You may wonder how these portraits of different elderly people are connected with therapy. This is a short explanation of the subject.

The Portrait as Therapy

Discovering Portrait Therapy was a very important step in my professional path.

In 2016, Nataliya Nagornova had contacted me on a matter unrelated to our collaboration.

Only then did I found out about this method.

Nataliya Nagornova is a psychologist with an artistic college background.

Being a student of G.M. Nazloyan (http://mask-therapy.ru/cntnt/o-centre/about-eng.html), the founder of the Mask Therapy Centre in Samara which treats patients suffering from a variety of pathologies with 3D portraits, Nataliya ultimately developed her own method for working with the elderly who suffer deprivation due to social, economic, Alzheimer's and other conditions that may arise in old age.

With her thesis, she won the Golden Psychea Award ("Project of the Year in Psychological Practice") in 2016.

As a painter with art therapy experience, I was fascinated. For a **pure case**, I was invited to conduct an art activity in a residential facility for the elderly in Padua just as I began to study this therapeutic intervention. I contacted Nataliya and asked for her approval and her supervision. When she enthusiastically agreed, I proposed to demonstrate Portrait Therapy in the home, and the staff agreed to give it a try. Since they have a whole department for residents with Alzheimer and dementia in all stages, I started to visit this unit every Monday morning and made portraits of residents who were interested (almost all were).

I observed that the portraits evoke memories and emotions. Other observers (staff) testimony corroborated my observations. Some residents, less able to communicate by words, cried with joy on seeing the final result. One lady told me when she saw her portrait: "That's not me; I am older." When I added more wrinkles, she said: "Now it's me."

People with Alzheimer's often don't recognize themselves in the mirror or in photos, so why do they recognize themselves in a portrait?

The silent dialogue of mutual observation, showing the portrait at different stages and making remarks essentially creates a time loop in which the repetition of the movements/motions of drawing, looking at the portrait and each other at different stages and being present at the session makes it very different from simply snapping a photograph and then showing it. The painter's interpretation is different, and the subject being portrayed does not always approve of the outcome. This is very good because it results in dialogue: disapproving, pointing out defects, or giving suggestions is all part of the therapeutic process.

Nagornova explained to me that this therapeutic intervention does not cure a disease, but when performed repeatedly over time, it can yield positive outcomes such as better recognition of oneself and family members and even developing a curiosity for learning new things in life. She compared it to a person who is constantly under water: therapy is like a deep breath that eases existence.

Some quotes from Nataliya Nagornova's thesis:

(The Ministry of Education and Science

Federal Institute of State Education

Professional higher education

"Volga State Socio-Humanitarian Academy"

Nagornova Natalia A.

Identity of people following age

IN THE DIDACTIC adaptive systems

Samara 2016

Winner of the prize for "Project of the Year in Psychological Practice"

Project Summary

"Volunteering with the Seriously Ill Elderly: Portrait Therapy" (Rehabilitation Program)

"Everybody knows his [own] name, but does not remember his face" (Russian proverb).

Following the "Portrait Therapy" Method

"My 2012 project titled "Volunteering with Seriously Ill Elderly People Using Portrait Therapy" was presented in the "Golden Psychea" competition. The project details "success stories", specific episodes illustrating how this method works, and real work done with real people in need. This method reconstructs "the lost image of" I "and restores a person's private dialogue with his/her Mirror Image - as the threshold of/to? the visible world."

People experiencing periods of deprivation, dementia, or depression typically respond only to a limited range of therapeutic methods. Sometimes drawing an image of them is the only suitable approach.

"Take a quite typical situation: a new patient, with an internal barrier, often apparently insurmountable ... Over time, it sooner or later begins to break up thanks to the portrait of identification; moreover, the effectiveness of psychotherapy increases from one session to another. There is an evolving situation and complicity, a creative collaboration "(Nazloyan GM, 2002).

"Older people in a state of deprivation often do not know their current appearance -

The self-image fixed in their memory is one of strong, conscious, capable individuals they had been in the past. This is nearly always the reason why they do not recognize themselves in recent photos. In a state of deprivation, they almost completely stop looking at themselves in the mirror. "Nagornova Natalia A.

"During the portrait, the person and the artist/therapist engage in a silent dialogue of looking at each other. This is not an **verbal dialogue** but a concentrated interaction that is a consequence of compassionate understanding which penetrates into the depths of the soul.

