting so painfully long. I do not know if it is the love or not, but I know I like this feeling. I had already forgotten this was possible.

And he is worried about HIV, of course, he asked me if I had it and I told him I did not, but of course it does not get in the way of our relationship. It does not stop me and I asked him to not give up... to not even think about giving up. It's not an obstacle.

I always had this kind of attitude. If I want to be with someone, I need to accept them as they are. And maybe it is even good, although I am not sure if it is possible to say “good” that it is him and that he has HIV. I think that I could go through it all with him and God willing I will have this chance to bear this problem with him. I’d like to be that person who is there for him and who will support him. I kind of need it even.

Reflecting the institutional and public discourses of love, marriage, and differential gender relations I mentioned earlier, Zhenia here articulates an ideal-notion of love not only as about having someone to care about her, which it is for several others – particularly men – that spoke to me about their desire for love. But, Zhenia also *needs* to take care of an other; she needs to support him and to struggle through this problem with him. Love for Zhenia, then, emerges from what Elizabeth Povinelli (2006: 4) calls an intimate event, which is the formation of normative love at the intersection of discourses, practices, and fantasies of the autonomous individual and the “genealogical society” of social constraints. The autonomous individual and genealogical society are not only two aspects of the liberal societies Povinelli analyzed, but are similarly central to the various institutional and public discourses of morality, love, and marriage found in the assemblage both Zhenia and Misha have found themselves a part. But this intimate event is also an event in the sense I have been using it in this article; for through this love Zhenia can both remake herself and lose herself; she can become responsible for and give herself over to the other person – to help and care for him – and in the process lose herself by remaking herself and leave behind the feeling that life is boring and disgusting. Love does not distract Zhenia as much as it provides the opportunity to transform herself and her world; as such it is a form of being together with an other that

allows her to begin to remake both her social world and her moral subjectivity. As an intimate event, love for Zhenia is an event that opens a possibility for a new life and moral trajectory.

Unfortunately, Zhenia came to realize that what she felt for Fyodor was not love but something else entirely. If she had only exercised the therapeutic training she had received at The Mill as a rehabilitant and controlled her emotions, she would have been able to see that her feelings for Fyodor were not love at all but instead sinful temptations and passions. This, at least, is how she explained it to me several weeks later as she was telling me how she had just recently become friends with Misha, Sasha, and Max.

Well, I need to start in a roundabout way. I remember I told you about a temptation I had. It all seemed so nice and all that, yeah. I did not feel any danger or anything, but the enemy was approaching me slowly. I am talking about the situation when I told you about this young man [Fyodor] and that all my thoughts were about him, this was the temptation. Naturally, I told Father Maxim about it. And events started developing rapidly with us and he said it was nothing but a passion. And he talked to me a lot about it and that it was not good for either me or [Fyodor].

Zhenia never told me if anything specific happened that led to her and Fyodor no longer being together, rather the first time I hear of him again after our previous talk she describes the relationship in very different terms as a temptation (*iskushenie*). This is a word most likely introduced to her by Father Maxim in their talk or before at some point during her rehabilitation at The Mill or the nunnery she attended afterward, for it is just one of several terms such as fornication used in Russian Orthodoxy to describe potentially or actually

existing sinful relations between men and women. Not only was this relationship a temptation sexually, but it was also a temptation for her addiction. Staff in the Church-run program continually reiterate to rehabilitants and ex-rehabilitants that they should not get into relationships with other former heroin users since neither person, in the program's view, has the embodied dispositional strength to support the other in moments of potential breakdown related to drug use. The idea here is that if one person in the pair begins to use heroin again or has a strong desire to do so, the other person will not only not be able to provide the support to stop the other, but will most likely also succumb to this desire. Thus, according to Father Maxim, Zhenia was caught in a double temptation.

[Father Maxim] talked a lot about that pure love, the divine love that one needs to long for. And I analyzed the situation and realized that I never really knew how to love, I simply did not know what love was. There was love I had or I thought I loved, but the love that is for real I did not know. And Father Maxim simply warned me. And I really understood that it could be some sensual passion which will pass tomorrow.

And you want that true pure love and you need to walk towards it in small steps. And I was like, that's that, the next day – "I love". Well, that's just illusion. That truly is just a passion. What kind of love is that, that is not love. And it was very painful to just deal with it really. But the priest was right although it was very hard and painful to accept that, but as soon as I did, I found peace.

