




## Walking in St. Petersburg—Vienna Walks Continued

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### Abstract

Inspired by the bold methodological experiment on auto-ethnography in Vienna (Rhodes et al. *Human Arenas*, 1, 151–165, 2018), we conducted several walking sessions in St. Petersburg. During the walk, each participant took photos of objects, which attracted his/her attention, and dictated to the voice recorder what he/she was experiencing at this moment. The data allows to expand and supplement the existing ideas about individual differences in the perception of urban spaces, which are based on both the influence of the subject's past experience and deeper, possibly neurophysiological factors causing these differences. The results we compared with theoretical models of the structure of the image of the world elaborated in Leontiev's school in context of the activity theory. Among the main results of our work, the participants noted two effects that, being a sort of by-effect of the investigation, turned out to be extremely important and interesting for them. First, the self-reflection of the impressions of the environment turned out to be a means of self-discovery. It brought some new knowledge about oneself, sometimes surprising, helping to reveal something about oneself, which was not obvious before. The second unexpected result was a kind of "therapeutic effect" of our walks, noticed by the participants. The possibility of "mediated" self-discovery while focusing on an informational and emotionally saturated object of reality may have potential as a therapeutic practice.

**Keywords** Activity theory · Image of the world · Introspection · Perception of urban spaces

### Introduction

As I read the paper by Rhodes et al. "Hidden Present, Visible Absent in the City of Dreams: Assembling the Collective Imagination," the temptation to participate in the wonderful auto-ethnography adventure was too great to resist. I had taken part in the "Winter School on The Method of Imagination" in Vienna in December 2017 as a lecturer; I had walked through the

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streets of this City of Dreams, together with my young colleagues and alone. So, as I read sitting in my study in St. Petersburg: “We are coming now, as you read, to your house, to grab you by the hand and take you on this journey” (Rhodes et al. 2018, p. 153), I allowed the tempting voices to lead me, and was there in Vienna once again, and plunging into that “polyphony of internal dialogues, capturing the collective imagination after the fact, hidden inside the moving bodies of a group of psychologists /researchers let loose in the City of Dreams” (Ibid, p. 153); I thought that the article of my colleagues was a bold methodological experiment. This experiment gave rise to ingenious and resourceful material for psychological analysis, and the method is worth a try.

I was teaching a course at that time named “The image of the world: personality impact and determinants” to a group of Master’s students of Psychology Department of the St. Petersburg State University. The course aims to introduce some knowledge on how people compose their worldview—the image of the world, in which they live and act, which they themselves create, and which in its turn mediates their life and activities in the real world.

We live among other people, but do we share the same world? Social life flows in the hyperspace of many subjective lifeworlds.

Inspired by the article by Rhodes et al., I made up my mind to make an attempt of a similar auto-ethnography in the framework of practical classes on this course.

## **Walking in St. Petersburg: an Attempt at Introspection**

We follow the steps of Rhodes and his students in St. Petersburg. I see this as another aspect that might be of interest: Vienna is a city of dreams, but Petersburg is that also. For three centuries, since its foundation, a trail of imaginations and fantasies of poets and artists stretches behind it. These two definitely belong to cities, which “have such a powerful grasp on our sensory and cognitive apparatus that they attain a lasting and individual *identity*” (Kharlamov 2012, p. 278). However, different people see such cities differently. Petersburg of Pushkin is different from Petersburg of Dostoevsky. Most of my students are not native Petersburgers. They came here to study from different regions of Russia and Ukraine and have spent here a little more than 1 year, as they were second-year Master students. It might be of interest to reveal how they perceive this city, as their ““Implicit standard of comparison,” such as the person’s hometown” (Milgram 2010, pp. 21–22) is different.

Three “walks” were prepared and conducted. In the course of the first two, students started together on the same route, but they were not obliged to stay together all the time, and then, a short analysis of the experience was prepared individually. Last walk the participants planned and conducted individually. After each session, there followed a group discussion.

The first session we spent in the courtyards of the main campus of the university on the Basil’s Isle, which are picturesque and diverse. We chose this route for the first session, because these yards are closed for outsiders, they are calm, there are no crowds of noisy tourists, and nothing prevents concentration. The route was planned so that students should pass through a diversity of small spaces, different in architecture and adorned with works of art different in styles.

The task was the following. Before starting, each student had to make notes describing his/her physical condition and emotional state. During the walk, each student should take photos of objects that attracted his/her attention and dictate to the voice recorder some text about what he/she is experiencing at this moment. Initially, the texts were in Russian, specially translated

later for this paper. Actually, students were using their mobile phones for making both photos and speech records. Some seven to ten photos were expected.

Finishing the walk in the yard of the Philological Department (Fig. 1), with many comfortable benches, they were to stop there and make a short record on their physical and emotional state at the moment and comment on the general impressions. Getting ready for the discussion, which followed a couple of days later, at our next class, they prepared their photos and text comments to those and short analysis of experiences including emotional and physical dynamics during the session. The task to focus not only on external objects, but also on one's own physical and emotional condition—here we followed the example of the Vienna Winter School—turned out to make a striking impression on the participants. For the first time, when practicing observation, they consciously focused attention not only on external objects, but also on their own bodily state. This moment was at the center of our discussion of the results of the session. The resulting assessments surprised the authors themselves by the detailed and vivid descriptions:

Before we started:

“Sleepy, head aches, lethargy. Something I want to - eat, drink, want a mulled wine in an autumn day... I want more relaxation. Pricking woolen dress”;

“Fatigue, tension in the back and cervical spine, slight dizziness due to stuffiness in the rooms in which I spent the whole day ... Discontent with myself (an incorrectly completed task in the classroom). Easy panic due to the fact that I do not have time to do some necessary things on time. Irritation”;

“A bit worried about the stomach. I sit on a chair, and it seems that I feel the separate parts of the body more clearly than I would like. Today, I did not get enough sleep again, and the body knows about it, even though I tried to trick my head with a cup of coffee. I'm tired, although it's only noon. I don't really want to go somewhere, due to this incomprehensible feeling of my body”;

On the go:



**Fig. 1** The yard of the Philological Department

“The feeling that I am Gulliver, and pranksters of Liliput poke me with sharp spears on my knee. And some kind of anxiety. Or not anxiety? I do not know what a feeling it is. Something squeezes inside. I do not know. As if I, when I came here, knew in advance what I should feel - and I do not feel that”;

“...And then my thoughts smoothly flowed into a foretaste of future travels, because the stones in the background reminded me Stonehenge. The body joyfully vibrated in response to pleasant thoughts and anticipations of the pleasures of traveling”;

“A “mountain” of brick color attracted my attention (Fig. 2). I rushed to it and stared at it enthusiastically for another five minutes. I felt I wanted tactile sensations, so I touched it with my hands. And felt, as if I am a little more awake...”

