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On the Problem of Determining “Generational” Theme in the Novels of the 1990–2000-s

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The present article studies the changes in the pattern of “generational” theme in Russian novel (different from the traditional schemes of “Oedipus complex”, “fathers and sons”) towards the end of the 20th century and sets the problem of finding approaches to the explanation of this pattern in the latest works of the 1990–2000-s. The analysis of the semantics of the “generation” concept states, that “generation” is considered as one of the institutions of the reality objectification, because it is the way of transferring such objectivity of the institutional world that was required to “increase” and “strengthen”. The paper proposes a concept of the “generational” plot as an image of communication between generations on the “co-being” level, when one character is involved into the construction of the objective reality image from subjective ideas in order to transfer their experience to another generation. The article offers an explanation of this plot, relying on the phenomenological sociological conception of Berger and Luckmann.

Keywords: generation, plot, Russian novel of the 2000-s.

In the 19-20th centuries Russian literature dealt with “descriptive and explanatory conceptions of Russian generations” more than sociology, which resulted to “describing a generation not as a collective, but intellectually or socially active entities (generation of Decembrists, generation of the 60-s, revolutionary generation¹ etc.)” (Semenova, 2005, 84). In the literature of the 19th and the 20th centuries the essence of the “generational” theme was the intelligentsia (existential) “alienation of the person from the society as a result of a symbolic riot raised by its non-compliance with the ideal construct made up in the protagonist’s conscience” (Kuznetsov, 2008) (see: A. Pushkin “Dubrovsky”, I. Turgenev

“Fathers and Sons”, A. Herzen “My Past and Thoughts”, L. Tolstoy “War and Peace”, F. Dostoyevsky “The Adolescent”, A. Bely “Petersburg”, L. Leonov “The Thief”, “The Russian Forest”, B. Pasternak “Doctor Zhivago”, Yu. Trifonov “The Old Man” etc.)². The model of a generational theme in this literature was based on depicting the “generation conflict”³ in its classical variants (“Oedipus complex”, “fathers and sons”). It is explained by the fact, that up until the late 20th – early 21st century the scholars considered generation gap to be a universal theme in the human history, as all of these inter-generational conflicts are based on the eternal competition between the father and

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the son (“Oedipus complex”). In the late 1960-s H. Marcuse defined generation conflict as a natural law originating from the anthropological structure of human needs, and L. Foyer remarked, that competition between the father and the son is a stronger propulsion of history than the class struggle (Glotov, 2004, 44-45).

Characterizing the “transforming Russian society” of the last 20th century decades, sociologists began speaking not so much of the conflict, as of the “gap” between the generations, “that reflects the interruption of graduality, disruption of historical development”. The social values lived by the Soviet generations “lost their sense and practical value in the new historical situation, and, therefore, cannot be inherited by the ‘children’, as they are not suitable neither for their present nor future life” (Molodezh’ Rossii, 1993). In Russian literature of late 1970-s – early 1990-s the depiction of the generation conflict goes deep into the context, and “in the legend of the Soviet intelligentsia and its (unofficial) literature there are two motives or motive knots that form the storyline: the obstruction and collapse of several generations or even ‘all at once’; the symbol and figure of deliriousness, abruption, negatively resulting in the imperative task ‘to maintain and to convey’ the image of the past, to pass on ‘the heritage’... (Dubin, 2005, 79) (this is the theme of such novels as “Pushkin House” by A. Bitov”, “The Shore” by Yu. Bondarev, “The Burannyy Railway Stop” by Ch. Aitmatov, “Father Forest” by A. Kim, “Lines of Fate” by M. Kharitonov, “The Infinite Deadlock” by D. Galkovsky, “Slynx” by T. Tolstaya etc.).

