

THE 'NATURAL CHILDBIRTH' MOVEMENT IN RUSSIA: SELF-REPRESENTATION STRATEGIES

Ekaterina Beloousova

"Natural childbirth"(NC) is the term referring to a special system of ideological and practical attitudes concerning birth management and baby care.¹ This system may be regarded as an alternative to shared patterns of medical care and baby rearing. The ideology of "natural childbirth", or "conscious childbirth", supposes that giving birth is a very special spiritual experience which demands both parents' personal responsibility that cannot be shared with the authoritative institutions such as maternity care units. NC activists suggest that the parents should be prepared for the childbirth physically and spiritually by means of a series of certain techniques and practices. As for the delivery, the common point is that the mother, the father, and the baby are equal participants in the process. The other principal point is the necessity to avoid any kind of medical intervention and to integrate labor pain in one's consciousness to provide the baby the most comfortable physical and psychical conditions to be born.

According to R. Davis-Floyd, American NC discourse is attempting to mediate the oppositions between dominant (technocratic) and alternative (holistic) models of medicine (Davis-Floyd 1992:155). The American concept of NC is associated with the name of Grantly Dick Read (Dick Read 1933; Dick Read 1984; Dick Read 1997) and implies laboring without pain-killers and certain sympathy towards holistic values. In Russian tradition, those who identify themselves with the NC movement sound considerably engaged by what R. Davis-Floyd calls the holistic model of medicine. It is important that while American NC is supposed to occur in a hospital and allows medical intervention in general, the strong point of its typical Russian proponents is homebirth and waterbirth. The following words are ascribed to the "father" of Russian NC movement, Igor Charkovsky: "I remember her [midwife] citing his words: 'Let the Soviet woman give birth anywhere – any place would be better than a maternity hospital'" (Katia).

In this article I concentrate on the NC community's self-representation and self-description, which makes it necessary to discuss

specifically Russian connotations of "being natural."

The increasing popularity of such a marginal movement as NC is to a large extent caused by reactions to the situation in Russian State maternity hospitals. During the Soviet period no private hospitals existed, and now there are only a few of them, mostly in big cities, and they are unaffordable for the majority of Russian population. As the interviews I conducted during my work on hospital birth in Russia have revealed, women's rights are roughly violated in State hospitals, at all possible levels. Most of the women express their strong disappointment with the violent separation of mothers from their newborn babies, ignoring their opinion while making decisions on the methods of treatment, prohibition to meet their husbands and relatives, abusive medical intervention into the process of birth, rude treatment, and bad conditions. Here are some references to these human rights violations typical of Russian State maternity system:

They told me nothing about my baby - all the doors were closed, you couldn't get info from anyone (Tania).

They bring him [baby] swaddled, and there is no possibility even to have a look at him naked, you can't see if he is clean, and what he looks like, and if he is taken care of (Sveta).

Through all my life, when I asked what medicine am I taking, they used to answer me in a rude manner. Therefore, I became already kind of allergic to hospitals, and this time [at the maternity hospital] I tried not to ask questions at all (Anonymous).

There were only two days in a week, when they allowed relatives to visit us, and only at definite hours. You had to shout out of the ward window (Angelina).

My husband was standing under the window at the moment, and when my daughter was born, he shouted: "Who was born?" – and they shouted him back that he had a daughter (Nina).

They just deceived me. They said: "Don't worry, we won't prick you anywhere," because I had already asked them not to [perform an amniotomy]. <...> The woman doctor said: "See my hands, I have nothing in them, I only got to have a look." And there she pricked me for an amniotomy (Asya).

They [maternity hospital medical stuff] take us for pigs. They didn't care a damn. I mean, they treat us like cattle (Lyudmila).

The Russian version of waterbirth appeared in the early 1980s: the first four water deliveries took place in spring 1980 in Moscow and were arranged as an experiment (Irina Martynova 5:2). This technique got to be known abroad as "the Russian method." In comparison, the first reported waterbirth in America took place in the fall of 1981, that is 1.5 years later (Ray 1985:117-119; Rei 1985:40-41). Igor Charkovsky, the dissident childbirth assistant, is traditionally considered to be the pioneer of the movement. He had a number of successors, who used to work with him personally, and who are now the main agents of the waterbirth tradition in Russia.