In psychology, in Russia as well as throughout the world, there is still a strong tendency to teach students only “objective” science. Methods of self-observation are not given sufficient attention. One can hear from students: “Introspection? – but it has been recognized as unscientific ...” Who said so? Who has the right to make such evaluations? Even the so-called qualitative methods aimed at analyzing subjective experience are mainly applied to the subjects, but not to the researcher himself, forgetting that the mental phenomena are directly accessible only to the one, who experiences that. Is it worth neglecting this unique way to direct comprehension? This is not an easy way, and anyone who would try to focus on one’s mental states, as our students did, will feel both the affluence of information hidden here and the need for a *method* to extract it. Psychology has experience in developing such a methodology; in fact, from the time of Descartes until the last decades of the nineteenth century, psychologists elaborated on this methodology.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a new stage in the development of psychological science began, usually labeled as the “modern history of psychology” or “development of psychology as an academic discipline.” The main shift occurred in relation to the methodology

**Fig. 2** A “mountain” of brick color



of science: experimental method was introduced, and introspection was dislodged. The old paradigm, especially the work of those who continued research in line with the old paradigm in the last decades of the nineteenth century, was not popular among the supporters of the new one, and many of those have been forgotten by the new generations, fell into the blind spot of history. Having looked through a number of popular textbooks on history of psychology, Russian and international, I can say, that the development of “traditional” introspection psychology in the period of 1850–1860, “before Wundt,” is hardly given much attention. This tendency was very clearly expressed in Russia, where during the Soviet period, psychological science, partly forcibly, was kept within the frame of a mono-methodological trend, oriented towards the principles of natural-science methodology, including, first and foremost, the privilege of the experimental method.

Nowadays, psychological science is changing in the context of the global new modernity, which presupposes both general renovation of the domain of psychology, new objects of research, as well as changes in methodology and its general diversification. Psychological science turns to investigating subjectivity phenomena once again, and the work of the introspectionists of the nineteenth century can find its place in the history of psychology and contribute to the contemporary development of our science.

Our attempt at “introspection” was an impressive new experience for the students. Our work confirms the findings of Rhodes et al.:

“a. I began to embrace my abilities as a human being alongside my abilities as a researcher rather than separating the two.

b. Now I can clearly see that I have made a connection I had long subconsciously disregarded, that of my body and my mind” (Rhodes et al. 2018, p. 162).

## Testing Theoretical Models: the Concept of the Image of the World in Leontiev’ Activity Theory

Our lecture course highlights a number of psychological theories that relate to the subject area of the image of the world.

In Russian psychology, Sergei Rubinstein (1889–1960) addressed the problem in his book “Man and the world,” posthumously published in 1973, but the concept of the image of the world was elaborated by Alexey Leontiev (1979). Leontiev elaborated the idea of the image of the world in the context of research on perception, primarily visual perception. The problem of how our *visible world*, endowed with a relatively stable spatial structure, filled with objects that have relatively constant properties (shape, size, color, etc.)—is built up from the chaos of sensations of light and color (the *visible field*)—remains an unsolved mystery, despite the innumerable studies of psychologists, physiologists, and specialists in artificial intelligence. Libraries have been written about it. Entire clusters of perception theories have been elaborated; among the great “breakthroughs” of the twentieth century are James Gibson’s ecological psychology, the discovery of visual detectors by Hubel and Wiesel, the theory of recognition of three-dimensional objects by David Marr... The *ostensiveness* of the fact that we initially see the *spaces* around us, and then give them meanings (Kharlamov 2012), is just as illusory as the impression that the Earth is flat and the sun is moving over it across the sky.

Leontiev addressed the problem of the formation of *visual world*: “The thesis that I defend is that in psychology the problem of perception should be posed as the problem of building in the

mind of an individual a multidimensional image of the world, an image of reality. In other words, the psychology of an image (perception) is scientific knowledge about how, in the course of their activities, individuals build an image of the world - the world in which they live, act, which they themselves alter and partially create; it is also knowledge about how the image of the world functions, mediating their activities in the objectively real world” (Leontiev 1979, p. 3).

This approach to perception is fully consistent with Leontiev’s activity theory (Mammen & Mironenko 2015; Mironenko 2013). Hereby, Leontiev declares:

- The primacy of activity in relation to perception (the image is formed in the process of activity; it is the activity; its goals and conditions determine the content and structure of perception).
- The unity of the affective and cognitive spheres of the psyche (the image involves the attitude of the subject; it initially bears an emotional color).
- The prognostic character of the image is stressed (the image is a kind of program of action—it orients the subject in the environment, providing the possibility of locomotion and manipulation).

Thus, the image of the world is a reflection of the objective world in human psyche, which formation is mediated by subject values and corresponding cognitive schemes and amenable to conscious reflection.

Notably, the position of Kharlamov regarding the perception of the city in general is consonant with this approach: “I explicitly adopt a perspective focused on persons—the sentient inhabitants of environments—and their *intentionality*,” which is the source of meanings and activities that define cities as spatial forms, and focus thus on psychic experience of urban living.” (Kharlamov 2012, p. 280).

