

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE «THIRD SPACE» IN «THE
SECRET DIARY OF HENDRIK GROEN»**

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Abstract

This research paper considers the old age phenomenon through the prism of the modern social and communicative practice “third space” in the text of “The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen”. The research studies the dual nature of old age, which is implied in its twofold comprehension – in the gerontological (biological) aspect and the gerontosophical (philosophical) one. On the basis of the presented in the book sustained old age stereotypes in the modern society the authors show the narrowness of the old age gerontological perception as exclusively empirical (concentrated on aging and diseases). The gerontosophical analysis of old age is held by means of reconstructing the transcendental old age in its existential aspect, which gives an opportunity to the person to choose the way of their aging. The paper alleges that the preference of the existential aging is signified mainly by the club “Old-but-not-Dead” in the book. The analysis of the communicative practice “third space” in comprehending the old age phenomenon manifests that the club fellowship fosters its six members to continue living intensively. The presented interpretation of the club in terms of the social and communicative practice “third space” highlights both this idea and the message of the diary about the respectful attitude to old age, its own meaning, and the right to decent existence. The idea of the special place of the club in the old people’s life is also proved by the system of the “third space” values incorporated in its activities and the old age “daily discourse”.

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Keywords: Aging, discourse, gerontology, gerontosophy, “third space”

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of aging is an undeniable and natural object of multifaceted investigations of the Sciences and the Humanities, which are united by the goal of gaining insight into the nature and essence of the finishing period of human existence on Earth (Martins et al., 2017). The reasons for resorting to the phenomenon of aging are quite explicable: in today's world there is a great number of old people who live around and constantly remind of themselves by overt infringement, loneliness, destitution, indifference of the government, authorities, and relatives, and contempt on the part of the youth. With different variants for different countries all these are caused by the «uncertainty of the place of old age on the scale of sociocultural values» (Elutina, 2009) in the modern society, which is saturated with gerontophobia and ageism (Brossoie, 2009).

Undoubtedly, immutable virtues, psychological completeness and beauty of later years are worth mentioning and writing about. One should strive for multifaceted reflection on aging. However, there is another approach. For example, instead of focusing on demerits and disadvantages, as it usually happens to the evaluation of aging, one can tie a tight knot of “minuses” and quite evident “pluses” and go beyond biological considerations of aging. After all, Human being, having intellect, is the only creature who is aware of both their mortality and aging. That is why they can turn the awareness of passing away into full living instead of painful expectation of an imminent end (Diyachenko, 2013).

The present research paper is centered on the book «Attempts to Make Something of Life. The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen, 83 1/4 Years Old», in which the two themes are being developed and interrelated in counterpoint. The first theme refers to the life of the Amsterdam nursing home's residents and is submitted to the readers from the point of the cultivated in the modern society concept “being old” (Sapogova, 2011). The other theme of “the later age” (Pogrebnyak, 2002), or “the person completed” (Pigrov, 2002, p. 5), is considered through the prism of the concept “third space” (Lebedeva, 2016), which is actively demanded in today's social urban environment.

Taking into consideration the content area of old age, the author's choice of the form of diary appears quite unexpected. As the researcher of “old age philosophy” Pigrov (2002) justly mentions, “an old person does not write a diary, his/her life is not interesting or is not so interesting already. An old person writes memoirs”, because “these are memoirs that enable one to seize his/her life as an entity. This is the only way to appreciate the meaning of life, to get aware of the fact that one has lived it up not in vain” (p. 23). However, the researcher's observation undoubtedly proves the considerable value of Hendrik Groen's diary in their accent on the thematic counterpoint focused not on the person's doom to “being old” in the care home, but on their determined resistance to the society's inertia in perceiving old age with a lot of stereotypes (Brossoie, 2009).