The NC movement meets certain obstacles because the authorities had prescribed bearing children in the State maternity hospitals since the beginning of the Soviet period. Thus, the tradition of having babies born in maternity hospitals is much older than in America. It is necessary to say that while in most American states direct-entry midwifery is officially permitted, in Russia it is completely prohibited. However, nowadays a number of NC educational and preparatory centers are functioning in Russian cities. For example, in Moscow about 15 registered NC centers are practicing. These centers are officially permitted by the State in spite of their nonconformist approach to the birth management. Officially, these centers are functioning as preparatory only, but in fact the instructors of some centers also illegally assist in home deliveries. There are also a number of unregistered independent NC assistants. Both employed and independent NC assistants identify themselves as "spiritual midwives." This term was borrowed from an American "farm midwife," Ina May Gaskin's book "Spiritual Midwifery," translated into Russian and published by "Akva" NC center in 1986 (Gaskin 1977; Gaskin 1986). Currently, there are several branches of NC movement, each one possessing its own interpretation of birth management and its own ideological preferences.

The American concept of NC reflects a general cultural tendency to identify the female body with primordial nature as opposed to the male body viewed as a "perfect machine." Robbie Davis Floyd deconstructs this shared perception of male/female bodies: "The male body is metaphorized as a better machine than the female body, because in form and function it is more machine-like – more consistent and predictable, less subject to the vagaries of nature (i.e., more cultural and therefore 'better'), and consequently less likely to break down" (Davis-Floyd, Robbie 1992:52).

Correspondingly, in the American feminist movement, including the struggle for NC, as well as in scholarly analyses of the topic, any kind of medical intervention into the process of childbirth is described as "male practice/malpractice."²

In the Russian cultural context, the term "NC" has been considerably alienated from its American feminist connotations. Traditionally in Russia, the vast majority of physicians in general and ob-gyns in particular were women. That's why the opposition "male practitioner vs. female patient" is not equally relevant in the Russian case. Significantly, in many stories about him, Charkovsky looks quite a phallic figure, and this image has mostly positive connotations. According to one of these stories, Charkovsky was accused of sexual harassment while practicing in the United States. The episode is described as a false accusation, a misunderstanding, or as a plot of American technocrats serving the interests of medical businesses. In Charkovsky's remarks, a strong male perspective is obvious: once, for instance, he referred to women as to sheep supposed to obey their shepherd: "Women are unable to think and they don't want to understand anything. They behave like does and act in accordance with ancient instincts, which come from the animals. They don't even know why they can't catch such easy things. That's why a man has to prepare everything in advance... however men do nothing, while women behave like a flock..." (Akva: 24). Thus, although later in the history of NC movement women took over midwifery practice and the female line inside the community won out, originally this movement did not sound like any kind of struggle for women's rights par excellence.

In Russian NC discourse, female identity is considered not in political perspective but rather in the context of a New Age paradigm that regards

sexual intercourse, conception, and childbirth as a complex holistic experience of a woman and a family as a whole. From this point of view, medical intervention is harmful as it destroys the woman's sexual identity and her spiritual experience in the course of such an important process and event as childbirth. Referring to one of her own hospital childbirth experiences, "spiritual midwife" Marina Dadasheva said: "In fact, all those medical inspections of women after birth, you know... They do check them, but they don't care at all about their femininity, their sensitivity, the birth canal... The body of a woman is rather sensitive, but when they start to turn your core out with all those metallic tools..."

The other context relevant for the NC discourse both in American and Russian cultures is the following opposition: "natural" patterns for health care vs. utilitarian approaches to it. The commonplace of all anti-medical discourses is that medical theory and practice have developed from nature-centered attitudes to the culturally constructed "human interests." Here is a typical reference to contemporary medicine as "unnatural" in the context of childbirth: "Gradually, it [medicine] left behind its original *natural* entity and became more and more artificial... Birth assistance finally stopped seeing childbirth as a *natural* process, and started seeing pregnancy as an illness and childbirth as a dangerous operation (Ilya).

One of the main meanings of the Russian word "jestestvennyj" ("natural") is "normal," "typical," "accepted," "straight," as opposed to "unnatural," "abnormal," "odd," and consequently, "wrong." The adjective "normal'nyj" ("normal") is often used as well to gain higher status for the NC ideology. Another basic meaning of the word "jestestvennyj" is "related to nature," "essentially belonging to nature," "primordial" as opposed to "artificial," "culturally constructed," "invented by mankind." By using this word, the NC movement appeals to Nature as to an authoritative instance. As far as the Russian language is concerned, the Russoist concept "l'homme naturel" was mostly translated as "jestestvennyj chelovek," and that is why this word sounds quite natural in the context of the dichotomy "natural/cultural" and in the context of "back-to-nature" discourses.