When St. Paul writes that "I do not do the good I want, but the evil that I do not want is what I do," he is describing the essential division at the heart of subjectivity that is made manifest in moments of what I have called elsewhere a moral breakdown (XXXX 2007).

Similarly, when Zhenia told me that “there was love I had or I thought I loved, but the love that is for real I did not know” she was articulating her realization that her relationship with Fyodor made possible her recognition in a moment of moral breakdown this division within herself. A moral breakdown is an experience of self-reflection during which persons must ethically work on themselves in order to transform their moral subjectivity, even if ever so slightly, so that they can return to the everydayness of their life trajectory. It is not clear if Father Maxim or some other event instigated the reflectiveness of this breakdown, but once the breakdown occurred Father Maxim seems to have played a central role in conceptualizing, reframing, and providing motivation for Zhenia to ethically transform herself so that she can – hopefully – now recognize the difference between passion and pure love, and know that reflective self-control is significant for discerning the difference. This lesson was not easy for Zhenia but at the moment she was confident that she had finally learned it and that it would serve as a guide in her next encounter with possible real love.

Now the story finally turns and we begin to hear the same love story Misha wrote about in his journal but from the other perspective:

And this is when the Lord sent me this comforting thing in the form of the volunteers [Misha, Sasha, and Max]. I came to Bumazhka [the hospital where all three worked at the time] and got to know Sasha and Misha. And since that day we have not parted really. We go everywhere together, the three of us [it is not clear to me why she does not include Max]. Yes, I just forgot about everything. I can say we are true friends. We totally talk about everything, it is so wonderful, such guys, I am generally happy, the Lord does love me in the end.

I asked her what they do together.



We walk in the streets; we can walk all the way down Nevsky. Mostly we just walk and talk. I have never had anything purer. We met up yesterday too, but then Sasha left and Misha and I went walking just the two of us. And I told my family at home that I was going out with a young man. So my sister asks me today, she says, well, what, did you go some place, did he take you somewhere? And I understand that I am not going to tell her that I totally don't need this.

Communication is enough and that we don't have any money to go places, but that I absolutely don't need it. Communication is enough and that's that. I have not had that feeling for a long time. Everything happens so wonderfully in this life.

For Zhenia this is the pure love about which Father Maxim spoke. She assigns this love to her relationship with the network of friends, but perhaps this is not entirely the case. For there stands Misha and there is something about him, something that brings them together and allows them to communicate in such a way that, as Zhenia puts it, gives her a feeling that she has not had in a very long time. This feeling – this love – is beyond the consumerist notions of dates and gender relations articulated by her sister's questions of where and what they did (the question the sister meant to ask was: how is this love signified through consumption?). This love, this pure love, exists because it is based in *obshchenie*, translated here as communication but perhaps best translated as communing talk, although ultimately true *obshchenie*, or being with, does not rely on words at all. This is the kind of love Zhenia felt for Misha. Misha, as we know, felt the same and soon this would come to be known to the rest of the friends as well as the staff of the Church-run program. The love that would

start so hopeful for Zhenia and Misha, however, would soon become a story of warning that staff would tell to other rehabilitants who would look for love among one another.

### **Love as moral experience**

Their story became a story of warning because from the perspective of the staff and the moral discourse of the Church-run program Zhenia and Misha had failed twice over in their post-rehabilitation lives. First, Zhenia and Misha were open to, sought, and followed through with a loving relationship with another former drug user. As I said above and as the warning story that circulated in the coming months after Zhenia and Misha's disappearance emphasized, two former drug users are not capable of being in a loving relationship together because neither person has the experience or strength to support the other in moments of relapse. This, then, necessarily leads to the second failure of Zhenia and Misha in the eyes of the program - both returned to a life of heroin use and at the same time are dragging their unborn baby into a life of addiction. From the moral perspective of the Russian Orthodox Church and the heroin rehabilitation this institution runs, Zhenia and Misha failed in their post-rehabilitation trajectory because they failed to love properly.

But from the anthropological approach to the study of moral experience that I am advocating in this article, whether or not Zhenia and Misha's relationship lasted and whether or not they remained heroin-free, and even whether or not their baby was born addicted to heroin are all beside the point. What matters for our understanding of their moral experience is that in their post-rehabilitation attempt to remake their moral subjectivities, **love is the event that set them both upon a new life trajectory to which they attempt to sustain fidelity despite the difficulties and struggles this entails.** It is this fidelity to love that is the moral experience

and not any particular act or behavior that might be labeled good, bad, right, or wrong according to some pre-given, abstract, and totalizing discourse of morality.

