

## The Space of the City and Literary Imagination: the Legacy of Nikolai Antsiferov<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the legacy of Nikolai Antsiferov (1889–1958), a Russian historian who suggested a unique approach to urban studies in which literature played the key role. In the first section of this paper, the genesis of Antsiferov's conceptions of the study of urban history and the image of the city are outlined. The second section provides an analysis of his ideas on the literary image of St. Petersburg and the theory of literary-themed guided tours, which were articulated in his works of the 1920s. The final section of the article sheds light on the reception and legacy of Antsiferov's intellectual ideas in the modern humanities and assesses its significance in the modern context of interdisciplinarity.

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### Parole chiave

Urban history, heritage, image of the city, excursion, "biography of the city", genius loci, interdisciplinarity, Petersburg text, myth, local studies

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### Contatti

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The issue of 'the boundaries of fiction' is certainly crucial not only to modern literary studies but to the self-reflection of modern scholarship in general. Rather than just thinking about the ontological status of their objects of study, modern researchers influenced by the linguistic turn and sociological constructivism have to be conscious of their own role in constructing these objects and of the ways the knowledge they produce is being integrated in modern culture. Thus, we find ourselves faced with the need to understand the functioning of knowledge from the point of view of cultural anthropology. Practically this means tracing the formation of concepts all the way from their value basis revealed in basic metaphors down to the making of a scholarly text with its specific communicative intentions as they interact with mechanisms of professional and popular culture. Such a study has to rely on resources of several disciplines including text analysis-based science studies, sociology of culture which allows the researcher to see a scholarly text in a communicative context, and intellectual history which inquires into the his-

<sup>1</sup> The results of the project "The construction of the past and forms of historical culture in contemporary urban spaces", carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2014, are presented in this work.

toric conditions influencing the formation of a concept and its integration in the scholarly and cultural tradition.

It is from this perspective that we shall look hereinafter at the works of Nikolai Antsiferov (1889–1958), a Russian historian who suggested a unique design of urban studies in which literature played the key role. Antsiferov's project originated in the early post-revolutionary years and was inspired by his participation in urban monument protection, the designing of new guided city tours and promoting local history studies. In the late 1920s Antsiferov was arrested and it was not until shortly before the World War II that he was able to return to his intellectual pursuits. His memories published in the Perestroika time are a crucial evidence of the cultural life of the first half of the twentieth century. Antsiferov's work absorbed the social and intellectual experience of its time. Today it finds attention of several disciplines such as philology, cultural geography, and local history that seek to understand the role of literature in shaping the landscapes of cities and the cultural identity of urban residents. Antsiferov's life has been studied fairly well (Vraskaya; Dobkin; Konechnyi; Margolis), particularly by E. Johnson and D. Moskovskaya. Johnson offered a meticulous study of Antsiferov's role in the formation of St. Petersburg local history studies, while Moskovskaya's book describes his life in the 1930s–1940s when he lived mainly in Moscow. However, due to both the fascinating personality of Antsiferov himself and the problematic status of his works, located as they are between science, literature and social work, the tasks of analyzing his methods and understanding his ideas in a modern interdisciplinary context have not yet been sufficiently and satisfactorily solved.

This article tries to outline some of the ways to solve these tasks. To reconstruct the origins of Antsiferov's ideas, I will try to analyze them in the context of the work and theory of his teacher Ivan Grevs to whom he owed much of his interest in this issue. Then I will look at Antsiferov's works of the 1920s on the literary image of St. Petersburg and the theory of literary theme guided tours.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in the last section of the article I will try to briefly outline the reception of Antsiferov's ideas in the modern humanities and assess its significance in the modern interdisciplinary context.

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Antsiferov's instructor at the university was Ivan Grevs, an outstanding Russian mediaevalist and founder of a scholarly school whose pupils included many famous historians, e.g. Lev Karsavin, Olga Dobiash-Rozhdestvenskaya and Nikolai Ottokar<sup>3</sup>. Grevs was also one of the first to practice guided tours as part of university education. Nikolai Antsiferov participated in the tour to Italy to which Grevs took his students in 1912. Their cooperation continued after the 1917 revolution as they organized guided city tours and local history studies in St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad. Working together with Grevs and his concept of understanding a city by way of traveling it had a strong influence on Antsiferov. Perhaps it is in Antsiferov's works that Grevs's idea of travels and tours' existential meaning was developed the most consistently and transferred to literary studies.

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<sup>2</sup> Antsiferov's later works (Cf. Antsiferov, *Prigorody Leningrada*; Antsiferov, *Metodika izyucheniya Antsiferov, Problemy urbanizma*) are not discussed here.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Grevs's school see (Sveshnikov; Kaganovich, *Peterburgskaya shkola*).

As noted by historians of modern tourism, the emergence of the very idea of guided tour reflected both a growing importance of tourism practices and important trends in the development of education (for more details on this, see. Stepanov, *Znanie o proshlomu*; Stepanov, *Navstrechu proshlomu*; Johnson, 97–124). In modern culture, traveling is conceptualized as a form of self-actualization, significant in the cognitive as well as emotional respect. The affirmation of high cultural and existential significance of traveling for the modern man has to do with the idea of travel as a way to set free the essential powers of man and establish contact between man and culture. It was already in the practice of Grand Tour that the personal meaning of traveling was associated with visiting culturally important sites. Criticizing the trivialization of tourist activity (tourists' omnivory, the superficiality of their experiences, etc.) became an important form of appraising the cultural significance of traveling. In the 19th century, the quest for experiencing the true meaning of cultural heritage generated a whole industry of travelogues whose best-known examples are works by Reskin, Taine, Boissier, Pater, Vernon Lee et al.<sup>4</sup> Both Grevs and Antsiferov appealed directly to this tradition and continued it.