Leontiev proposed a three-component model of the structure of consciousness, which is the basis for the image formation (Leontiev 2005):

**Sensory Fabric** This “fabric” forms the sensory composition of images of reality, currently perceived or arising in memory, relating to the future, or even merely imagined. The special function of sensory elements is that they lend a sense of reality to the conscious picture of the world. To put it another way, it is specifically because of the sensory content of consciousness that the world appears to the viewer as something that exists not in his consciousness, but outside his consciousness—as an objective “field” and an object of his activity. (Leontiev 2005, pp. 14–15).

**Meaning** Meanings present the objective world, transformed and rolled up into language constructions: words and social signs. In meanings, the properties, connections, and relations of the reality reveal themselves through the totality of social practice. Leontiev notes that the meanings, if abstracted from their functioning in individual consciousness, are just as “un-psychological” as the socially perceived reality that lies behind them. (Leontiev 2005, p. 19).

**Personal Sense** There is a distinction between “meaning-in-itself” and “meaning-for-me,” which Leontiev called “sense,” and then limited it to “personal sense.” If external sensibility brings together meanings and the reality of the objective world in the consciousness of the subject, then personal sense brings them together with the reality of one’s own life in this world and its motives. Sense creates the partiality of human consciousness (Leontiev 2005, pp. 23–24).



**Fig. 3** The clock with the Greek helmet and owl

Thus, “Consciousness appears... as movement, bringing together the reality of the world represented in sensory stuff, the experience of mankind reflected in meaning, and the partiality of my existence as a living being, consisting in the acquisition of “meaning-for-me,” meaning for my life.” (Leontiev 2005, p. 24).

The formation of the image of the world is a complicated dynamic movement of the three layers, passing in iterations.

A part of our “introspection” in the course of the first session was a try to reveal these three components in one’s own experiences, while making analysis after the walk and preparing for the discussion in class.

Here are some examples of photos with comments that we analyzed:

“I saw this clock, and next to it the Greek helmet and Owl, as a symbol of wisdom and the goddess Athena (Fig. 3). I thought about how I loved the myths of ancient Greece as a child, and reread it many times, and tried to memorize Homer’s *Odyssey*.... After thinking about reading, I again remembered school books and my dissertation. The body, protecting itself from excessive stress, gave a signal that it was tired.”

“Fragility, “thrown into the world”, loneliness (Fig. 4). We must hold on to ourselves not to be gone with the wind... The impressions of the monument are rather dreary, but it is an existential longing. The association of the image of the poetess<sup>1</sup> with an autumn leaf, which was once attached to something, but all ends the same - you are alone and have to fly ...”

“The statue reminded me Confucius (Fig. 5), and I immediately wanted to go to China. I thought that I would be an ideal object of marketing influence. If I watch TV and I see something, a clear associative line builds up in my head immediately, and if I like what I see, I want to get it straight off (buy it, go there, try something...)”

“First I took this ensemble of stones for the cemetery (Fig. 6). Then, horrified, I realized that it was some kind of an ancient monument - I saw signs with the crown princes, etc. Then I saw stones with emblems of different universities... The cornerstones of the

<sup>1</sup> This is a monument to Anna Akhmatova

**Fig. 4** Fragility

Masons came to my mind. I thought that the design is similar to Stonehenge. Somewhat mystical construction. I looked at it from all sides. I was pleasantly surprised by the contrast of bright green soft, unevenly cut grass among the stones. When I realized what it was, and my psyche processed the holistic image of the ensemble at last, pride arose in my soul that now I also belong to SPSU, and, therefore, to this whole story”.

**Fig. 5** The statue, which reminded Confucius





**Fig. 6** An ensemble of stones

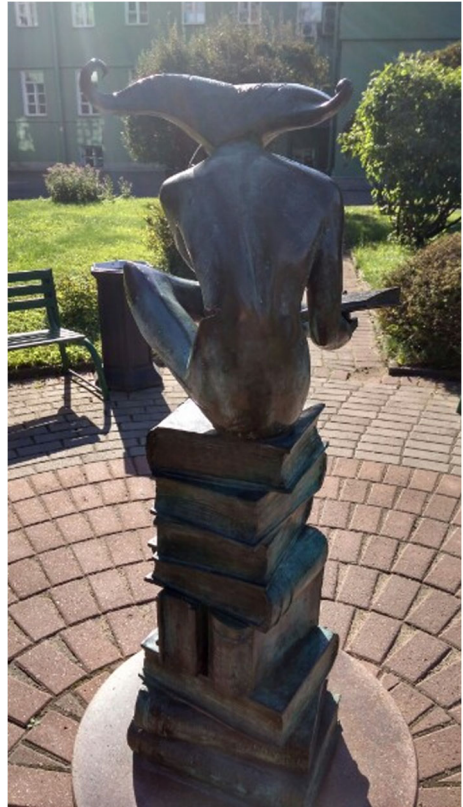
“Some people love autumn. Look, what a wild rose (Fig. 7)! To my mind, wild rose is a great deceiver. As children, we picked these berries, awaiting sweetness, but what was inside? Nasty prickly bones, which you cannot spit out just like that, they prick the whole tongue! Until now, I cannot force myself to believe in its healing properties. Wild rose proves the fact that much in the world is not what it seems. My favorite topic and wild roses are not).”

“The body felt a little tired, and I decided that I would sit on a bench. I relaxed a little. With pleasure, I viewed the back of this amazing creature, and it seemed, I was not thinking about anything at all (Fig. 8). The peeking out sun slightly burned my face; I

**Fig. 7** Look, what a wild rose!



**Fig. 8** I viewed the back of this amazing creature...



closed my eyes because of the warmth and tranquility that poured inside me. Then I opened my eyes, saw a pile of books on which the sculpture was sitting, remembered the like pile that awaits me at home, and my dissertation. The body tensed, immediately wanted to jump up and run home, to do things.”