There are also some contextual meanings of the word "natural." "Spiritual midwife" Tatiana Sargunas says: "By *normal* women we mean those who have been trained in special spiritual midwifery centers and taught to give birth in

natural way and, preferably, in *natural* settings" (Sargunas). Here we find the word "natural" used in two different meanings. "In a natural way" means without medical intervention. "Natural settings" in this context means "waterbirth."

Significantly, waterbirth proponents, referring to NC history in Russia, assert that the idea of waterbirth preceded the idea of homebirth. One of the first enthusiasts of the NC movement in Russia believes that people started practicing homebirth because it was impossible to arrange waterbirth in hospital settings: "First of all, the idea appeared to give birth in water – well, there was Charkovsky and his crowd. As hospitals provide no possibility to give birth in water, they *naturally* came to the idea of homebirth" (Ilya).

Thus, the ideology of the Russian NC movement presupposes not only that waterbirth is natural, but also that it is the most natural way to give birth. Charkovsky claims: "Properly proceeded birthgiving in water is totally a *natural* act, based on *nature*" (Charkovsky a). Male-midwife Oleg Tutin asserts in his interviews to the "Speed-Info" newspaper: "They [parents] often practice waterbirth - this is more *natural* and softer for the baby" (Podkolodny b). He also said, "Some people prefer waterbirth, for women find it more *natural*, and they are quite right" (Podkolodny a).

The opponents of the waterbirth ideology try to prove that this thesis is logically incorrect. Dr. Ailamazian, professor of Saint-Petersburg State University, says: "Among the mammals only whales, dolphins and hippopotami give birth in water, that is the species spending most time in water and well adapted in it. But this is not true as far as a man is concerned. From this point of view we can rather call waterbirth "unnatural" (Ailamazjan).

However even some opponents of waterbirth ideology consider waterbirth to be "closer to nature." They say that our contemporaries have changed too much since they were natural people," and that now they probably need some more "unnatural" settings to give birth in. A woman, who had preferred to give birth at home but in bed, says: "That's why we left the bathtub - we just didn't want to prevent our child from having this [gravitation] shock. Because it is disputable - whether it is good or bad. Maybe, people have left their original *natural* condition so far behind, that probably it's better to experience this shock nowadays" (Lyubov).

Nevertheless, the activists of the waterbirth movement suggest that it is contemporary human nature rather than the way of giving birth that is to be changed by means of a special set of attitudes toward body and health. Xenia Ryndich, the Director of the former "Family Ecology" center, said: "Birth finally became so problematic, because contemporary civilized woman lost those qualities that she was supposed to have as a woman. It is necessary to return a woman into her *natural* condition" (Rebenok rozhdaetsja 1992).

A midwife, Irina Martynova, comments on the very first waterbirth that took place in Moscow in 1980: "We congratulated the new mom and each other with the completion of our experiment though I don't like this word actually. It would be better to call it return to *natural* birth without medical intervention (Martynova 5:2). Irina regards this particular moment, the first waterbirth, as the beginning of the return to nature in spite of the fact that unmedicated homebirths had been already practiced in Moscow by a certain group of people. Referring to them, Irina said:

They already had a feeling, that there was something wrong about our medicine, but it was not completely clear yet what was wrong with it in particular. Some of them tried to give birth at home on their owns, without the doctors' assistance. But not in water yet. <...> Having come along with these people we found out that they had a strong desire to deliver their children "in *natural* way," though they had neither methods worked out for such births nor the experts who could help in preparation to and assistance in such birth (Martynova 5:2).

In an attempt to provide waterbirth with the necessary authoritative background, the proponents of waterbirth appeal to human ancestors of different historical periods that are supposed to be "truly natural." First of all, they refer to some ancient exotic cultures. The newspaper article about Charkovsky reads:

He found some historical witnesses about waterbirth practiced in ancient Egypt to make the delivery easier. To say more, in one of the manuscripts Charkovsky found the information that in the pharaohs' times there was a ritual of waterbirth that the future priests' mothers were prescribed to follow (Vasinsky 1994).