The growing popularity of guided tours as a form of education signaled the declining authority of the old education model rooted in the rhetorical culture and the spread of non-classical secondary education based on modern rationality and experiential cognition of the world. As part of this model, guided tours originally served primarily to make pupils acquainted with natural phenomena. Gradually, however, more and more persistent attempts were made to assert the value of tours and travels for the humanities too. It is in this context that Grevs put forward his idea that, apart from broadening one's worldview, guided tours were an important element of a scholar's vocational training. He regarded them to be "a necessary form of historical seminar" which served to "deepen the knowledge, test concepts, shape ideas and refine the techniques and skills of their acquisition." "From books to monuments, from the lecture room to the actual stage of history, and then, from the fresh air of history, back again to the library and to the archive! This should be the motto that would symbolize the interaction of various factors enabling and invigorating the historian to write," Grevs wrote (Grevs, *K teorii i praktike "ekskursii"*, 9). He organized educational journeys at the end of seminar courses he offered on late medieval and Renaissance culture. Visiting many cities in Italy, the tour culminated in a two-week stay in Florence, filled with walks in and around the city and visiting its museums.<sup>5</sup>

The design of Grevs's guided tours reflected the main principles of his approach to the study of culture. Overcoming the negative consequences of positivism's expansion in historical studies, Grevs sought to expand students' understanding of the subject and the possibilities of historical cognition. Grevs and his pupils insisted on understanding culture as *Zeitgeist* and as the key object of historical research. They advocated the principle of historical synthesis and the individualizing approach as a method of reaching this synthesis. Therefore, they criticized 'external' explanations in history relying on 'factors' etc., calling instead for a broader understanding of the historical reality and searching for its

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<sup>4</sup> In his essay *Scholarly Excursions to Historical Centers of Italy (Sketches of Florentine Culture)* (1903) Grevs sought to present Italy as "the best school of humaneness." Pavel Muratov, who authored the classic *Images of Italy*, wrote in the preface that Grevs was "among those who revived 'the sense of Italy' in the Russian culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." (Kaganovich, *I. M. Grevs — istorik*, 219).

<sup>5</sup> See (Sveshnikov, 283–308) for the tours to Italy.

'deeper', 'internal' layers (Grevs, "O *kul'ture*", 282-284). Contrary to the positivist urge to clean the reality of fiction, we see in the works of Grevs and his disciples the desire to understand the 'myth', the 'legend', the 'faith', i.e. the subjective perception as part of historic reality or even as its essence. In accordance with these goals they reformulated their criteria of knowledge validity and changed their priorities in selecting the sources and techniques for analyzing them. They searched for manifestations of the 'mental element' in which an author lived or the 'vital element' of his age, attaching increased importance to aesthetic and stylistic aspects of all sources (not just literary ones), because they saw these aspects as more immediate manifestations of the past. Grevs's new approach to the sources was guided by a desire to achieve a more true-to-life experience and representation of the past by feeling a direct and personal contact with it. His city tours predominantly taking their participants to outdoor monumental sites rather than to museums provided very bright and unprecedented impressions, making the tour a very special experience of touching the past as such (Grevs, *Ekskursionnoe delo*, 10).

In Grevs's and Antsiferov's writings we find religious metaphors likening the guided tour experience to that of pilgrimage.<sup>6</sup> This bears evidence of their extremely high appreciation of this activity. At the same time, the evolution of the historical guided tour idea went — mainly in Grevs — hand in hand with the understanding of traveling as a major cultural phenomenon. This resulted later in the concept of 'the spirit of traveling (*puteshestvennost'*)'. "Puteshestvennost'" means immersion in nature and culture accompanied by free and active dealing with their objects, and an unusually intense game of various psychic powers, and unique forms of their synthesis. All this is fully promoted and deployed only by a guided tour." (Grevs, *Dal'nie gumanitarnye ekskursii*, P. 15). In Antsiferov, the idea of traveling having an existential meaning is even more fundamental. In a text significantly entitled *The Historical Science as a Form of Struggle for Eternity* Antsiferov he regards trips to historically significant sites as a form of 'immersion in the past'. Each of these sites is a "living link in the chain of times" and a "place where descendants meet the ancestors," Antsiferov holds, ascribing them almost magical powers to overcome time and allow people to touch the past and tap its energy (Antsiferov, *Istoricheskaya nauka*, 153–154).

Grevs's concept of the city as a touring site was dictated by his view of history in general. For him, biography embodied the integrity of history. Therefore, he viewed eternal humanistic values through the prism of 'images of humanity,' the 'spiritually beautiful personalities' such as Dante or Francis of Assisi whom he regarded as creators of enduring cultural values but, at the same time, as exponents of their time's unique character, the *couleur temporal*. Grevs understood history as the biography of the human race,<sup>7</sup> individual facts of which he tended to interpret symbolically. He transferred this approach onto his study of the city. In his articles of the early 1920s Grevs described the city as the quintessence of every epoch's cultural life<sup>8</sup> and insisted that it should be stud-

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. the characteristic expressions used when discussing guided tours: "scholarly pilgrimage", "Florentine rejoicing", "sanctuaries of history" etc.