2. Problem Statement

“The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen” is one of the most successful novels of 2014. Undoubtedly, it is its topical subject that makes the book so popular. And its author, Peter de Smet, probably does not completely realize which layers have been coded in the diary and how many different aspects of analysis the book can be exposed to in the intercultural context: sociological, psychological, communicative,

linguistic, philosophical, axiological, biological, medical, and etc. In this research we'll make an attempt to combine some of these aspects of analysis and to decode the concealed messages of the book on the basis of gerontosophy.

According to the intention of the author of "The Secret Diary" an old person can surprise others at their desire and capability to enjoy life, which is smoldering but that is why even more desirable. By the whole content of the diary the author sends the following message to the modern society and today's ever-young people denying the experience and wisdom of old age and insisting on its uselessness and out-of-datedness: "Aren't you able to discern and admit that that there is much more to old age than weakness and diseases?" This question arises observing the wonderful six who deny wretched existence in the nursing home and confirms the idea of involving the elderly into the active social life (Leontyeva Martins et al., 2016).

The diary's author finds out the other content and meaning of "the later age" by means of the "Old-but-not-Dead" club. The attitude of the club members to old age manifests its divergence into the "natural" old age and the unknown old age. The first old age ("natural", "empirical") is characterized by the power of body and is logically regarded as a mainstream type of aging in the society. The unknown old age ("the other old age", "transcendental") contains spiritual strength and is characterized by the person's capability to live old age in accordance with their own decisions and personal choice (Pogrebnyak, 2002). This transcendental old age is exclusively actualized in the existential aspect.

So, the problem that is implied in the book and generated by this article is the way of an old person to their choice of aging on the basis of the opposition of the "empirical" and the "transcendental" old age, and the role of "third space" in the decision-making process.

3. Research Questions

The investigation of the old age phenomenon through the prism of the modern communicative practice "third space" functioning in terms of self-reflection within "The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen" determines setting up and solving a series of research questions:

- 3.1** To designate the narrowness of the gerontological approach to old age as entirely empirical and typical of the modern society sustained stereotypes in the old age perception.
- 3.2** To reconstruct the perception of old age through the prism of gerontosophy (philosophy of old age), which depicts old age as transcendental, returning the meaning to the later age and the possibility to choose the way of aging.
- 3.3** To present the communicative practice "third space" as a way of actualizing the transcendental old age in its existentiality in the club "Old-but-not-Dead".
- 3.4** To reflect on the practiced by the club members system of transcendental old age values and on the communicative situation of the Hendrik Groen's diary discourse as a direct proof of denying the prepared societal scenario of "natural old age".

4. Purpose of the Study

The above presented questions entail the purpose of the study that is first comprised of the comprehension of the phenomenon of “being old” or “the later age” through the prism of its new gerontosophical understanding, revealed in self-reflection of the old age home resident. The second side of the purpose covers finding out the actual role of the communicative practice “third space” in the direct realization of the transcendental old age idea and its system of values, which are represented in the Hendrik Groen’s diary discourse.

5. Research Methods

For accomplishing the set-up purpose of the study, the conceptual research frame has been formed, which includes four research approaches: axiological, gerontosophical, communicative, and discursive.

5.1. Axiological Approach

In terms of new ideas in the Russian gerontology the authors of the present article refer to the socio-cultural aspect of aging, which is concentrated on the axiological approach to old age. This approach is related to such issues as the meaning and purpose, goals and lifestyles of the later age. Exactly these issues will be actualized in the Hendrik Groen’s diary and besides, they unite the six old people from the Amsterdam old-age home into the fellowship “Old-but-not-Dead”.

5.2. Gerontosophical Approach

The actualized by the club “Old-but-not-Dead” values of “being old” that mirror the transcendental old age are the ground for accentuation of the gerontosophical approach in the comprehension of the old age problems, which is being actively developed by the modern Russian science. It is the philosophical reflection on the old age comprehended as an “individual and notional perspective of the person’s life” that enable the reader to see Hendrik Groen and his friends living “their old age”, namely, old age in its existential meaning.