Charkovsky appears here as a warlock, a sorcerer, capable of reading old Egyptian manuscripts, though he is far from being an Egyptologist.

Second, and most important, is the idea of all life on Earth as originating in water. Thus, the original human ancestors, "truly natural" beings, lived and gave birth in water. Many species were, according to Charkovsky, pushed from water to the land by certain monsters, and thus the fear of water had been imprinted in human (and many other animals') ancestors' mind. However, the breaking of taboos can help the brain to recollect its ancient programs, which can provide the human being with certain inhuman abilities - bodily, spiritual, and intellectual.

The symbol of waterbirth, the totem and protector of the waterbirth community, is a dolphin. It is a live reminiscence of the lost paradise. According to Charkovsky, pregnant women and women in birth should help their babies to establish telepathic contacts with the dolphins. Being connected to dolphins and through them to the Natural World in general, a human being is supposed to gain a powerful source of energy and knowledge as well as to get rid of her/his essential fear of water. Here is Charkovsky's comment on human-dolphin contacts:

Water rearing of the children could have opened new perspectives in human evolution. Establishing telepathic contacts with the dolphins and their powerful bioenergy, relying on their help in birth, communication and friendship - that is the way to create a new man with a higher physical and probably even higher spiritual abilities (Charkovsky b).

Thus the very important goal of waterbirth is a certain contribution to Human Evolution, that is, the creation of a New Generation of people, or as Charkovsky puts it, a "New Race." He says: "Prenatal training is not only important for physical exercising but it also helps to open the inner vision, the 'third eye,' that is the abilities, now called 'para-normal'" (Akva: 16-17). In addition, "These abilities have to become a norm, but now they still look like something supernatural" (Akva: 27).

In the waterbirth community, beliefs are common about waterbabies as superpeople. "Spiritual midwife" Daria Streltsova claims that waterbirth was used in antiquity in order to provoke special abilities in children who were supposed to form the elite and to fulfil some

special mission: "They have some special abilities, waterbabies... Waterbirth used to be practiced long ago - not for everybody, but for the babies supposed to know more than ordinary people - like, you know, pharaohs..." Now that waterbirth has become "normal," the shared (hospital) way of birth is automatically interpreted as a wrong way. Consequently, children born in a hospital are considered to be subnormal as opposed to "vodnye deti" ("waterbabies"). The article about "spiritual midwife" Marina Dadasheva reads:

Charkovsky and his successors regard children born in maternity hospitals as disabled, even if the doctors say they are healthy. And if we compare "land-" and "waterbabies," we will see that it is true. "Waterbabies" can swim from the very beginning, learn to stay and walk several months before the common babies can do it, they rarely get ill, and they have rapid intellectual development and strong artistic abilities (Korovina 1993).

According to Charkovsky's theory, the extraordinary abilities of waterbabies were supposed to be used for the defense and development of the "natural" conditions in the world, for establishing a new, ecological world order. First of all, the people of this new generation have a mission to protect the Earth from ruin in case the world war begins. Charkovsky says: "These beings have a very strong feeling of the world around, they feel, when some malpractice against the planet Earth is taking place and experience pain" (Akva: 14). Also, "Such children have a stronger energy, stronger psychical and physical abilities. If the "atomic reaction" starts, and these programs will be accepted by many people, these children will be able to conquer the arms race. That's why creation of a New Race is considered to be so extremely important" (Akva: 38).

The other side of this task is restoring the cosmic unity of the world, of the ruined "natural" connections, establishing a special "ecological" and "holistic" reception of the World and attitude toward the World.³ Charkovsky says: "Entering the world should be extremely gentle, harmonious, humanistic, incorporated into the *natural connections*" (Charkovsky a). The article about "spiritual midwife" Marina Dadasheva reads: "The man was born, and at the same moment he received as a gift all the World, the Sky, and the Earth. Happy is the man who keeps the feeling of inviolable *connection* with everything in the Sky and on the Earth" (Korovina 1993). Marina

Dadasheva herself comments on this issue: "It's important to communicate with the Cosmos, with the Earth, and with Nature during pregnancy."