<sup>7</sup> This metaphor will be used by Antsiferov in the preface of *The Soul of St. Petersburg*. Cf. (Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 13–16)

<sup>8</sup> Grevs and later Antsiferov referred to Oswald Spengler's theory as they elaborated this idea. In 1926–1927 Nikolai Antsiferov and his wife Tatiana Antsiferova published a three-volume reader titled *A Book on the City* (Antsiferov, Antsiferova. *Kniga o gorode 1*; Antsiferov, Antsiferova. *Kniga o gorode 2*; Antsiferov, Antsiferova. *Kniga o gorode 3*) in which they sought to interpret the history of civilization as

ied using the biographical method. “The city, he wrote, should be understood as something coherent, as a ‘special subject’, a collective personality, a living being, and we should take a close look at its ‘face’, understand its ‘soul’, learn and restore ‘the biography of the city’.” (Grevs, *Gorod kak predmet kraevedeniya*, 249).<sup>9</sup> Thus, in studying cities, the moral imperative of studying history was transformed into an aesthetic one, for the city embodied the complexity of culture and at the same time possessed the integrity of an organism or a personality.<sup>10</sup> This integrity was evident and available for empirical study.<sup>11</sup>

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The idea considering the city’s unique ‘personal’ image and aesthetic wholeness was deployed by Antsiferov in his works on St. Petersburg. An important impetus for these works was provided by the activity of local history and urban monument protection associations during the first decades of the twentieth century, who regarded it as their mission to affirm the value of classical St. Petersburg architecture and to draw public attention to the aesthetics of the urban environment.<sup>12</sup> The importance of Antsiferov’s writings (above all, his book *The Soul of St. Petersburg*, 1922) largely consisted in the fact that the aesthetics of classical St. Petersburg which inspired Alexander Benois, Igor Grabar and other authors was conceived through the prism of literature, from the first 18<sup>th</sup> century panegyric descriptions to Antsiferov’s contemporaries such as Alexander Blok, Anna Akhmatova and Vladimir Mayakovsky. To describe the soul of the city Antsiferov made extensive use of the *genius loci* metaphor revived by Vernon Lee (cf. Colby). Importantly, his use of literary material was more than just transferring to the scholarly domain the uses of literature practiced by artists of the *Mir iskusstva* circle.<sup>13</sup> Antsiferov made a strong case for using literature as a major means of reflection on the city allowing to identify new systems of meanings — architectural, mythological, historical and literary ones. Moreover, he pioneered new ways to extend the aesthetic perception of the city: in his assessment of St. Petersburg architecture Antsiferov followed the *Mir iskusstva* thinkers criticizing the “boneless era of the late nineteenth century,” the “false-Russian style” and the “unarchitectural Art Nouveau style” (Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 34, cf. Johnson, 45–72 and Broomfield, 141–164). However, turning to the study of imagination and perception, which had a lot to do with literary studies, he came to justify his own time:

a history of the development of the city as a social and cultural institution. The reader included historical sources, scholarly and literary texts.

<sup>9</sup> According to Ewa Bérard, research on cities’ souls was largely inspired by John Ruskin’s writings, in particular *The Stones of Venice* (Berar, 218).

<sup>10</sup> The organism metaphor which Antsiferov made extensive use of (cf. the title of his book *Ways of Studying the City as a Social Organism: an Essay on Complex Approach*) enjoyed great popularity in early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban studies (P. Geddes, L. Mumford, R. Park, etc.), and it still remains popular with architects today. See (Paloma Úbeda Mansilla, 35–48).

<sup>11</sup> It is telling that one of the major city touring practices is looking at the city from some elevated point making it possible to see it as a whole.

<sup>12</sup> See Johnson on the history of St. Petersburg local history movement. Johnson points to tourist guides to St. Petersburg as forming an important context for Antsiferov’s texts.

<sup>13</sup> Although Antsiferov’s relationship with *Mir iskusstva* artists has been repeatedly discussed in literature, the relation between the image of St. Petersburg as presented in their texts, on the one hand, and in the writings of Antsiferov and other students of local history in the 1920s, on the other, doesn’t seem to have been studied systematically (See e.g. Dolgoplov).

“The evolution of art perception takes place also in the *perception of the city*, and this partly compensates for the creative impotence of modern architecture” (Antsiferov, *O metodakh i tipakh*, 8).

The historiosophical tone of Antsiferov’s book, of course, bears the stamp of the time of its creation: the revolutionary events of 1917 which meant the collapse of imperial Russia brought the city’s life to a standstill and cast an eschatological light on its architectural integrity, leading Antsiferov to call St. Petersburg the city of “tragic imperialism” (cf. Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 27). Because he attributed an objective nature to the making of the city’s soul in literary texts, his assessment of authors obviously includes value judgments: when Antsiferov felt an author’s subjectivity impeded the ‘true’ knowledge of the city’s soul he described it as “random,” “arbitrary,” or “contingent,” and if he felt it was contributing to it he described it as recognizing the “necessity” or “fate.” “The reflection of St. Petersburg in the souls of our literary artists is not for nothing. It is not about creative arbitrariness of strong personalities. One feels consistency or even regularity behind all these impressions. One gets an unshakable impression that the soul of the city has a fate of its own, and our authors, each in his time, noted certain moments in the history of the city’s soul” (Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 39).