At the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries the development of post-industrial civilization (the reign of technos, globalization, computerization, mass media technologies) dictates the change in the scholar’s view on the conflict and succession of the generations. Researches of modern sociologists and psychologists demonstrate, that

“ancestral memory preserves information on the gender identity and the place of its gender in the system of the genealogical tree, but erases the information of its name, life and fate” (Vekilova, 2013, 300-301). The eternal competition between the father and the son as a basis of intergenerational conflicts loses its edge, because “the modern society and its authority is not experienced by the unconscious as the image of the Father as a mentor, protector and embodiment of the values, but resembles the archaic image of the almighty Mother. The maternal element is mostly represented by the almighty technology, which makes a human feel helpless” (Glotov, 2004, 45). Moreover, intergenerational relationships develop on the tempos of the scientific, technical and social development (Meed, 1970), while in the current round of civilization “‘the velocity of sending more of new and new life forms into the tradition’ accelerates so much, that there is no word in the language to describe it” (Kutyrev, 1998, 180).

As a result, modern literature captures the transformation of existential communication of persons into “situational communication”, the transformation of communication between individuals into rational “superficial communication” (physical interaction, depreciation of information, implicit complementation of values) (Nora, 1998, 56) (it can be observed in the novels of the 1990-s – 2000-s: “The Bite of an Angel” by P. Krusanov, “Life of Insects” and “Generation P” by V. Pelevin, “One Night Befalls Us All” and “Maidenhair” by M. Shishkin, “Haze Sets Upon the Old Steps” by A. Chudakov, “The Underground, or a Hero of Our Time” and “Fear” by V. Makanin, “The Time: Night” by L. Petrushevskaya, “Freedom” by M. Butov, “Konigsberg” by Yu. Buyda, “The Fish” by P. Aleshkovsky, “The Peasant and the Teenager” by A. Dmitriev etc.). In the previous researches (Rytova, 2007, 2008, 2009) the author

has already stated that in the prose of the 1980-s – 2000-s by S. Dovlatov, A. Chudakov, A. Utkin, Yu. Buyda the generational theme is moved from the figural layer of the text into intertextual one (communication between the generation is scaled back to signs and is expressed with allusions).

Therefore, if a plot is a form of expressing the procedurality of being and/or procedurality of conscience, then the generational plot is traditionally concentrated on depicting the process of communication between “I” and “Other” as representatives of different generations. However, it leads to a question: what can point at the generational communication in modern literature, if the “encounter” of generation representatives is not directly depicted?

Relying on the philosophic researches of E. Husserl, A. Schütz, E. Levinas, works by M. Bakhtin (Husserl, 2004; Levinas, 2000; Schütz, 2003; Bakhtin, 1979), we may suggest that the point of view of a “third one” who sees the act of communication as an ontological process is inevitable (in a literary text it is the author).

In his work “Totality and Infinity”, E. Levinas marks the following aspects of communication between “I” and “Other” as an ontological process, which can be related to the depiction of generational communication in modern literature: 1) for Levinas, when I meets the Other, it faces *absolute difference*⁴ and insuperable opposition; verbal communication with the Other reveals the transcendental of the Other; 2) Levinas considers that subjective expression of admission of the Other in the structure of ethic relation is the Action. For our interpretation of the modern generational plots, where the real communication of generation is scaled back, the conception of Levinas that the Act is “the connection with the Other, which reaches it, *though it is not aware*”; 3) language is also an important component in the conception of Levinas; it is what makes relations between

separate persons possible. I expresses itself to the Other in speech; I introduces itself, selects some words, produces meanings. For Levinas, language structurizes “my” encounter with the Other due to the “traces”; 4) these ontological aspects of generational communication are mostly found because, for Levinas, “my” responsibility for the “Other” is evaluated by a “third person” (which in literature is the author).

Besides philosophic works, revelation of a generational plot requires relying on the “hints” hidden in the transforming semantics of the term “generation”, because the history of interpretation of the term is connected with the shift of emphases in the social, historical, cultural, civilizational understanding⁵. In the 19th century, when the West European social philosophy began developing its interest to the scientific analysis of the “generation” and its problems, the scholars were mainly using the traditional, bio-genetic interpretation of the term: V. Dal explained the word “generation” as “a family, tribe, relation; related by blood, in descending or ascending order, with the ancestors and descendants” (Dal, 1994, 626). In the 20th century, when historical cataclysms made its inevitable impact on the life of people, historical and cultural interpretation dominated; it was set forward by philosopher W. Dilthey and the largest researcher of generational sociology K. Mannheim, who specified: “We may talk of a generation only when the representatives of certain generations are connected with each other with everything they experienced as a result of social and intellectual symptoms of the dynamic destabilization process” (Mannheim, 1998, 28). Therefore, “Being specific constructions of reality, cultures (these variously structured and differentiated spheres) predetermine the sense of humane existence in culture” (Petrucijova, 2010, 618).