There is a series of certain techniques, supposed to help the members of the waterbirth community to achieve some special condition so that pregnant women and the babies both inside and outside were able to freely communicate with the Cosmos. These techniques include meditation, yoga, wet rebirthing, and winter diving, among others. The human body is considered to be cosmically oriented and axiologically heterogeneous, having some "special" organs intended for cosmic communication. Thus Charkovsky calls the womb the "resonator of cosmic communication" (Akva: 33). Tatiana Sargunas refers to the placenta as "the cosmic aerial;" Irina Martynova calls it "an energy generator." NC instructor from "Pearl" NC center, Svetlana Abramova, interprets a pregnant woman's picture as a "cosmic" vision of the placenta and regards this image as the woman's insight:

We were picturing childbirth. A very beautiful meditation one of the girls had, the last time, it was gorgeous. She used to be a silent one, one of those who never told anything, no lively images, nothing. And all of a sudden she came out with something really special. Shine, cosmic space, stars, and at the same time a baby was being born - so beautiful it was...It must have been an image of the placenta. She compared the placenta to a multicolored aster, kind of.

One of the most important practices in waterbirth is the so-called "lotus birth" ritual. Ideally, the cord is not cut off within the 24 hours after the birth, so that some energy cycle can be completed. As a result of this practice, the child is supposed to receive some proper amount of cosmic energy through the placenta. The latter is regarded as a certain channel through which the energy is transferred from the Universe. In practice, this ritual is considered to be hard to perform and therefore it is reduced to several hours. Irina Martynova comments on this custom: "Our ancestors, Slavs, practiced waterbirth. They used to cut the cord at the sunrise. The placenta - it's an energy generator, you know, and they were solar people... But we certainly have to conform to our life, to our conditions."

In general, ritual operations with the placenta are intended for "proper" redistribution of material and energy in the Universe. The traditional

Russian ritual of burying the placenta is still most typical for NC proponents. One of the women who had the experience of burying the placenta, refers to the belief that the placenta must be buried, according to the gender of the baby, under one of the trees that have symbolic gender meanings in Russian culture: "In fact, you must bury it, the placenta, you know. A boy's one under an oak, a girl's under a birch" (Natalia). The other NC enthusiast refers to a magic function of burying the siblings' placentas together: "We buried the placenta. Just buried it in a park, and that was all. Vasya's we buried in the Kuskovsky park, and Anyutka's - at the same place. Now they will become friends" (Ekaterina).

Some parents prefer to eat their baby's placenta in communion. This ritual provides the opportunity to keep the remnants of birth inside the family and is supposed to restore physical and "energetic" balance of the parents after childbirth. The following account illustrates this attitude:

And, as far as eating placenta is concerned... We actually ate ours. And when we were told - I've been told that it happens - before the birth I was positively against that. But we finally did it, and my husband also took part in it quite easily, although he is a vegetarian. Dasha ["spiritual midwife"] recommends to eat it after hard labor, just because it contains microelements that help to recover. (Svetlana)

The exclusive cases of eating "alien" placentas are described as an improper and harmful act because it contradicts the ideas of preserving the family unity and of the sacred meaning of the placenta. Therefore, the husband of a NC activist disapproves her habit of eating the placentas of women whom she assisted in childbirth: "She, actually, started to eat all those [other women's] placentas, like ordinary meat, which one probably should not do" (Ilya).

One more ritual way to integrate the placenta "properly" into the "cosmos" is its full annihilation. A Russian American woman, a university professor, not involved in the NC community, describes the recycling of the placenta in ritual terms:

What did you do with the placenta? It is quite important, you know. If your midwife has not taken care of it, she must be a bad midwife, she should have taken it with her. They have to take it to the

hospital [after homebirth], and there are those special yellow bags there, which are cremated in a special oven so that nothing remains, absolutely nothing (Maya, personal communication).

Thus, the meaning of the term "natural" makes it possible to see humankind in the universal perspective involving the realm of animals, plants, the whole Earth and, finally, cosmic space. In addition to its physical representation, "cosmos" acquires transpersonal and metaphysical connotations (interaction of elements and *energies*, material, and spirit etc.). Here, one of the most important motives is restoring balance, harmony, and integration of the whole world. This topic also has psychological and social perspectives, as applied to personal integrity and to the field of human interactions.