Literature offered Antsiferov a number of opportunities to project his biographical metaphor on urban studies. Evidence of this was his so-called *St. Petersburg Trilogy* which included *The Soul of St. Petersburg*, *Dostoevsky’s St. Petersburg* (1923), and *The True Story and the Myth of St. Petersburg* (1924). In *The Soul of St. Petersburg* Antsiferov offers a bird’s eye view of the city’s changing image covering more than a century and a half of St. Petersburg literature. In *Dostoevsky’s St. Petersburg* he views Russia’s northern capital through the prism of the famous writer’s life and work. It is, therefore, no longer the classical harmony of this city that comes to the foreground but the “contrived city” atmosphere, the one that permeates Dostoyevsky’s novels. In a city that is alienated from man and in this sense ghostly, contrived, things that happen look like a dream and harmony shines through only for a moment (Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 44–45, 50–52). Antsiferov repeatedly uses the concept of power to describe the big city environment capturing the author and his characters. It is interesting that here Antsiferov introduced the *flâneur* figure so crucial for urban studies since the time of Walter Benjamin.<sup>14</sup> According to Antsiferov Dostoevsky himself was the prototype of this visionary absorbing multiple impressions of the urban environment and the atmosphere of the city: “In these remarkable passages Dostoevsky told us how he was able to peer into St. Petersburg, grasp the expression of its face, and contemplate it with his mind’s eye to see the presence of another existence behind its outer shell.” (Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 53).

*Dostoevsky’s St. Petersburg* focused on individual sites and buildings which Antsiferov felt were manifestations of the atmosphere of Dostoevsky’s works and their heroes’ worldviews. “A house is pictured as an isolated little world living a mysterious life of its own that affects in one way or another the fate of its inhabitant.” (Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 37). Antsiferov described the capacity for this kind of imagination as “the ability to enter a personal relationship with the house and as if make friends with it.” (Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 40). This accounts for the important role played in the first part of the book by detailed descriptions of places which testify to Dostoevsky’s texts possessing documentary qualities. In the second part of the book, Antsiferov suggested to apply this optics to the real urban space and find places in the cityscape that can be seen

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<sup>14</sup> See (Fokin, 305–315) for a comparison between Dostoevsky’s and Baudelaire’s *flâneurs*.

as embodying Dostoevsky's poetics, and then try to walk following the topographical indications that can be found on the pages of Dostoevsky's stories.

*The True Story and the Myth of St. Petersburg*, the third book of Antsiferov's St. Petersburg trilogy, pursues a different strategy of understanding the city's integrity and shows a different version of the biographical approach. It focuses on the city's founding and the figure of its founder Peter I who — as the title suggests — is regarded both as a historical and a mythological figure. In contrast to *Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg*, the starting point here is the cityscape itself. Antsiferov sought to trace the growth of the urban organism and the evolution of the city's core, analyzed the functions of places that shaped the early development of St. Petersburg. Examining various layers of history from the geological to the economic and political ones, he applies data from numerous fields of knowledge. Drawing on a wide range of visual sources including engravings, maps and plans, he engages various optical perspectives. For example, the book opens with a description of the city's panorama as viewed from the top of St. Isaac's cathedral.<sup>15</sup> Though the presentation of the early history of St. Petersburg here is not devoid of a metaphorical layer, most of the time Antsiferov seeks to comply with the rules of scholarly writing. He even remains neutral when analyzing the main mythical topos of this story, namely Peter I attending the foundation of the city and seeing an eagle in the sky.<sup>16</sup> The analysis of the mythical component of St. Petersburg's history comes to the forefront in the second part of the book, drawing on Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* which, according to Antsiferov, crystallizes the St. Petersburg myth. The depiction of a flood showing the city's struggling with the elements allows the poet to demonstrate the inner drama of St. Petersburg — the struggle between order and chaos. At the same time, the author shows also the ambivalence of this order, the classical harmony of which rests on neglecting the little man. The equestrian statue of Peter I seen through the prism of Pushkin's poem, Antsiferov holds, is the *genius loci* of St. Petersburg (cf. Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 27).<sup>17</sup> Antsiferov combines visual analysis of the monument with the analysis of the literary text which addresses the changing appearance of the city, the urban legends about its founder, and finally, the myths of St. Petersburg, a layer that allows the inherent drama of St. Petersburg to assume an utterly generalized and symbolic character. It is perhaps this book of Antsiferov that represents in the most refined form the system of metaphorical transferences that allowed him to create a sophisticated and complete construction of the St. Petersburg myth, which serves him both as a research object and an object of admiration and hope.

For the reader of Antsiferov's books, the link is obvious between the image of the city as shaped in the texts of the St. Petersburg trilogy and the guided tour practice.<sup>18</sup> The books contain numerous descriptions of sensory perception of the urban environment, its outlines, its smells and its sounds. The second and the third books offer explicit

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<sup>15</sup> See (Stepanov, *Kovcheg bylogo*, 2009) for a more detailed analysis of the topic.