5.3. Communicative Approach

The application of the communicative approach in this research is determined by the two reasons. The first reason is the model of the social communicative practice “third space”, which is showcased by the “Old-but-not-Dead” club being “the place of friendly socialization” that unites people of “common interests and values”.

The second reason is conditioned by the character of the narrative in the book. Diaries are known to function as a means of a verbal self-communication of the subject. It means that they a priori do not presuppose an act of communication with the Other. However, starting with the first entry in the protagonist’s diary together with “the personal” appears “the general” where Hendrik is one of many. “The general” is the world of old age, which is presented in the diary in the two value dimensions: the external, that is the perception of old age by the government, society, the administration of the old-age home, and

their residents; and the internal, namely, a deep experience of old age globally and personally by the author of the diary. Thus, Hendrik turns out to be in the area of conversing not only with himself, but also with the Others.

This circumstance signifies a concrete communicative situation in the protagonist's diary. Its content, on the one hand, manifests the rejection of old age by the modern society, on the other hand, it demonstrates Hendrik and his friends' disagreement to the legitimate societal disregard towards old people, which finally finds its way into establishing the club with the provocative name "Old-but-not-Dead".

5.4. Discursive Approach

"The Secret Diary" as a text is to be analyzed in the event aspect as submerged into the concrete real life situation. Such an analysis logically assumes resorting to the discursive approach in the comprehension of the protagonist's self-reflection. In terms of this approach the everyday explicit Hendrik Groen's conversation on the topic of old age is to be defined as the "daily discourse" of old age.

As the analysis of the book shows, it is the "daily discourse" of old age actualized in the protagonist's diary that appears to be the force field, in which the other research approaches have been activated. Accompanied by the discursive approach they have contributed to achieving the goal and solving the objectives of the research.

6. Findings

It has been found out that due to the discursive ground of the protagonist's diary the book communicates not only the personal story of the elderly man who happened to be a resident of the nursing home. The event aspect, being characteristic of the discourse, has entailed the active involvement into the text of the diary:

- 1) experiences, intentions, conclusions, extracted from the everyday scenes of the nursing home daily routine;
- 2) informational, situational, contextual descriptions, which consist of supplemental or alternative meanings related to the problems of old age in the modern world.

As a result, the communicative constituent of the text, which addresses the government, authorities, "ever-young" people, is the life itself where, as we know, there is no decent place for old age. That is why the theme of old age in the book is represented in the "daily discourse" filled with disparaging old people excessive guardianship and confined independence.

Resorting to the "daily discourse" of old age is also explained by Hendrik's being in the area of overwhelming empirical old age with all its clichés, patterns, and stereotypes allotted to old age by the society. Hendrik does not ignore these patterns, ironically mentioning: "I still don't like old people <...> **Their Zimmer frame shuffle, their unreasonable impatience, their endless complaints, their tea and cookies, their bellyaching**" (Groen, 2016, p. 4). But recognizing his age ("Me? I am eighty-three years old"), Hendrik identifies himself as a representative of this group. And starting with the first entry in his diary Hendrik begins the "sad march" of old people's wretched existence in the nursing home. Hereby, in the process of writing notes the protagonist is creating a real conduit of the representatives of the "natural"

old age: they speak only about the weather, food, and their ailments, they are often untidy, they like neither surprises nor changes, any activity for them is like climbing up a high mountain, and etc. These described in the book examples of old people's behavior fully correspond to the findings of psychologists identifying factors that determine old people harmful behaviors (Oprea & Stan, 2019). Accepting these "misconducts" of his fellows Hendrik at the same time pierces such modes of behavior with his precise and sensible self-comments manifesting the "face" of the existential old age, which sees "loss of dignity" in old people's untidiness (Groen, 2016) and simple laziness in lack of activity ("I think it's laziness and apathy").