Well, well, perhaps, Leontiev is right about the three components. It is possible to distinguish both sensual fabric, and the role of values fixed in culture, and personal meanings ... They interact, but they can be distinguished:

“I managed, more or less, to apply the model of the structure of consciousness. I really can differentiate the personal sense that this or that object carries for me, and its cultural meaning. Still the sensual fabric is less accessible to me. I cannot fully comprehend how my “physiological” perception works”;

“Sensual images intertwined in the thinking process and transformed it - slowed down, changed the train of thought, made thoughts more amplitudinous. From the visible to the existential, then again to the visible, only deeper and fuller. Indeed sensual images launched thought processes. I felt it very precisely. In each of the images, I have chosen as illustrations, there is a personal meaning. It could coincide with the current state of my mind, could be different and introduce new notes into my state, transform it. Probably, if I had come for the walk in a different emotional state, I would have seen other images.

However, really, in line with Leontiev prognosis, internal feelings fulfilled the function of “targeting” my eyes.”

Discussing of the results of our first walking session, we “tried on” our experiences to another theoretical model that was presented in the lecture course. The concept of the image of the world proposed by Leontiev was developed by his pupils and followers in various directions. In research on social cognition—as an image of the social world (Andreeva 2013); applying methods of psychosemantics (Artemyeva 1999); in direct connection with personal lifestyle (Serkin 2009)...

## Theoretical Model of the Structure of the Image of the World Proposed by Sergey Smirnov

To analyze our experiences, we chose the theoretical model of the structure of the image of the world proposed by Leontiev’s pupil and colleague Sergey Smirnov (1985). In Smirnov’s understanding, the image of the world is “a complete integrated formation of the cognitive sphere, performing the function of the starting point and the result of any cognitive act” (Smirnov 1985, p. 23). It exists and functions in the form of continuous generation of hypothesis models of the world, at least on three levels—personal, intellectual, and sensory-perceptual, each level including both conscious and unconscious components. Smirnov proposed the differentiation of the structures of the image of the world into superficial (sensually formed) and nuclear (free of sensory modalities sign systems, reflecting the world as a whole).

The first and the most superficial layer corresponds to the sensory-perceptive and representational level of reflection—this is the perceptual world.

It presents as a set of objects arranged with respect to each other, including the body of the viewer. Localization of objects creates the three-dimensional space; objects move relative to the subject or to other objects. The objects of the perceptual world possess modality, i.e., they have color, taste, and other sensual attributes. In addition to the space and time coordinates, the perceptual world characterizes by meanings and personal senses. This is what Leontiev assessed in his paper (1979).

Smirnov suggests a more differentiated structure:

Next to the perceptual world is the semantic layer. Traces of interaction with objects are fixed in this layer in the form of multidimensional attitudes to objects, including evaluations (good–bad; strong–weak). This layer is a structured set of attitudes to the actually perceived objects. This is a transitive layer between the surface perceptual layer, carrying the image perceived now and related to the actual situation—and the static nuclear structures. It is no longer perceptual, because it carries in itself a certain semantic field, embracing the world as a whole, and is not limited to what is actually presented, but this layer is not yet free of modalities: the objects are still modally tinted: they have color, taste, and other sensual attributes.

The deepest layer of nuclear structures is free of sensory modalities. It is relatively static and changes only in important life situations. This layer determines the semantic layer, and the semantic layer “transfers” to it the attitudes to objects of current activities. What is common to the nuclear and semantic layers is that their elements are not reflections of objects; they reflect attitudes towards the latter.

Shall we be able to identify the functioning of these three layers in our experiences?

“It was my first visit to the courtyard of the Philological Department. Impression of chastity and lucidity, orderliness, a tint of eternity. There are things of eternal value in the world, since for many years people have been studying here language and good literature here. I felt small in the face of these... Snail - the first object, which echoed in me on the walk (Fig. 9). This image is the quintessence of my impressions about the courtyard - no need to hurry, meditate and contemplate, the eternal books are there, and there is also Latin ... I wanted to stop – just stand next to the snail, stroke it...”

“The first impression is that this is a graveyard (Fig. 10). Probably because of the entrance, which is through an arch – it gives the feeling that you are going where you should not go. There are actually some stones from different universities. I guess, this all is not about the cemetery. These stones are somehow laid on pedestals and arranged in circles. This is something about knowledge, about the search for Truth... Still not on all pedestals there are stones - it turns out that the Truth cannot be found. The idea is cool, I really like it. Some stones are decorated with plates with memorable dates; for example, on October 19, 1994, Queen Elizabeth II visited St. Petersburg University. It is the year when I was born. I love to find such matches. I also want to be involved somehow in knowledge, I want to make some discovery... It is inspiring. Although it does look like a graveyard, it's a bit creepy here. And there is a stone with a round hole. It looks as a window to knowledge.”

“This is about loneliness (Fig. 11). In spring, there probably would be different impression: waiting for a company to settle down on these benches in the late afternoon; they will laugh and sing songs until dawn. However, autumn comes, and on these benches, as if created for friendly talking, only for a while someone will sit down to rest. Now - everyone has gone, the benches are lonely, they wait for spring.”

Fig. 9 The snail



**Fig. 10** The “graveyard”



What about the three layers of the image of the world here? Our main aspiration now was to reveal the two “deeper” layers: semantic and the “nuclear.” Can those be separated? I confess,

**Fig. 11** “This is about loneliness”



we could not. Perhaps, the design of the experiment did not match the task. However, at the same time, the semantic level was present OK, and it was apparent that meanings of perceptual images go far beyond the significance of the objects we see. These meanings participate in the general image of the world and, in their turn, reflect the latter. They allow revealing characteristics of this general amodal world image, leading existential attitudes, values, and general representations of the world order, and reflect problems relevant for the subjects. For sure, what we see is not only what we see: “Hidden Present, Visible Absent”....

## Second Walk: Focus on Individual Differences in Perceiving Urban Spaces

People walk down the streets, look around, see the same houses, trees, and cars, but what they see affects them differently. Thus, “the central question for urban psychology concerns how the distinctive characteristics of the people and places that make up urban environments give rise to particular types of experiences and behaviors, and have particular consequences for mental health, wellbeing, and human development” (APA 2005, p. 2).