<sup>16</sup> The story of the founding of Saint Petersburg became subject of a controversy between Grevs and Antsiferov, on the one hand, and Petr Stolpiansky, also a leading student of St. Petersburg local lore and history, on the other. The latter wrote in a private letter that Antsiferov's interpretation of the story was "mystical and idle rubbish." (Golubeva, 62). The event, i.e. his foundation stone laying of St. Petersburg, retained its legendary aureole even in scholarly text. See (Cf. Kamenskij).

<sup>17</sup> In a way, Pushkin as the founding father of the myth becomes equal to "the founding father of the city" (Antsiferov, *Dusha Peterburga*, 62). For thoughtful considerations of the literary reception of the monument see (Ospovat, Timenchik).

<sup>18</sup> Thorough analysis of the Antsiferov excursion theory see also (Johnson, 125-141).

reflections on the possibilities of touring St. Petersburg as a way of getting to know it. In 1920s Antsiferov discussed this matter in his theoretical and methodological papers which had nothing to do with nostalgic reflection on St. Petersburg myth. Rather, they focused on the status of literature and its possible uses in understanding the city. These texts allow us to describe Antsiferov's concept as a kind of theoretical and literary project which is interesting because it was constituted at the boundaries between literature, history and education.

In his paper *On the methods and types of historical and cultural guided tours* Antsiferov distinguishes showing and commenting tours. The first type includes tours covering aesthetic, historical, artistic, technical, economic and ethnographic subjects and a number of subtypes dealing with history of culture. They are characterized by their subject matter being materially present. Without going into a detailed analysis of this type of guided tours, we can say that they discuss the evolution of the city as a whole, its topography and architecture, and individual elements of the city system (e.g. public institutions, monuments, or museums) and parts of the urban space. Their methods include various ways of capturing and analyzing the impressions of urban environment: motor cognition, experiencing real spatial relationships, 'analysis of visible features' and using them for reconstructing of a monument's original appearance, etc. To characterize the cognitive experience acquired during such tours Antsiferov applied such terms as "the imprint of time," "age-related indentation," "tangible traces" of historic life enshrined in the appearance of the city and in the change of architectural styles<sup>19</sup> (Antsiferov, *O metodakh i tipakh*, 21–26; Antsiferov, *Puti izucheniya goroda*, 32, 37–38; Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika ekskursij po obschestvovedeniyu*).

By contrast, Antsiferov reckoned literary tours to the commenting type. Their object "is not visible to the tour participants" (Antsiferov, *O metodakh i tipakh*, 31). This statement captures the main problem with literary tours. On the one hand, literature evades immediate demonstration, the task guided tours traditionally serve. On the other hand, guided tours' value for literature is questionable, because the latter addresses not visual perception but imagination (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 3–4).

In formulating his own understanding of the meaning of literary tours, Antsiferov compares a literary tour with a theatrical performance and with a book illustration. Like them, a literary tour is meant to help us to understand literary characters and get an idea of the writer, their life and work (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 8). At that, Antsiferov notes, all a literary tour does is introduce us to the "poetic economy," making us familiar with the material used to create artistic images but offering no insights into the creative process itself (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 10–11). Thus, the recognition of literary imagination's autonomy means that literary tours can only play an auxiliary role. This reservation, however, does not prevent Antsiferov from taking the formal approach to the study of literature as a starting point of his argument.<sup>20</sup> To justify the value of literary tours, he turns to the critics of formalism, advocates of the sociological approach popular in the 1920s which interpreted literature in

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<sup>19</sup> For detailed discussion of this subject see also (Lynch).

<sup>20</sup> Antsiferov describes the formalist approach quite briefly, without discussing individual works of Shklovsky, Tynyanov, Eykhenbaum and others. In his memoirs Antsiferov mentions his argument with Lev Lunts. Criticizing Antsiferov who "felt for a cityscape background for Svidrigailov and Raskolnikov", Lunts said "It is not in the streets of St. Petersburg but in the novels of Balzac and Dickens that one should look for Dostoevsky's house." (Antsiferov, *Iz dum o bylom*, 410).



terms of its reflecting life and studied authors' relationships with their social environment. But Antsiferov's interpretation of this approach is very unusual: he defines the environment in which a writer works not in terms of class but in terms of terrain. It is the terrain that becomes the object of literary guided tours.<sup>21</sup>

Antsiferov's analysis of literary tours begins with a description of the uses literature can be made of in guided tours. In his opinion, there are four types of tours. Type 1 comprises tours in which literature plays no role as such but is used to achieve a rhetorical effect or as a source of information, with literary texts serving to show the *couleur temporelle*, e.g. in combination with daily life artifacts or with other works of arts.<sup>22</sup>

The three types of guided tours devoted to literature in the proper ("narrow") sense are to some extent or another familiar to us we encountered them in the St. Petersburg trilogy. They include (1) literary biographical tours; (2) "theme tours in which places and cultural monuments serve as commentaries to a literary theme"; (3) tours "serving the study of a cultural or natural site exclusively with the help of literary monuments."

Antsiferov regards the tours of type (1) as a special case of visiting the places of great events, their value consisting in satisfying the "historical topographic feelings":

Visiting the places of great events is an old cultural need. These visits often take on the character of pilgrimage. The words 'on this very spot' seem to possess some magical power over a pious mind, as if a place marked by a great event overcomes time. When you are there, the chain of time breaks, making the current moment and the past meet, and a bright experience of the otherwise extinct past flashes like a spark (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 43).

