

Ageing and Agency in the Contemporary Geriatric Discourse in Russia

The aim of this research is to understand how the agency of the ageing subject is constituted within the emerging discourse on geriatric medicine in Russia. The theme of the project is closely related to the current transformations of the long-term eldercare in Russia, and in Saint Petersburg as it has been presented as a model case of geriatric care system development for other regions (Serpov 2016: 37). Considering the global tendencies of population ageing, Russian ageing policy prioritizes the improvement of geriatric care as a unified system of medical and social services (The Strategy 2016). Moreover, the Order of Geriatrics Healthcare Provision, approved by the Ministry of Healthcare in 2016, proposes a medical approach which aims to provide support to the elderly people's ability to "self-serve" (*samoobslyuzhivanie*) and remain independent in the "frail" condition (The Order 2016). In light of the increased demand for the elderly (health)care, the experts suggest disseminating geriatric knowledge amongst the medical staff as well as social workers and non-professional caregivers through various educational programs (Tkacheva 2016: 35).

In this research I engage with the two key theoretical issues discussed in relation to the field of critical gerontology broadly defined as an approach reflecting on the social constitution of the age-related normative perceptions (Baars 1991; Katz and Calasanti 2014). While the social constructivist perspective proves to be productive for illuminating the inequalities related to ageing understood as a social practice, such perspective is criticized within the "material turn" in gerontology as anthropocentric and limiting for understanding of the materialities of ageing (Höppner and Urban 2018: 4). Therefore, the social studies of ageing are urged to consider the "bodily" matters, as well as the role of inanimate things in the process of "mattering" age. For instance, in the study of nursing students' training, the attention to gerontechnologies helps to reveal the power relations in the long-term care between care professionals and older people with dementia (Bergschöld 2018). The other theoretical issue which is related to the social-materialist debate is the understanding of agency in relation to the later life. On the one hand, the successful ageing paradigm suggests viewing the human ageing as an *agentic* process which can be modified in a desirable (active) way through an adoption of a healthy lifestyle (Katz 2013, Baars 2016: 78). On the other, such view, linked to health of the ageing subject, is limiting for understanding of the agency, and discriminatory for those who do not comply with the "healthy ageing" standard (Grenier, Phillipson 2013: 56-7). As a category, agency itself has been contested as based on the normative liberal understanding of the autonomy and the self (Mahmood 2001). New materialist

gerontology adds another “complication” to the discussion, inspired by Karen Barad’s notion of agency as an “ongoing reconfiguring of the world” (Barad 2003: 818, quoted in: Höppner and Urban 2018: 6).

I employ critical discourse analysis methodology, focusing on the assertions and assumptions used in the instructive documents and lessons, their context, and the constructive effects (Fairclough 2003). On this stage on my research, I focus particularly on the educational programs for people engaging with the caregiving process such as relatives of the elder patients, social workers, and nurses. First, I will analyze various documents currently serving for, or aimed at, the regulation of this field (The Order of Geriatrics Healthcare Provision 2016, National Guide on Geriatrics 2018, Care for the Weakened Elderly People: Russian Recommendations 2018, Professional Standard for Geriatricians 2018, tbc.) Second, I attend an educational course organized and taught by geriatricians for nurses specializing in geriatric care (*mladshaya meditsinskaya sestra po ukhodu za bol'nymi geriatricheskogo profilya*). Third, I collect interviews with geriatric care workers and nurses.

Considering the alarmist perspective on the global ageing, and the successful ageing paradigm blurring the boundaries between ages in facing age-related issues, the emerging discourse of the geriatric medicine in Russia gains an authoritative position as a specific field of expert knowledge. The understanding of the later life and the elderly person distributed between professionals, caregivers, and the elderly people themselves, reviews the bio-medicalized perspective on ageing through the hegemonic successful ageing paradigm. This project questions the constitution of the ageing subject as a “geriatric patient” in this discourse, paying attention to the notion of agency as it is discussed in relation to the materiality of ageing: the ageing body and gerontechnologies. Ultimately, this project contributes to the debate around the conceptualization of agency in later life and indicates the opportunities for expanding the critical gerontological perspective on the successful ageing paradigm.