Love is a struggle; it entails a risk. Simon Critchley puts it thus, we “can dispose ourselves in such a way as to be open to the demand in relation to love but we cannot be equal to that demand” (Critchley 2010: 71). This demand of love shakes one out of their normal everyday existence and impels a transgression or transcendence of one’s already acquired way of being in the world. In this sense the demand of love initiates a moral breakdown. We are not equal to the demand of love because in the very act of loving we lose ourselves – shatter ourselves – and in response must struggle to remake a self capable of remaining faithful to the new subjective trajectory initiated through the eventual demand of love. **Because of this, love as an existential way of being in the world with others<sup>4</sup> – and not simply in any particular cultural manifestation of love such as the staff’s emphasis on pure love rather than instrumental love – has a particular potentiality for initiating an eventual demand.** Loss, struggle, hope, risk, creativity, rapture, transgression, and emergence would be apt moral terms to describe the moral experience of love.

These are the terms that best describe the moral experience of Zhenia and Misha. More than any other person I came to know during my research, they acknowledged and responded to the demand of love. They acted upon the expectation that love would be that which shattered their very way of being in the world – love, after all, was that which they hoped would lead them away from heroin. They risked their already acquired way of being for another unknown form of life. And they did all of this by transgressing the very morality they had sought to embody through nearly two years of Church-based rehabilitation. According to this morality it was this very transgression that doomed their love and sobriety

to failure. But such a judgment tells us little of Zhenia and Misha's moral experience and the way love opened up new possibilities for both of them to live their lives despite their possible return to the use of heroin. In other words, if the focus remains simply on Zhenia and Misha's possible return to heroin, then we miss out entirely on all the other aspects that came available to them through the event of love, which opened up their singular life trajectories that we can call their post-rehabilitation moral experience.

An anthropological approach to the study of moralities and moral experience cannot allow itself to get caught in the already available web of moral discursive proclamations of what counts as morality, ethics, good, bad, right, or wrong. In doing so we do more to reproduce and reify these socio-historically specific moral discourses than we do to come to understand the moral experience of those we study. In cases such as those of Zhenia and Misha that entail much personal and social suffering the former sort of anthropological analysis – one that often borders on moralizing – is not at all uncommon (cf. Robbins 2010). But what I am trying to argue and what I hope to have shown in this article is that such analysis does very little to help us understand the actually lived and felt moral experience of either Zhenia or Misha. This only becomes possible in their case, I suggest, when we consider their attempts to remake their moral subjectivities in terms of a fidelity **to the eventual demand of love** that began this new trajectory and eventually brought them together. Zhenia and Misha may have already had embodied moral dispositions that allowed them both to be open to the possibility of love as event. **But their new moral subjectivities only became possible when they each separately recognized the demand of love in the midst of their rehabilitation process, and were thus set on a new ethical trajectory that would culminate in their amorous encounter that one day at the hospital.** It is this experience that we must take

seriously and seek to understand, for while it may not be the kind of life that anyone, including us, would want them to have, it is, after all, the life they are now living.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> Both The Mill and its director Father Maxim are actual names. I have chosen to use them for two reasons: 1) Father Maxim requested that I use his real name and the real name of The Mill; 2) because there are no other ROC-run rehabilitation centers in the region, nor any other non-payment rehabilitation centers for that matter, any attempt to protect its identity would be senseless. All other names have been changed to protect identities. The Mill takes its name from a nearby village. It is only a happy coincidence that it also metaphorically expresses the therapeutic process that takes place there.

<sup>2</sup> For a similar discussion of the centrality of love within intergenerational heroin using families in New Mexico see: Garcia 2010.

<sup>3</sup> For a similar discussion on how one's own suffering limits the possibility of being with others through the modality of empathy see: Hollan and Throop 2008.

<sup>4</sup> The anthropologist Charles Lindholm describes love as a variation "on a very deep and basic existential search – the quest for transcendence." (1995: 68). Although we come at this in very different ways, Lindholm and I both recognize that this essentially human search for self-transformation takes on particular forms in various historical and social singularities.

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