In this regard, Antsiferov welcomes the establishment of memorial museums and turning the homes of great writers to reserves, a widespread practice in Soviet Russia during the first years after the revolution. Along with the memorial places of the revolution, he urges to regard these places of "literary memories" as crystallization points for a genuine national memory to revive after being suppressed by the official nationalism in pre-revolutionary Russia.<sup>23</sup>

The 'theme literary tours' took their participants to places depicted in literary texts. Antsiferov generally considered the detection of differences between literary descriptions and their prototypes useful in terms of identifying individual authors' manners of writing. However, such tours served their purpose best when there was an opportunity to discover a connection between the imaginary world and the real place. In obvious cases, prototypes of places and buildings are testified to by some kind of evidence. Antsiferov, however, thinks it possible to find unobvious connections as well since, firstly, some literary works are characterized by a tendency toward topographical accuracy<sup>24</sup> and, sec-

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<sup>21</sup> These qualities of Antsiferov's ideas made them look marginal to proponents of the two above mentioned approaches.

<sup>22</sup> At this point, Antsiferov wrote, the question arises what such comparison can be based on. In other words, it was the question how literary texts could be used as historical sources. In solving it, Antsiferov relied on the notion of *consensus* introduced by the Russian historian Alexander Lappo-Danilevsky (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 35).

<sup>23</sup> Compared with visiting memorial homes, a guided tour about a literary museum with its artificially created exhibition is of lesser value, according to Antsiferov.

<sup>24</sup> Antsiferov, however, thought that this had more to do with psychology than with aesthetics (See Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 78–79).

only, a stylistic correspondence can be detected between a text and a landscape, like between Vasily Zhukovsky's poems and the park in Pavlovsk: "There is a genuine consensus between the literary monument and its prototype — the Pavlovsk Park. The old park is looking at us through the stanzas of these poems." (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 81). Finally, the relation between the text and the landscape may be the result of readers' activity. Not only do readers fascinated by literary images seek to "get in touch with the places that inspired the writer and sense their power," but they also create myths about places where the action could have taken place. "This is how the legend about Lisa Kalitina's house in Orel was invented. Think of the melancholic pilgrimage to Lisa's pond near the Simonov Monastery in Moscow at the beginning of the last century. So in Italy they honor the Ponte alle Grazie in Florence as the meeting place of Dante and Beatrice, in London 'The Old Curiosity Shop', in the USA places associated with Tom Sawyer, and in France the house of Madame Bovary in Rouen. All these are essentially the same sort of phenomena, reminding Pushkin's phrase "I do believe there was a temple here"<sup>25</sup> (Antsiferov, *Istoricheskaya nauka*, 157). However, topographic accuracy may correspond with reading experience: Antsiferov tells about a tour dedicated to *War and Peace* during which the participants experience scenes from the novel in the real Moscow cityscape, which can be likened to slow reading (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 85).

Finally, type (3) takes tourists to places in which numerous literary worlds intersect with each other. The significance of such places is determined by their literary relevance. Here Antsiferov is torn between two strategies of interpretation. In some cases, he writes about the multiplicity of perspectives (whether literary or physical) and the historicity of the place ("The purpose of the tour is to make the participants experience Catherine's Park as filled with images created by our poets"), in others cases he tends to refer to the reflection concept and to naturalistic assumptions about the "power of place": "There are places that have a strong effect on one's mind, they make one think intensively, excite one's senses and set one's will on the path of creativity. It is about such places that literary traditions are created." (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 87).

Antsiferov's discussion of literary tours seems to refute his original definition of their role as auxiliary. A literary tour proves to be more than just an illustration to a text. It turns literature into an object of existential experience which, as we have seen, sometimes is interpreted in religious and mystical terms. Within the framework of this concept, literature is presented as the principal form of experiencing history and transmitting collective memory. Even though Antsiferov admits that literary tours cannot become very popular, his concept is in line with the spirit of the time which went a long way towards institutionalization of worshipping literary classics (Cf. Dubin, Reytblat, 160–161; Dobrenko, Tihanov). Antsiferov solves the initial dilemma concerning the guided literary tours by formulating a concept that runs against both the sociological and the formal approach. As for the former, the problem is the drift towards the social conditioning of literature; as for the latter, it is the tendency towards a purely realistic (in some cases even

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<sup>25</sup> Obviously, this is only possible if the tour is dedicated to a significant literary text (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 78). Antsiferov's works, as Albin Konechny and Xenia Kumpan note, themselves were a significant contribution to the myth of "Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg" (Konechny, Kumpan, 18).

naturalistic) interpretation of literature which contravened Antsiferov's own efforts to promote urban literary imagination.<sup>26</sup>