In the same way, critically and soundly, Hendrik evaluates the state of loneliness of the nursing home residents: "Old people often lose touch with last remaining friends outside the care home; they stop visiting each other and doing things together. <...> Not letting yourself grow lonely one costs a great deal of – sometimes fruitless – effort" (Groen, 2016, p. 233). However, all these "adornments" of old age and known by everybody forgetfulness and absentmindedness, love for gossips and rumors, envy, mutual surveillance, specific old age smell do not arouse Hendrik's annoyance toward the care home dwellers. After all, as Hendrik self-critically reasons, he is one of them. This self-criticism entails the readers' impression of him as a smart and wise old person, able to convey the image of "natural" or empirical old age through the amazing combination of light humour and bitter irony. For example, "If grow to a very old age in here and remain on your feet you may have to attend as many as 500 burials and cremations in the last 10 years of your life. A lovely prospect" (Groen, 2016, p. 68).

The reflection on "The Secret Diary" permits to find out the conceptual ground for the twofold interpretation of the old age phenomenon. It implies diametrically opposite comprehension of value and meaning of "being old". The empirical old age is inclined by the society to ordered existence, to living "by the rules" and involved into activities that are accessible to the minds of old people. As for the right to choose the way of "being old", it means the set of value concepts determined by the personal intrinsic need to live the rest of life to the full. So, it's not by chance Hendrik does not like autumn, which, as he thinks, "smells like a nursing home". On the contrary, Hendrik is attracted by spring, which symbolizes "a new beginning" (Groen, 2016, p. 216), "the old age hope for future", which is the Hendrik's formula of "being old".

In the prism of this formula the image of the existential old age is being formed. This existential old age embraces the whole set of value concepts: sober acceptance of being old, to "live as if today's your last day" (Groen, 2016, p. 100), to appreciate and "enjoy your sunset years" (Groen, 2016, p. 9), to find new friends and to make adventurous plans, to set up clear objectives, to make later wishes come true, and the main thing – one should simply be. These life values as the reflected in the Hendrik's diary reference points of the later age are actualized by the protagonist and his friends in the club "Old-but-not-Dead", which unites its participants under the motto "Attempts to Make Something of Life".

The analysis of the text and of the model of the social practice "third space" allows us to make the following conclusions. First, the image of the club, which represents this model, reveals the mix of the sustainable axiological and humane principles and shows the evident dramatic character of today's life, which deprives the person of the hope for the decent end of the later period of living. And Hendrik as a person of the later age does not agree with such a state of things and resists openly trying to make something of life as a counterweight to the "stagnant life" in the nursing home. All this demonstrates the productivity

of the artistic solution to the old age problem made by the author and the approaches to the comprehension of old age phenomenon offered by him.

One more result of the textual reflection on the urban communicative practice “third space” is the finding of transformation of the “daily discourse” of old age, determined by the considerable enrichment of the event aspect of daily discourse. The ground for it is the club activities held mostly outside the old-age home. The “geography” of the activities is quite variable, and what is more, unpredictable: The Hermitage on the Amstel, the cuisine atelier, the Dutch casino, the Zoo “Artis”, a golf-club. Nevertheless, this diversity completely clears up the essence of the club members’ rebellion against the rules of the nursing home that doom the residents to the meaningless existence. The mosaic of outings showcases an unusual intrinsic freedom and, what is especially important, adamant determination to keep the taste of life and to get a bit more enjoyment of it by all means (Pinheira et al., 2018). Moreover, people that the club members address to in a bid to help them organize their outings are always supportive, which confirms the readiness of local communities to foster tourism activities of the elderly for the mutual sustainable development (Leontyeva et al., 2017).