At the turn of the 20th–21st centuries different approaches to interpretation of the “generation”

term co-exist with each other: anthropological, ethnographical, historical and cultural, social and demographical, sociological etc. Depending on which problem in interpretation of the world and the human is made the cornerstone, it is possible to find associated interpretations of the “generation” in works by philosophers and sociologists, who, throughout the whole 20th century, have been actively developing the generational theme and models (K. Mannheim, J. Ortega y Gasset, I.S. Kon, R. Laufer, Yu.A. Levada, L. Ya. Lurye, P.Ya. Sorokin, N. Eisenstadt etc.). From our point of view, in the epoch of virtual reality and computer technology Russian literature focuses on the problem of “search” for the reality and consequent understanding of the fact, that failures of stereotypes and values of the whole generation are not just an eternal (archetypical), but also an excessively frequent (in the technos epoch) process. They activate the discovery of the uncontrollable and indescribable reality. The problem of “grasping” and objectification of the reality is complicated for scholars with the new idea of the “historical time”: “the new Present is flooded with an endlessly great number of hints on the material presence of the Past”, and “the technical opportunities for creating simulacra of the phenomena typical for any past, have dramatically grown” (Gumbrecht, 2007, 48). In the plots of their novels, the modern writers (realists, modernists, postmodernists) contemplate on the problem of the new generation’s production of an objective reality from the subjective ideas of the individuals (V. Pelevin “Generation P”, “Chapaev and Emptiness”, Yu. Buyda “Königsberg”, A. Chudakov “Haze Sets Upon the Old Steps”, M. Shishkin “Pismovnik”, S. Bogdanova “Dream of Jocasta”, “The Mathematician” by A. Ilichevsky etc.) At the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries the literature realized, that “as a keeper of the axiological base of the generation, the protagonist, responsible for receiving and decoding

information from the previous generation, is, in fact, not liable for anything, and creates his own reality on the base of illusory associations created by himself” (Kuznetsov, 2008).

In the conception set forward in the book “The Social Construction of Reality” by German-speaking sociologists, followers the phenomenological sociology of knowledge, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, (1966) (Berger, Luckmann, 1995), it is possible to find the kind of interpretation of the function of “the generation” which was demanded at the very turn of the 20th – 21st centuries, because in the epoch of replicating simulacra of the past and continuously updating present, in the epoch of text and virtual reality the society feels the urge for finding some institutions for reality objectification (in the opinion of sociologists, “the nature of the phenomena cannot be understood from the strictly empirical point of view; the social world of man is connected with existence and is actualized from the unknown sides of the unconscious”) (Malenko, 2010, 309). According to “The Social Construction of Reality”, the “generation” category can be taken as one of such institutions for objectification of reality as, in the authors’ opinion, “only with the appearance of a new generation can one properly speak of a social world” (“reality of the social world acquires its massiveness in the process of transmission to the new generations” (Berger, Luckmann, 1995, 102-103).

From our point of view, the Berger-Luckmann conception can be used for interpreting the generational storyline in those modern novels, in which it is connected not with the depiction of direct communication (or a conflict) between generations, but with their co-existence in the “co-being”. “The base for the succession of generation is formed by the process of a personality socialization” (Glotov, 2004, 47); in the work “The Social Construction of Reality” there is a description of the “socialization model”

as a process of “objectification of the reality” by human from his individual experience of “here-and-now” routine and subjective ideas⁶. This process embodies the formation of the “collective meaning” of the generation, because it is for transmission of the objectiveness of the institutional⁷ world to the new generation it shall be “increased” and “strengthened” (the world needs to acquire “the stability in the conscience” of the transmitter generation, to become “much more real”)⁸.