The way Antsiferov understood a sociological approach to literature had to do with the intellectual context of local history studies in which his ideas took shape. By asserting a close relationship between literature and landscape he was making a case for autonomous integrity of culture (cf. Crang). Antsiferov's concept of local literary and history studies confronted more than the so-called *industrial movement* which prioritized social and economic issues as literary topics. He criticized also the studying of 'cultural nests,' a project put forward by the Russian literary scholar Nikolai Piksarov. According to Emily Johnson, in the 1920s Antsiferov and his teacher Grevs repeatedly spoke in support of this project (Johnson, 184–190). Piksarov called for literary scholars to focus their efforts on writing a social history of literature from the point of view of regionalization. However, Antsiferov noted, no less important was the studying of "how landscapes are reflected in the images invented by literary artists and how these images affect local life. The atmosphere created around dramatic landscapes and memorial places is subject to the law of development which determines the fate of society generating this atmosphere;" "When studying this changing image, through it we can also see changes in the life of the city and in the life of society which creates and perceives this image" (Antsiferov, *Teoriya i praktika literaturnykh ekskursij*, 98). Like Antsiferov's questioning about the reader's perception of literature and their role in shaping 'literary places', these points place him in close quarters with concepts of imagination accepted today in cultural geography and literary criticism.

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Antsiferov's efforts in studying biographies of cities and his active participation in local history movement played a tragic role in his own life. His works were repeatedly branded as anti-Marxist, and he was arrested several times on political charges in the 1920s and 1930s (in particular, in the course of the so-called "Academic Affair" of 1929) and served several prison terms in the camps (cf. Moskovskaya). It was not until after the Second World War that he was able to really get back to work and defend his doctoral thesis. Antsiferov's dissertation systematically presented the results of many years of research on St. Petersburg and literary urban studies in general (Antsiferov, *Problemy urbanizma*). Given that his works were never republished until the 1990s because their idealist aspects made them incompatible with Marxist ideology, no public or academic discussion of Antsiferov's ideas could take place. While ample research was done in the Soviet literary criticism on St. Petersburg literature and literary images of St. Petersburg, particularly by Lev Pumpyansky and Boris Tomashevsky who were Antsiferov's acquaintances, he himself had to keep in the background even though he was a cult figure among humanist intelligentsia. It is telling that several chapters of his memoirs depicting his life in the camp were published in the dissident *Pamyat'* almanac which in 1970s and 1980s was an attempt to present an alternative to the official version of recent history.

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<sup>26</sup> Antsiferov's *The Soul of St. Petersburg*, Emily Johnson points out, barely comments on the architectural quality of the buildings it discusses. Instead, it always refers to them via literary texts (Johnson, 198–204). It seems, however, that the opposite is just as true: Antsiferov always viewed literature primarily from the point of view of its reflecting the cityscape. It would therefore seem unjustified to liken Antsiferov's theses to Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope concept (See Moskovskaya, 132).

Although some reception of Antsiferov's legacy did take place in the tradition of *literaturnoe kraevedenie* focused on the local literary and historical source studies (cf. Milonov), a truly extensive use and further development of ideas he had formulated in St. Petersburg trilogy can be seen in the concept of the Petersburg text put forward in the works of Moscow–Tartu semiotic school between the 1970s and 1990s. Antsiferov, therefore, can be seen as a kind of mediator between the Russian Symbolists who had shaped the 'force field' of the St. Petersburg myth and contributed to its crystallization as an integrated body (Mints, Bezrodnyj, Danilevski; cf. Muratov, 21), on the one hand, and semioticians of the second half of the twentieth century, on the other. In the works of the latter, the 'Petersburg text' includes a much larger body of sources and is scrutinized through the prism of structuralist notions of myth, language and text. Ample evidence of continuity with the work of Antsiferov is present in works by Vladimir Toporov which are among the major manifestations of this tradition. (cf. Tsiv'yan, *Esche o Peterburge*). This continuity can be detected as to a wide range of issues related to the 'Petersburg text', e.g. the uniqueness of the literary tradition associated with St. Petersburg; the role of individual authors (in particular Pushkin and Dostoevsky) in shaping this tradition; individual texts' relation to the tradition as a whole; finally, the system of categories structuring the 'Petersburg text' (order vs. chaos, culture vs. elements, greatness vs. inhumanity, etc.).<sup>27</sup> Similarly to Antsiferov's interpretation of the city as a "superhuman being," Toporov defines the 'Petersburg text' as "a kind of synthetic supertext which elevated meanings and goals are associated with." Here, in spite of the scientific pathos otherwise typical of semiotics, the reflection tends towards historiosophy and mysticism: "The St. Petersburg text is a powerful polyphonic *resonance* space. In its vibrations, the disturbing syncopations of Russian history and the chilling 'evil' noises of the time have long been heard. Not only did this great text 'remind' of the city and, through it, of the whole of Russia, but it also *warned* of danger, and we cannot but hope or at least surmise that it has also a *salvatory* function, signs of which were revealed more than once over the past nearly two centuries. That is why, when listening to these vibrations, we hope to hear a harmonious sound in which we might discern a hint of some salvatory resource and, finally, would make our genuine and good choice ourselves" (Toporov, 699).<sup>28</sup>

Already during the Soviet period, semiotics established itself as an influential interdisciplinary paradigm and accepted the 'Petersburg text' concept in generalized form as a model for describing urban and, more broadly, local texts (Knabe; Abashev, *Perm' kak tekst*). At the same time, the concept is undergoing critical rethinking. While recognizing its value for understanding the urban space, critics demonstrate its tendency towards reification of the object it constructs.<sup>29</sup> The source body it is based on is chronologically limited to the remote past. The synchronically organized structure the 'Petersburg text' is

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. also Toporov's general remarks concerning the relations of individual texts to the Petersburg text and the subjective attitudes of their authors towards it (Toporov, 644–646).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the use of the *genius loci* notion in Toporov's article *Aptekarsky Island as an Urban Stow (a General Overview)*, and Boris Egorov's article *Metalevels of Local History and the 'Soul' of Kharkov*. Against this background, corrections have to be made to Emily Johnson's thesis whereby under the influence of the materialist Soviet ideology semioticians distanced themselves from Antsiferov's pantheist views and his mystical assumption that cities have 'souls' (Johnson, 212–213).