The outings of club members are constantly accompanied by “enthusiasm” and “laughter” (Groen, 2016, p. 53). These words are becoming part of the thesaurus of the “third space” and witness a considerable renewal of the lexical and semantic field of old age. Whereas the frequent lexemes of “empirical old age” are complaint, moaning and groaning, rumors, envy, surveillance, denunciation, the common lexemes of the “existential old age” are joy, happiness, enjoyment, friendship, admiration, and in addition to them – dreams, plans, perspectives, future. In the prism of the twofold interpretation of the old age phenomenon all these words obtain the meaning of values. This idea is clearly illustrated by one remarkable Hendrik’s entry, where he writes about forming “the two contingents” (Groen, 2016, p. 230) in the nursing home: a small disease-free company at their table (they are the club members) and all the rest 154 diseases plunged dwellers at other tables. The “disease-free” vs. “diseases plunged” clearly reflects the opposition of the empirical old age characterized by the body painfulness and weakness, and the existential old age, full of spirit power. The gerontosophical approach to old age activity overlaps the psychological studies, which proves the interdependence of physical activity with psycho-cognitive functioning at this age (Bootsman et al., 2018).

The direct proof of the “transcendental” (existential) old age defeating the “empirical” one in their opposition in the club is welcoming life and enjoyment in its daily discourse. The club members enjoy being together. They always speak and discuss to their hearts’ content, listen to music or discuss a book together, which is typical of the “third space” uniting like-minded people (Lebedeva, 2016).

It is quite logical that the club in the diary is represented as a real fellowship where everything is centered on the cult of friendship. In this fellowship everybody is plunged into the care for one another. Nothing remains unnoticeable. The protagonist sees pain, especially if a friend is very old and turns out helpless. Thus, Hendrik becomes a beacon for Grietje in the approaching void of dementia. For paralyzed Eefje he becomes eyesight and hearing, for disabled Evert he is a spinal column in any situation. However, Hendrik, a person of the “third space”, does not consider the care for the soulmate a burden. On the contrary, this care brings about peace and the feeling of being wanted (Andrade et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the

indifference of the outside world to the nursing home's dwellers is being overcome more bitterly. That is why having friends is such happiness.

In fact, establishing the club launched the "mechanism" of the existential old age. Since then, the words "plans", "perspectives", "dreams", and "future", which are regarded as not typical of old age regularly appear on the pages of the diary. Moreover, these words become the ideologemes of the "third space", their value setups, signs that cross out the word "disease" from the club "daily discourse". Besides, the group of six does not have time for doctors because they are busy with different activities. However, this does not mean that the existential old age "should not take into consideration habitual attributes of old age". On the contrary, they push "the person completed" to get a bit more pleasure of life.

The culmination of the "third space" realization in "The Secret Diary" is the courageous Hendrik's dream of buying a cottage for his old friends and himself, which gets him to purchase a ticket of the State Lottery for his personal savings (7450 euros). One can live there by the rules of old age that are chosen personally. At such a trend the "third space" for Hendrik and his friends will logically turn into the "first space", their native home, which was forever lost and now, "if I win the jack-pot", obtained again. Hendrik is sure that there should always be some room for hope. And hope remains with him even after Euphie's death. As remain the club, the perspective of spring, of a new outing. As if to confirm the functional realization of the "third space", the protagonist started off to buy a new diary and a new notepad. It signifies that the life of the "Old-but-not-Dead" club is going on and together with it continues the old people's life on their own scenario.

7. Conclusion

The sequel of "The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen" was released in 2016 under the title "As Long As There Is Life. The New Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen, 85 Years Old". This title signifies the development of the rebels' club to presenting the consequences of the participants' choice of "their old age": we'll enjoy living as long as there is life. Moreover, in the new Peter de Smet's book the club as the "third space" expands its boundaries both traditionally outside (the outing for the chocolate workshop, getting to know the African musical instruments, etc.) the nursing home and inside it. This circumstance justifiably exacerbates the conflict between the nursing home authorities and the club, imparts more social meaning to the old age problems, the comprehension of which is still predominantly held by the club "Old-but-not-Dead" as the "third space" representation in the current research.

Undoubtedly, "The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen" is not able to tackle all society problems, but it is able to identify them as the research has proved the efficiency of the club interpretation in terms of social communicative practice and gerontosophical approach to old age. The club as the "third space" directly takes part in solving such problems, mainly, fostering people not to feel lonely and to make an attempt to build up close relations with surrounding people, accomplishing its main communicative task.

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