The proponents of waterbirth ideology suggest restoring some particular kinds of the "forcibly ruined" connections by means of "ideal birth" - such as the connection between body, mind, and spirit inside a person, or links between the members of the family. "Spiritual midwife" Katia Ivanova says:

I have two daughters - Masha and Dasha. I gave birth to Masha in a maternity hospital, and to Dasha - on my own. And now when I feel sick, when I have a headache or I am just worried - Masha, the one born in a maternity hospital, behaves badly, as I am unable to properly react to her behavior. But Dasha, a home one, - she feels my pain and feels sorry for me. Our souls are *not separated* from each other. That's because I have been with her at the most terrible hour she ever had - the first hour of her life. And after that I also didn't leave her. Our biological fields remained *united*. I didn't betray her, and now she doesn't betray me. That's a psychological issue. In a maternity hospital the baby is born, while at home the *family* is (Lyskov 1992).

"Spiritual midwife" Marina Dadasheva says: "It simultaneously became obvious to me that the birth is a sexual process, rather than the process of *separation* from the male principle, from the husband, from the baby, from the *family*."

Consequently, the activists of waterbirth regard their coming into the profession as a certain spiritual path and their own activity as a heavenly

mission. Irina Martynova comments on this issue: "I appeared to be able to understand what the God wanted me to do. He led me toward the gentle, *natural* birth, and I was able to hear it" (Martynova 10:3). Marina Dadasheva explains her professional and spiritual choice this way: "In several days I understood that this was my path, and all my family went that path and started to prepare. <...> And we promised that we just came into this thing and that we will work." This kind of midwives' self-positioning additionally supports the already existing legends about miraculous events that accompanied their activity. Correspondingly, "spiritual midwives" become an object of worship and even a cause of pious trembling inside the NC community.

We have observed now a certain number of meanings and contexts most typical of the word "natural" as a self-reference used by the proponents of NC. In addition to two basic meanings ("normal" and "related to Nature") it has acquired some very specific implications, only relevant for NC-related oral talks and self-representation narratives, such as "no medicine homebirth" and "waterbirth." In all those meanings and contexts the same self-representation strategy is reflected. To put it in terms of the general binary opposition (common vs. alternative attitudes and patterns), the word "natural" is used for a marked member of the opposition, though it would be certainly more natural to use it as a neuter member. In other words, to declare some new attitudes as natural, one has to start with declaring common and shared ones as unnatural. Using this strategy in the basic self-reference already, a marginal and challenging movement attempts to gain authoritative status.

References

- Ajlamazjan, Eduard.
n.d. "Rody v vode." "Raduga" Active Birth Center's Web site.
http://www.raduga-birth.spb.ru/rus/menu51_stat1.html.
[Ajlamazjan, Eduard. "Waterbirth."]
- Akva.
1992. *Akva: Besedy s Igorem Charkovskim. Rasskazy o rodakh v vode*. Sargunas Tatjana, Sargunas Alexej, eds. Moscow: T-Oko. [Akva: Talks with Igor Charkovsky. Waterbirth Stories.]
- Belousova, Jekaterina.
1999. "Predstavlenija i verovanija, svjazannye s rozhdeniem rebenka: sovremennaja gorodskaja kul'tura." Ph.D. diss., Institute for the Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow. [Belousova, Ekaterina. "Ideas and Beliefs Concerning Childbirth: Contemporary Russian Urban Culture."]
- Charkovsky, Igor (a).
n.d. "Rozhdenie v vodnoj srede." Igor Charkovsky's Web Site
<http://charkovsky.chat.ru/frames.htm>.
[Charkovsky, Igor. "Childbirth in Water Environment."]
n.d. "Obshchenie s del'finami." Igor Charkovsky's Web Site
<http://charkovsky.chat.ru/frames.htm>.
[Charkovsky, Igor. "Human-Dolphin Communication."]
- Corea, Gena.
1985. *The Hidden Malpractice*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Davis-Floyd, Robbie. 1992. *Birth as an American Rite of Passage*. Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press.
- Davis-Floyd, Robbie and Davis, Elizabeth.
1996. "Intuition as Authoritative Knowledge in Midwifery and Homebirth." In *The Social Production of Authoritative Knowledge in Childbirth*, a special edition of the *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, Robbie Davis-Floyd and Carolyn Sargent, eds. 10(2):237-269.
- Dick Read, Grantly.
1933. *Natural Childbirth*. London: Heinemann.
- Dick Read, Grantly.
1984. *Childbirth without Fear: The Original Approach to Natural Childbirth*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Dik Rid, Grantly.
1997. *Rody bez strakha: Original'nyj podkhod k jestestvennomu rozhdeniju rebenka*. SPb. – Moscow – Kharkov – Minsk: Piter. [Russian translation of: Dick Read, Grantly. 1984.]