<sup>29</sup> In her preface to the volume of Toporov's articles on the Petersburg text Tatiana Tsivyan points out that numerous trips to St. Petersburg and walks around the city were an important part of his working on this theme (Tsiv'yan, *Sledom za V.N. Toporovym*).

insensitive to the complex dynamics of relationships between different texts reckoned to this tradition (Kalinin; Muratov; Schmid; Buckler).<sup>30</sup>

Julie A. Buckler's book *Mapping St. Petersburg* can serve as an example of rethinking the 'Petersburg text' for research purposes. It examines the cultural life of St. Petersburg in the imperial period by looking at what she calls 'the cultural middle.' This perspective leads her to disenchanting the 'Petersburg myth' as crystallized in the texts by Antsiferov and his followers. It is, of course, not about criticizing it in terms of being true or not true to historic facts. First of all, Buckler adds non-classical texts — both verbal (folklore texts, guides, etc.) and visual (in particular, the eclectic architecture which Antsiferov despised) to the existing narrative on the 'Petersburg text'. Second, taking into account the social history of the city, she provides a consistent projection of myths on real places in St. Petersburg and its suburbs. Third, she questions the uniqueness of St. Petersburg and Petersburg text (Buckler, 8–26; cf. Nikolozzi, 12–18).

It appears that, despite the above-mentioned numerous elements of reductionism and idealist naturalism in Antsiferov, some potential for deconstruction of the myth can be found in his texts, too. Both their intermediate location between scholarship and literature, and their archaic conceptual foundations which were criticized by Antsiferov's contemporaries already can, paradoxically enough, make them more compatible with our today's thinking than other texts that may be more corresponding to the standards of modern academic writing. On the one hand, the essayistic nature of Antsiferov's works provides a place for aesthetic appreciation of the city in terms of literature, painting or architecture. The combination of historiosophy, urban studies and tour-related theorizing allowed Antsiferov to get much closer than many of his contemporaries to what we today would call empirical study of the historical culture.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, the excursionist's look breaks the film of the urban narrative and provides for encounters with the real urban environment. This makes possible reflection on one's experience of the city, which includes interactions with human and non-human communication partners. It is not for nothing that such actor as the *flâneur* appears in Antsiferov's text. Its task is to represent one's (or the author's, for that matter) immersion in the city life. Besides, here we see in elemental form questions being asked about the relationships between the natural and the man-made in the urban environment and between the visual and verbal perception.<sup>32</sup>

It is these intuitions of Antsiferov's which allow us to regard his ideas as relevant to modern urban studies dealing with an urban environment characterized by growing fragmentation, faster pace of life, and an increasingly complicated communication system. Of course, today's research on literature in the city has to take into account a greater variety of genres claiming literary qualities and a wider range of social conflicts. Recent studies represent more sophisticated ways of dealing with topographical, historical, and social contexts (e.g. different studies of urban memory [cf. Koshar]) as well as literary ones (cf. Lehan; Pike). After the work done by Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau it is no longer possible to speak of the "power of place" but only of the place as a tool to

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<sup>30</sup> A systematic analysis of research on the Petersburg text within the semiotic tradition has yet to be undertaken.

<sup>31</sup> Antsiferov's article *History as a Form of Struggle for Eternity*, which wasn't published during his lifetime, is particularly illustrative of this.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. the way these topics are addressed in modern texts on literary tours (Abashev, *Neosyazhaemoe telo goroda* [the intangible body of the city]).

exercise power. Today, a look at the city off a tall tower is associated not so much with the perception of its integrity as with taking the expert's position and imposing an external rationality upon the elemental urban life. After the research subjects outlined in the works of Antsiferov have been adopted in many different domains of research, the issues he formulated keep surfacing over and over again. This was especially promoted by the *spatial turn* in the humanities (cf. Baron). The relationship between literature and region is important not only for literary studies now slowly becoming aware of the regional diversity of literary tradition. In cultural geography, this relationship is analyzed in connection with the comprehension of landscape issues in general, but also with the practical issues of image management and strengthening the tourism appeal of regions (Firsova). In cultural anthropology, the scope of urban text is being expanded to encompass various forms of urban folklore, even if researchers have to rely on institutional and media mechanisms for recording and accessing them (Alekseevskij, Akhmetova, Lur'e). Historiography today is confronted with the challenge of an increasing variety of ways to tell the history of a city (Ryuters). At the same time, when studying the history of individual cities, historians have to think about the necessity of taking into account their peculiarities (Bittner). For sociologists, the role of architectural and cultural heritage in the mechanisms of place belonging formation is a topical issue (Gladarev). The field of dialogue between these disciplines is taking shape yet, and Antsiferov's legacy might prove to be a useful contribution to this process.

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