It is generally believed that recreational resources (parks, beaches, ponds) have a calming effect on humans or enhance the processes of inhibition in the brain. On the contrary, active and even aggressive environment is expected to have an activating, stimulating effect on the brain. Thus, the impact of the environment is supposed to be approximately the same for all people. Meanwhile, there is a good reason to believe that environment can affect people in different ways, depending on their personal characteristics. In the literature, certain evidence is present that a place can have a very different effect on a person, depending on the characteristics of neurodynamics (Newman & Brucks 2016; Al-barrak et al. 2017). For example, a park zone may not have a relaxing effect on a person with a high level of neuroticism, but on the contrary, be irritating, because of the contrast between the pace of the environment in the park from the pace of the subject’s nervous system. There is certain evidence that perception of urban environments depends also on personality traits. For example, researchers (Gabidullina 2012) claim the impact of extraversion–introversion: more pragmatic attitude being typical for extraverts and the increase of personal esthetic assessments for introverts, so that preferred places become more diverse.

We dedicated our second walk to the investigation of individual differences in perceiving urban spaces. Vasilevsky Island, where our faculty is located, has many advantages for walking. Here, there is a beautiful historical area with famous architectural ensembles, green parks, embankments, shopping streets, and modern comfortable residential complexes. We planned a walk so that students had to pass several different places; the impression on each of those we asked them to reflect. Here are reflections of two places, as an example: the University Embankment and the Romyantsev Garden.

### The University Embankment

“Celebration, champagne splashes, the waves with flecks of sunlight, inviting me to touch the water. My mood is elated, festive, as if it is a holiday. I have the feeling that St. Isaac’s Cathedral is watching me. It towers majestically over all around, even though it is located on the opposite side of the wide river. I imagine hiding myself in a large glass jar

with legs, and do not notice the people around, the transport on my right and tourists passing by. I hide in my “glass jar”, and absorb, absorb the waves, the mist, and the sun glare on the waves. I watch and watch all this.”

“Now I am on the embankment, the river looks very beautiful, but the sun sparkles so brightly on the water, that I want to look away from it. Because the sun is shining so brightly, I feel uncomfortable. It constantly makes me frown and I would like to wear sunglasses. It upsets me a little. Nevertheless, overall, I feel OK for now. As I walk near the water, I feel cold, my hands freeze, and I think that I should wear gloves”.

“I like the water; I try to keep closer to it. Sunny. Glare of water reminds me of a kaleidoscope, so beautifully flickering (Fig. 12). The only bad thing - the wind is cold, and it is unpleasant. The Neva, by virtue of its restlessness, is not like a river. It looks like something more serious, like a sea or an ocean. It brings back to me fond memories of the sea in my hometown. All these piers, ships, docks attract me.”

### The Rumyantsev Garden

“The garden gate as if protects this quiescent little world, a static frame, cut out from a movie. Everything is motionless there, the wind does not blow, and there are stock-still lonely figures on the benches. The sun shine through the branches of the oak trees. Time stopped. It seems that if you sit on this bench all day long, you will fall into another dimension. Very meditative and cozy place. Frozen time does not scare. It even seemed to me that nobody moved there except for us. The only annoyance is that some scamps have painted the Rumyantsev stele, but the stele was so indifferent to this that street artists could not degrade its dignity and left disappointed.”

“The tomb symphony. One feels like to close his eyes and draw back - slowly, looking back at the sun that peeps out from behind the trees. Here are less people than in other places, but still it is noisy and a lot of marble everywhere. I feel anxiety, no way to calm down at this place. Nowhere to hide here. It seems that you are under the trees, and shadows glide across the ground, but you feel that these trees cannot protect you, because it is impossible to hide yourself from the noise of the traffic. It penetrates;

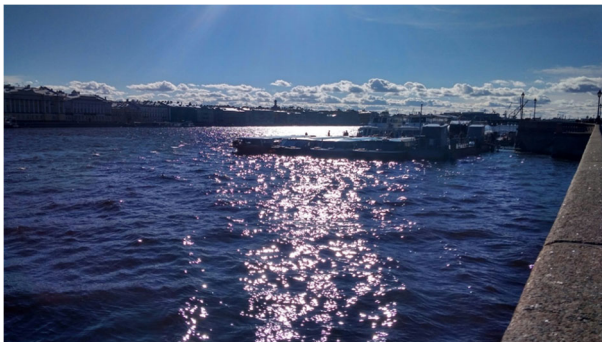


Fig. 12 The Neva Embankment

you can hear many sounds from the road: cars and people. The overall feeling is far less secure here than at the embankment. My state of mind here is rather more excited, it is very difficult to relax and feel oneself in harmony. There are a lot of monuments, classical attributes and smells of tombstone here. Despite the fact that the sun is flashing, it seems rather a dead winter; you might be willing to stay here if you dwell in melancholy, otherwise you would run away from here - if you were in an elevated state. I would rather run through, leave it behind, and not think about this place anymore.”

“This place for me is very ... so let us say, personally significant, pleasant. It causes special emotions. It is a very comfortable place, it gives one some kind of stability due to the fact that there is a high column in the middle of the park, and tall trees around it. All this creates a state of security and comfort. This place, more than the previous one, speaks of autumn, obviously because there are many trees, many yellowing and reddening leaves. The dried-up fountain reminds me of my hometown, because fountains there never function, this brings childhood memories. There is such an atmosphere here ... I do not know, as if there should be a library nearby; here I would like to sit down on a bench and read a book or perform some study assignment.”

“The park is very similar to the Mariinsky park in Kiev. I remember an evening of French music and dance, in May, it was warm, and we ate sandwiches and drank juice. It was a very nice evening.”

“It is nice here, but my hands are getting cold. There is some kind of pillar, incomprehensible, and a monument of some kind, I do not know to whom. I feel awkward when I feel that I do not know something. I like the lanterns here; they are as if they need to be unscrewed and lighted. Just like in the *Le Petit Prince*.”