In the conception of Berger-Luckmann there are the following statements, that can be related to the pattern of the generational storyline development in modern novels. Socializations of a person in the adult life (secondary socializations), which let him realize itself as a part of the generation, usually begin in order to get over some emotional childhood memories (which is the radical transformation of the subjective reality of the individual) (Berger, Luckmann 1995, 230)⁹. According to Berger-Luckmann, an individual may not contribute any more sense to his biography (and, consequently, cannot become a representative of a “generation”), until his subjective experience becomes sedimented, as the attention of any person is always drawn to the reality of his everyday life. Sedimentation of the subjective experience of an individual occurs in the language which gives sense to the biography of the person, because it shapes up the image of the objective reality in his conscience by forming patterns for recognizing objects, utterance of actions and utterance of existence; it shows the level of social relation etc. (“language can become an objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit” (Berger, Luckmann, 1995, 65-66)).

Moreover, Berger and Luckmann pay attention to the fact, that language constructs the symbols ultimately abstracted from the

everyday experience¹⁰, “transforming” them into objectively existing elements of everyday life. Compare: “symbolization does not only provide the access to different aspects of meaning overcoming the everyday reality; in the opposite way, it constructs a social aspect of this everyday reality” (L. Perrault) (see: Zenkin, 2013, 313). Modern sociologists say, that “description of the mass generation as a symbolic whole is possible as construction of a matrix of significant symbols of the generation, which acquire its mass value for a certain generation, constructing its self-conscience” (Semenova, 2005, 86).

The last step in the process of objectification of subjective ideas and senses is “reification”, an operation (modality) of the conscience, as a result of which the objectivized world is no longer perceived by an individual as created by the subjective conscience of a person, and is secured with a property of a non-human, dehumanized and inert factuality: “the institutions that have now been crystallized (for instance, the institution of paternity as it is encountered by the children) are experienced as existing over and beyond the individuals who ‘happen to’ embody them at the moment. In other words, the institutions are now experienced as possessing a reality of their own, a reality that confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact” (Berger, Luckmann, 1995, 98).

The applicability of these statements to the analysis of modern novel storylines is witnessed by the fact that the pattern of constructing objective reality as a whole, presented here on the basis of the work by Berger-Luckmann, in general corresponds to the universal four-phase plot pattern, researched by J. Frazer, V. Tiupa and others, which includes: phase of alienation, spatial departure (in the contemporary literature, retirement into oneself, disappointment, languor, exasperation), phase of (new) partnership, establishment of new inter-subject connection;

phase of death probation; phase of transformation, change of the character status (Tiupa, 2001, 44-46). Moreover, this pattern corresponds to the object and the problem of the “novel plot”, “depiction of an individual personality in its opposition to ‘prosaically structured reality’” (Stavitsky, 2006, 5). Ideas of Berger-Luckmann are significant because the generational theme is not just an artistic depiction of generational communication (conflict, succession), but also the story of how a protagonist (private individual) forms his generational values (ideas, texts, symbols, picture of the objective world) for the sake of other generations.

Conception of Berger-Luckmann provokes a generational theme researcher for the following hypotheses that require additional probation in the wide context of theoretical works and confirmation in the analysis of novel plots: 1. Function (mission) of generations is to create their own objective pictures of reality and individual biography of a person from subjective knowledge and ideas for the sake of transmitting them to the next generations. Such creation is carried out by each person individually, but it only makes sense if seen as a collective phenomenon. 2. Therefore, generational theme can be actualized in literature not only by depicting a conflict (internal generational or intergenerational) on the level of “events”, but also by depicting the communication of generations on the level of “co-being”, which means that representatives of different generations, introduced into the plot by the author, communicate indirectly, through an intermediary; when one of them, *for the sake of transmitting their life world and life experience to the next generation*, begins to construct an image of objective reality from subjective experience and knowledge (going through the way from the cognition of the “self-evident” everyday life / experience to the creation of their own “texts”, search for the generational values and symbols,

formation of a “symbolic universum” and “reification” thereof.