- Gaskin, Aina Mei.
1986. *Dukhovnoe akusherstvo*. Moscow: Akva. [Russian translation of: Gaskin, Ina May. 1977.]
- Gaskin, Ina May.
1977. *Spiritual Midwifery*. Summertown, Tenn.: The Book Publishing Company, 1 ed.
- Korovina, Olga.
1993. "Akva-Marina snova v Permi: Sobytie dlja dvoikh." *Znakhar'*. No. 4. [Korovina, Olga. "Akva-Marina is Back to Perm: Event for Two."]
- Lyskov, Aleksandr.
1992. "Kak babushki rozhali." *Speed-Info*. No. 7. [Lyskov, Aleksandr. "How Grannies Gave Birth."]
- Martynova, Irina.
n.d. "Istorija vodnykh rodov v Rossii." Pts. 1-9. Mailing list *Rozhdenie bez nasilija*. Podorova. Ksenija, ed. <http://birth.ft.inc.ru>. No. 1-77. 12.21.1999 – 05.22.2001. [Irina Martynova. "The History of Waterbirth in Russia." Mailing list *Birth without Violence*].
- Mendelsohn, Robert.
1981. *Male [mal]practice: how doctors manipulate women*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.
- Podkolodny Fjodor. 1992 (a). "Polovoj akt vo vremja rodov." *Speed-Info*. No. 6. [Podkolodny Fjodor. "Sexual Intercourse during Labor."]
1992 (b). "Rozhdennye v orgazme." *Speed-Info*. No. 7. [Podkolodny Fjodor. "Born in Orgasm."]
- Ray, Sondra.
1985. *Ideal Birth*. Berkeley: Celestial Arts.
- "Rebenok rozhdaetsja".
1992. "Rebenok rozhdaetsja": Roundtable. *Moskovskij komsomolets*. 11.06.1992. ["The Baby is Being Born."]
- Rei Sondra,
1985. *Ideal'noe rozhdenie*. Abbreviated translation by M[ihail] T[runov]. Moscow. [Russian translation of: Ray, Sondra. 1985.]
- Sargunas, Tatjana.
n.d. "Rasshirennye sostojanija soznanija v rodakh: putevoditel'." Sargunas-Akva-Center Web Site <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Pines/1860/index1.html>. [Sargunas, Tatjana. "Extended States of Consciousness in Labor: a Guide."]
- Vasinsky, Aleksandr.
1994. "Kreshchenie po Charkovskomu." *Izvestija*. No. 161. 08.24.1994. [Vasinsky, Aleksandr. "The Baptism According to Charkovsky."]

¹ This article is a part of my larger project "Natural Childbirth Movement in Russia: the Anthropological Perspective" supported by Research Support Scheme Grant (RSS No.: 997/2000). The research is based on the materials of my own field research in 2000-2001 in Moscow and St.-Petersburg, such as participant observation materials as well as the interviews conducted with "spiritual midwives" (15 interviews) and with people having experienced NC (40 interviews). These were in depth interviews conducted at the interviewee's place or at the NC preparatory school, in a free-flowing style. Before that, in 1995-1999, working at my dissertation (Belousova 1999), I have interviewed another group that consisted of 70 women who had experienced hospital childbirth (St.-Petersburg, Moscow, Russian community in the Estonian cities Tartu and Tallinn). For this article, I also use books and journals published by NC centers, as well as newspaper articles devoted to NC and the relevant materials on the Russian Web. Where the quotation has no reference to a certain work, the interviews from my personal archive are cited. I thank all my informants for sharing their experience and deliberations.

² Cf. the pun in the title of a book by Dr. Robert Mendelsohn, an advocate for women's right to manage their bodies and health: *Male [mal]practice: how doctors manipulate women*. (Mendelsohn 1981); cf. also the title of the book by Gena Corea: *The Hidden Malpractice* (Corea 1985).

³ Cf. commentaries on how the concept "connections" is used in American midwives' narratives: Davis-Floyd, Robbie and Davis, Elizabeth. 1996, esp. pp. 246-248.