“I am here for the first time. From afar, I really liked this place. Beautiful trees, and in the crowns of some of those the sun was playing, and they were painted in such a delicate transparent-lime color. It was very gentle and reminded of summer. However, when I went inside, passing through a dark fence, everything changed. Inside it was a little dark, because of tall trees, there was a stele, a dark fountain; a bust on the monument reminded of a cemetery - an old one, where poets and all famous people of the past lie. People of the present visit them, put flowers and read inscriptions on their graves. I used to love cemeteries, but I always visited them on sunny days and in a good mood. An investigator wakes up in me there, I like to imagine whom these people were, where they lived, what they did... The fountain was not functioning, as if to remind that what has recently been full of life may well dry out and become lifeless. My mood deteriorated, there appeared a vague anxiety associated with my real life circumstances, and thus, I hurried out of there.”

Our data confirm that urban spaces are perceived differently by different people and make it possible to outline the factors that determine individual differences in perception. The connection with the past experience of the respondents is striking, above all the associations with the places where the subjects' childhood and youth passed (as Milgram predicted). For some, this is the memory of a seaside city that turns the Neva into a sea; for some, it is the Mariinsky Park in Kiev...

Perhaps the expressed manifestation of these associations can be explained by the fact that the students who have recently come to St. Petersburg have nostalgia for their native places,



which forms the corresponding dominant of perception. A separate class of associations with the past are memories of events directly related to the place we visit: “This place for me is very ... so let’s say, personally significant...”

However, we think that it is not only associations with past experience that cause individual diversity of impressions. We assume that there are deeper links of a general kind, perhaps at the level of basic personality traits or even neurodynamics. Thus, for some, tall trees seem to be like a shelter, they call to hide and relax in the shadow, and the bright glare of the sun on the embankment is annoying and irritating. For others, trees are scary and their shadow seems a threat. These people feel more secure on the crowded sun-filled promenade than in the shady garden.

More material on this issue we collected on our third walk.

## **The Third Walk—Favorite Places and Unloved Places**

Why do we like some places and dislike other? Is it possible to use our method to find out what factors determine the choice of places loved and unloved by us and what our choice reveals in ourselves? The route of the third walk, our students have chosen for themselves, each of them. The task was to visit a favorite place and a place that you do not like and describe the impressions of each place.

### **Reflections on Favorite Places**

“Red Rostral columns are an incredible symbol! Like beacons, they signal that I am in the place where I belong. I want to believe it.”

“It was in this courtyard that I had a very vivid peak experience, when one autumn day I went out onto the porch, stopped, and time seemed to slow down. Yellow leaves fell from a maple tree, as if in slow motion movie, the city roared somewhere far away and children’s voices could be heard. Seconds were filled with sun, bright light, morning joy, and I experienced such fullness of this life, such meaningfulness, that I remember it clearly until now. It seems that every morning when I go out onto this porch I feel an echo of that state.”

“There are many pretty open, deserted places around. I remember when I just arrived to St.Petersburg to pass the entrance exams to the University; I could not find here my hostel. I wandered around and it was so cool! There are some scattered buildings, trees; a forest is nearby... this is all really mine. ... My parents and I often walked in the woods when I was a child, maybe because there were hardly many other entertainments in the city. We skated from the hills in winter, and once I even buried some “treasure” in the wood, brought my parents there, drew them a map so that they would find this “treasure!” In general, I spent half my childhood in the forest. I watched recently an interview with Carl Jung on TV. The interview was taken at his home in Zurich; it seemed to me that the house stood on the bank of a river. I think that in old age I, probably, would move closer to the forest too, I would live there like him, alone. What could be better than this?”

“I like urban spaces; I adore the crowd, cafes, strange places and shop windows. I like the city to challenge me. As my favorite sociological concept of “City as a party. The city that calls to go out!” Well, here is the coolest place my route! Gallery called ... sorry, “Pork Snout”, which exhibits, for example, juicy pictures of outrageous animal painter Vasya Lozhkin... The entrance to this place hides in a well yard near Fontanka river. The three pigs on the signboard without a name cause laughter and set up in a joking way. This place is also typical of St. Petersburg for me. Bohemian, underground. Fashionable. Still at the same time inside - poor and smelling with mold - some kind of the spirit of Dostoevsky’s Petersburg. Pigs are great! This place is really cool!”

“I have a ritual: I always go to the university along the embankment, I look at the water and I really charge with positive mood. This embankment, from Tuchkov Bridge to Birgevoi Bridge, for me is the symbol of the University. When I dreamed of psychology, I used to go to the university entrance exam preparation courses, and after the studies, in the evening, I walked to the subway along this path and watched the sunset. Then the place itself affected me in a certain way. I feel its influence even now, since I myself endowed it with the significance, it is a symbol of freedom and of the opportunity to engage in my favorite work, overcoming difficulties. I am sure that this place will be my favorite for many years to come, even if I move somewhere else.”

## Unloved Places

“I have recently been in a huge hypermarket. I always feel very uncomfortable in such places – the light is too bright, too many people, a clumsy basket in the hands or a hulking trolley... I dislike many things in such places, but perhaps most of all - my sense of self. As soon as I linger here a little, I start to “lose myself”; I am dizzy, I blank and completely forget what I came here for, and I have to stop and concentrate.”

“The unloved place for me is the intersection of Maliy Prospekt PS and Ordinarnaya Street. At this intersection on opposite sides of Maliy Prospekt there are two buildings. One abandoned, on restoration and tightened with this terrible green grid. Opposite it is a brick-colored house, multi-stored, which has not restored for a long time, with some terrible balconies, glazed in different ways. At this place, for some reason, it always blows cold. From the abandoned building, it smells as it does in abandoned buildings. The avenue here is quite narrow, so it seems that the buildings are piling on you and are now crumbling to dust, and they will bury everyone who goes next to them under their rubble. I try to run quickly through this place, because behind it begins the cozy part of Maliy Prospekt, with its toy crossroads and narrow sidewalks. At the emotional level, I feel an inexplicable fear here. These are not the only houses in St. Petersburg, that are tightened in nets and require restoration. However, it is from these two that some kind of dead cold blows. At the body level, I seem to shrink, draw my head into my shoulders, and quicken my step.”