In the event of confirmation of the above hypotheses, the analysis of semantics and poetics of a “generational theme” shall include:

1. Interpretation of the main protagonist image as a carrier of the generational function and entelechy¹¹, which also includes: interpretation of the protagonist storyline (with the emphasis on the generational reasons that evoke the person to begin constructing his own picture of the world), interpretation of distance between the protagonist and a representative of another generation (closeness-remoteness of the subjects reveals the closeness of their value systems (Vodolazhskaia, Katsuk), and explanation of the idea (problem), which binds the protagonist with the representative of another generation.
2. Interpretation of the everyday world of the protagonist before the moment of his acquisition of generational self-identification, including: interpretation of space and material world, surrounding him “here-and-now”, and systems of protagonists and their interaction, as expressed in the context of the protagonist’s everyday life.
3. Interpretation of the process of construction of the objective reality as a process of generational self-actualization for the protagonist, including: explanation of the event (crisis, problem), which pushes the protagonist to alienate from his everyday life and aspire to transmit his experience to others; revelation of a system of signs the protagonist turns to in the search for a language of sedimentation of his everyday experience (literature, religion, science, dance etc.) and modus of this sign system operation (written text, oral speech, flow of conscience, reading or interpretation of signs”); interpretation of the picture of the world the protagonist builds in his own text, applying the selected system of signs and modus; revelation of key symbols of generational conscience and model of symbolic

universum in the his picture of the world; and, subjective model of the world with the everyday finally, interpretation of the reification method for reality) and characteristic of the reified world (as the world modelled by the protagonist (merge of depicted in the final of the novel).

¹ Historical generations were named after ruling monarchs: “Ekaterina generation”, literary (Pushkin generation) or social leaders (Decembrists generation).

² Hereinafter, the names of novels given as examples are those in which the lines of generational plots are clearly found.

³ “The conflict of generations is a process of occurrence, manifestation, collision and resolution of contradiction both between representatives of the same generation (internal generation conflict) and between representatives of different generations (intergeneratoin conflict)” (Glotov, 2004, 42).

⁴ Hereinafter: italics by the author of the article.

⁵ Semantic “flexibility” of the “generation” term is a way of using it to identify the complicated reality signs: personality and society, types of communication and biological species etc.

⁶ See.: “Discovery of the initial relation of the social cognition object as a subject matter of this or that science... is in ... the material phenomena of its existence, in the practical everyday experience of each acting person within the research object of the individual. This relation is the real life of all members of a certain human community in all of its aspects” (Pyanov, 2012, 332).

⁷ The institutional world is objectivated human activity, and so is every single institution. (Berger, Luckmann, 1995, 101-102).

⁸ From our point of view, it explains the contradictory meaning found in the phenomenon of “the generation” by the French sociologist P. Nora: “generation, in its nature is a purely individual phenomenon”, but “only makes sense when seen collectively” (Nora, 1998, 55).

⁹ “Primary socialization is the first socialization an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society” (Berger, Luckmann, 1995, 212). “In primary socialization there is no problem of identification. There is no choice of significant others. Primary socialization thus accomplishes what may ... appear as necessity what is in fact a bundly of contingencies” (Berger, Luckmann, 1995, 219-220).

¹⁰ “Any significative theme that thus spans spheres of reality may be defined as a symbol” (Berger, Luckmann, 1995, 70).

¹¹ By “entelechy” K. Mannheim, who introduced the term, understood the internal duty of the generation. According to R. Pinder, “entelechy” is a creative core of generation succession, close to the term of “zeitgeist”.

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К проблеме определения “поколенческого” сюжета в романах 1990–2000-х годов

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В статье рассматривается изменение к концу XX века схемы событий “поколенческого” сюжета в русском романе (не в соответствии с традиционными схемами – “Эдипов комплекс”, “отцы и дети”) и ставится проблема поиска подходов к объяснению этой схемы в новейших произведениях 1990–2000-х гг. В результате анализа семантики понятия “поколение” констатируется, что “поколение” считают одним из институтов объективации реальности, потому что именно для передачи новому поколению объективность институционального мира необходимо “увеличить” и “укрепить”. В статье предлагается понимание “поколенческого” сюжета как изображения коммуникации поколений на уровне “со-бытия”, когда герой ради передачи своего опыта другому поколению включается в конструирование образа объективной реальности из субъективных идей. В статье предлагается объяснение этого сюжета с опорой на феноменологическую социологическую концепцию П. Бергера и Т. Лукмана.

Ключевые слова: поколение, сюжет, русский роман 2000-х годов.