Contemplating the process while the portrait is being drawn is of fundamental importance. There are no methods for measuring contemplation - Karitzky emphasizes that the techniques and methods of modern scientific research are irrelevant to the study of contemplation, because contemplation "slips through the coarse network of contemporary scientific **classifications**. You cannot 'grasp' contemplation with equipment or even classify it as a scientific concept because it is a psychological and spiritual phenomenon and, as such, not material"

From the manuscript

Here is what Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote about this phenomenon: "it very rarely resembles photographic images, and this is understandable. The true original that is each of us is very rarely like our photos. In a rare moment, the human face expresses its essence, its most characteristic thought "[59, p. 506].

Contemplation affects in a crucial way the adoption and modification of a person's personality through the adoption of his psychotherapeutic portrait. The phenomenon of specular reflection is a major contributor to the formation of human consciousness.

Jacques Lacan describes the mirror image as the threshold of the visible world: "If all the other qualities of an individual's person can only be imagined and speculated about, the body, the face, the eyes, one can see and touch. Also, this external appearance can be drawn, sculpted , painted - worked through internally " [92, p. 514]. [Portrait] work variants are defined by methods and expenses.

LB Schneider sees the path toward finding a new identity in expanding the awareness of reality, in meeting significant others (Translator) - "Again, there is a sense of belonging to other people, their understanding, a sense of" we "attained identity of a sense of identity to oneself, with others and the external world" [176, p. 110

Those of late age, who Boltenko classifies as being in the fifth and last stage of mental aging that is mainly defined by physical needs (food, rest, sleep), are in a state of deprivation. During the suggestive portrait session of therapy, the client, who is in this state of personal isolation, is included/involved in active dialogue with the psychologist or art therapist.

He reviews the image of his face and adjusts his self-image to it. Portrait therapy also provides conditions to rethink his identity and form a real/genuine identity. In the beginning of drawing a portrait, a blank sheet is a starting point, which therapist and client share as a common beginning. This creates a special atmosphere of unity and coherence of future actions. The act of drawing, involves looking at the object and then on the paper: so to speak accompanying the image towards its new location. This action "travels the path" from the person being portrayed in the image onto the paper; the action gradually focuses attention and creates the elderly man/woman's image in the picture. The brush strokes and lines that represent the person are collected and integrally restored as the individual image segments are being drawn.

 The process of drawing a person's portrait becomes a part of the silent dialogue between the person and the perspective of the artist. This communication might not be empirical but is still a focused interview with another person, resulting from sympathy and understanding, and penetrating the heart [70]. Contemplation of the process of drawing a portrait is of fundamental importance. There are no objective measures for the contemplative process. Karitzky notes that modern scientific and technical

methodological means of investigation are not applicable to contemplation; it "slipping through modern scientific categories and therefore cannot be captured by scientific devices and concepts that are simply not applicable to a psychological or spiritual phenomenon "[79, p. 264].

Nagornova Natalia A.

The drawing process takes time. The sense of duration of this process can be different, as can the drawing, and it depends on the one who draws it. This is what the experts call psychological time. GV Akopov notes the personal aspect of the passage of time that may not be identical to objective time: "it is determined by the number of psychologically significant events in the **social world per unit of time"** [6, p. 55]. That is, when time is saturated with mental processes, it "turns away", feels more resistant, tangible, meaningful. SV Berezin illustrates this as travellers of landscape analysis descending into the cave during therapy.

"The time of stay in the cave surprisingly does not coincide with the actual time spent there: a man thinks that he was in the cave a much longer than he actually was according to the clock" [24, p. 68].

If we view contemplation as a way of thinking, it is not a mediated act of knowledge. We can then say that the person identifies himself simultaneously with the awareness that he/she is being drawn, and again learns their appearance, their identity. There is a natural involuntary understanding, without a person consciously seeking to understand. During the process of contemplation, people see and know immediately, understand instantly, are ready to take a picture of themselves. GS Pomerantz compared the process of contemplation to meditation, prayer, and love, as a result of which "a new aura is born" [138].

The presence of visual and other similarities reconstructs specular counterparts an old person is deprived of, leading to a normalization of dialogue with himself, the resumption of relations with the outside world, the removal of the chasm separating him from the outside world. When drawing a portrait of the person in a state of deprivation, this process of adopting a self-image by comparing the portrait depicted with the person's existing self-image is inevitable, whether or not the person likes the image that is being drawn. A person being portrayed arrives at the psychological moment that allows him to concentrate on himself, to enter a particular condition, to represent himself, to recall Himself and his presence in space; this, for a person deprived of an adequate late-life self-image, is the beginning of a new identity.