“It is the place of the bus terminus at the Kirovsky Zavod metro station, and although it is not at all a city outskirts, everything here looks like a godforsaken place. Here even the

sky is different. It is even grayer than in other parts of the city. It is very sad and dreary here, it's like an island cut off from civilization.”

“I do not like the suburbs of St. Petersburg - Peterhof and Pushkin. They are certainly beautiful, picturesque, and nice for walking. However, I do not like them because of their density, the difficulty of the rout there, some sort of refinement and the feeling of boredom that I often feel there. We find ourselves in Pushkin, in the Lower Park. Of course, I know its history; I have visited the palaces with excursions. However, I do not like it. Expensive. Somehow tedious, somehow all too predictable and at the same time impersonal. Huge crowds of tourists who stare at you. I sometimes even get a headache from this. I could never understand if the sculptures in the park are authentic or are they copies. It seems like copies... This is a place for photo shoots and weddings. I do not like it. It is cold here, because, despite the sunny day, it is still very shady. As soon as the sun disappears, it turns dark because of the huge trees. The proximity of cold water and dark green spreading larches mentally depress me. In this place, I often hear arrogant dialogues concerning the fact that somebody pronounced some word incorrectly... There is something hypocritical here.... There is too little vitality, life, for me here. All kind of framework.”

It clearly shows that even the style of descriptions of favorite and unloved places, the texts telling about them, have clearly expressed differences. The respondents themselves marked this in the course of the discussion that followed the walk:

In the descriptions of the favorite places, there are often bright colors, expressive positive attributes of the objects that are present in this place and positive evaluations: “White snow contrasts beautifully with the red columns”; “I like the way the square is decorated”; “A building with columns is majestic”...

The descriptions of places unloved featured by negative attributes and evaluations of the scene: “Hum, drill noise, quarrels - I do not like that” “terrible balconies, glazed in different ways”...

Interestingly, personal memories, dreams, and fantasies are woven into reflections on favorite places, while descriptions of unloved places, on the contrary, are focused on momentary bodily sensations.

Loved places: “...this is all really mine. ... I spent half my childhood in the forest... I think that in old age I, probably, would move closer to the forest too”; “It brings back to me fond memories of the sea”; “It was in this courtyard that I had a very vivid peak experience”;

“I like to imagine whom these people were, where they lived, what they did”; “I like the lanterns here; they are as if they need to be unscrewed and lighted. Just like in the *Le Petit Prince*.”

Unloved places: “I always feel uncomfortable in such places” “A lot of people, I am often pushed by a cart”; “I am dizzy, I blank and completely forget what I came here for”; “I seem to shrink, draw my head into my shoulders, and quicken my step.”

I would like to mention one more observation regarding the theoretical model of the image of the world, which has been discussed in the text above, which proposes to assume that we move from the surface layers of the image of the world (the “perceptual world”) to the deep nuclear layers, and the modal characteristics of the objects are lost. Our data allow formulating a hypothesis that modal characteristics can grow into the depths of the image of the world. So, favorite places become a part of the image of the world, not only on the perceptual level, in

context of the current situation, but also germinate on the deep nuclear levels, acquire generalized meanings, without losing their modal characteristics:

“...this embankment is a symbol of freedom and of the opportunity to engage in my favorite work”; “Like beacons, Rostral Columns signal that I am in the place where I belong.”

“I define a favorite place of mine according to this criterion: when I want it to be only and exclusively mine. When I see someone else walking there, I feel like jealous. It was the same with the forest in my city. I needed it to be just my place.”

“As if shamans drew magical power from rivers, we can get inspiration through looking at urban landscapes. Significant places evoke in us an emotional response that we need. They help our self-regulation. They support us. They are part of our living space.”

## Self-Discovery and Regulation

We aimed at revealing general patterns of interaction of people with urban environment including the due spectrum of individual reactions. Therefore, it turned out to be unexpected for me that in the course of discussions, the participants noted among the main results of the work two effects that, being a sort of by-effect of the investigation, turned out to be extremely important and interesting for them.

First, the self-reflection of the impressions of the environment turned out to be a means of self-discovery. It brought some new knowledge about oneself, sometimes surprising, helping to reveal something about oneself, which was not obvious before:

“I noticed some interesting patterns in concern to what places and objects attract me, and how I describe them. For me attractive are images of femininity. I would stand by for a long time. I describe those focusing on cultural aspects, with associations with myths, legends. Often I use the word “graceful” describing them.”

“I like unusual places full of life. I describe them as something that is different from everything else around. That challenges. These can be urbanistic and natural objects. They give rise to the strong thirst for life in me. For example, a real oak with mushrooms, unexpected among a sculpture park. Or the signboard of the gallery “Pork Snout.”

“I do not like formally beautiful, but too aloof places. For example, the park in Pushkin. Also things that are meaningless for me. Such is the sculpture of the Unicorn from the Philosophical courtyard. I do not understand the meaning of this figure. It is dead to me. I describe it as a conditionally complex art object, while in the descriptions there are no emotions and feelings.”

“There was an impression that I saw these places for the first time. I used to run by, lost in thought, without seeing anything. Usually I look around, but it turned out that I notice very little: I see little of the beauty of the city and do not fix my feelings.”

The second unexpected result was a kind of “therapeutic effect” of our walks, noticed by the participants:

“The emotional state did not qualitatively change much, but the degree of unpleasant emotions decreased, thoughts ceased to be irritating and annoying, became more fluid and faded into the background.”

“Unpleasant emotions did not disappear, even new ones added, but some kind of detachment and contemplation came, as psychoanalysts would say, the observing Ego turned on.”

“The impressions of the walk had a significant impact on my emotional state, which has not changed completely, but took another quality. First, the experience let me be distracted from feeling sore about my imperfections. My irritation was replaced by existential anxiety, a feeling of loneliness and regret for the finiteness of time. It realized suddenly that I had not yet time to see that autumn was coming.”

“Reflecting on your own thoughts and emotional states while viewing an architectural object is an effective tool for studying yourself. The objects to which a person pays attention, as a rule, have a personal meaning, internal emotional complexes perform the function of “targeting” objects, which allow you to identify the source of the complexes and analyze their covert causes. In the course of the walk, one begins to understand the reasons for his current state and, perhaps (this is my experience), finds ways to change it. The technique allows readjusting yourself and can be effective for people who are, for example, in a state of creativity crisis. It also contributes to the development of creativity.”

“Since the technique changes emotional state, it can have a therapeutic effect. Of course, it is impossible to say definitely what emotions objects can evoke in people. Perhaps some might cause anxiety. However, analyzing one’s own emotions and bodily sensations when you focus on an object, allows one to bring the causes of emotions to a conscious level.”

We assume that our “technique,” as the participants called the procedure, as a method of psychodiagnosics, combines elements of projective tests and psychoanalysis. At the same time, due to fixation on an external object, the traumatic, in our view, effect of “soul searching,” which the procedures of focused self-analysis are fraught with, is substantially removed. In this respect, we share the point of view expressed by Lev Vekker (1981) that the reversal of the reflective ability of the psyche on itself is accompanied by negative emotions.

Of course, this issue needs a special analysis; however, if we assume that psyche appeared in evolution to afford the interaction of the individual with the world around him, since life itself is based on the processes of assimilation and dissimilation—this viewpoint seems natural. It is no coincidence that the world of our exteroception is so rich, and so lame and poorly differentiated is the spectrum of our interoceptive sensations. Although, of course, in this area, we can expect significant cross-cultural differences, taking into account the spiritual practices of Eastern religions (Jung 1970).

The possibility of “mediated” self-discovery while focusing on an informational and emotionally saturated object of reality may have potential as a therapeutic practice.

## Post Scriptum: St. Petersburg—the City of Dreams

“The rivers of Petersburg are always cold, even in summer their water seems gray and harsh to me. This is a harsh city. It is gloomy and merciless. It has a stone heart. Beautiful and ruthless to the needs of its inhabitants. This is a narcissistic city. It loves people who are confident in their talent or abilities. It loves unique people, born to win.”

“Saint-Petersburg for me is the city of unproved stereotypes. As every Russian, before moving here I thought Petersburg to be a gray, rainy and depressive place, also a place where lots of art objects of various historical epochs are. However, when I moved here, I realized Petersburg was not the city I imagined. Firstly, I like this weather — the city is not gray, and it is not raining as often as I expected. Secondly, walking along the streets, I do not actually feel my belonging to the «culture capital». I agree that the architecture is specific in comparison to other Russian cities where I have been. It is unique. However, actually, I do not pay much attention to the architecture or art objects, they do not bother me. I think people who come here looking for this very «level of culture» of the «culture capital» create this stereotype. To my surprise, I am not one of them. Petersburg for me is the city where I would like to hide in some deserted places like unremarkable parks, cafes in hours unpopular for tourists, or, vice versa, merging with big groups of people walking through places always crowded.”

“I especially like the combination of such pleasant but contradictory qualities in St. Petersburg as grandeur and comfort. During the walk, I had the feeling that I was weightless, that I fly with the wind from the Neva, which carries me to where I go. I remembered a long-standing conversation with a friend who once lived in St. Petersburg, but then left. She said that the city was pressing her; she could not stay among these heavy pathos buildings, she was choking. My impressions are completely different. As I leave the house every morning, I have a feeling that the wind picks me up, and it's as if I'm on some skateboard flying through the air, not too high above the sidewalks, but just flying. Petersburg makes you look up, so your back is straight and your chin high. I have never experienced a feeling of being pressed here.”

## Conclusions

Inspired by the example of our colleagues, we conducted several walking sessions in St. Petersburg, analyzing the “polyphony of internal dialogues, capturing the collective imagination after the fact, hidden inside the moving bodies of a group of psychologists /researchers let loose in the City of Dreams” (Rhodes et al. 2018, p. 153).

The material we received allowed:

1. To relate our results with theoretical models discussed in the lectures, which ran parallel to our walks:
  - 1.1. The results confirm the Alexey Leontiev's three-level model of the structure of consciousness. Both the individual descriptions of urban scenes and their discussion

- in the group show that “the sensory fabric,” the “meaning,” and the personal sense” layers clearly distinguished in the descriptions.
- 1.2. With regard to the structural model of the image of the world by Smirnov, the results make it possible to distinguish, as predicted by the model, “external” perceptual levels and deep nuclear semantic levels of the image of the world. However, our results suggest the possibility of preserving modal characteristics of images in the nuclear formations, which generally contradicts the model’s predictions and may become the basis for new research.
  2. The material obtained allows to expand and supplement the existing ideas about individual differences in the perception of urban spaces, which are based on both the influence of the subject’s past experience and deeper, possibly neurophysiological factors causing these differences.
  3. Analysis of the experience of visiting loved and unloved places showed the dependence of the attitudes of subjects to these places upon (a) events of the past, directly or associatively linked with these places, i.e., upon images of the “perceptual world” “returned” by memory, and (b) upon the general style of the interaction of person with the environment, which certain urban spaces correspond to or do not match.
  4. Personal memories, dreams, and fantasies are woven into reflections on favorite places, while descriptions of unloved places, on the contrary, are focused on momentary bodily sensations.
  5. Among the main results of the work, the participants noted two effects that, being a sort of by-effect of the investigation, turned out to be extremely important and interesting for them. First, the self-reflection of the impressions of the environment turned out to be a means of self-discovery. It brought some new knowledge about oneself, sometimes surprising, helping to reveal something about oneself, which was not obvious before. The second unexpected result was a kind of “therapeutic effect” of our walks, noticed by the participants. The possibility of “mediated” self-discovery while focusing on an informational and emotionally saturated object of reality seems interesting in the direction of using its therapeutic effect.

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