

Title: Sightseeing (in) Petersburg: Tourist Guidebooks to the Late Imperial Capital  
Author: Stiliana Milkova, University of California, Berkeley

A modern invention, guidebooks prescribe a way of seeing by means of reading. A tourist attraction is constituted first and foremost textually, through perusal; sightseeing and its allied practices become an extension of the reading process. But how do guidebooks, quite literally, guide the tourist's visual experience of a foreign place? How are specific tourist attractions constructed and codified as such? What kind of preconceived notions or assumptions can we glean from a guidebook's prescriptive and descriptive strategies of representation? And what might be the ideological stakes in the guidebook endeavor to shape sightseeing practices?

Early twentieth-century travel guidebooks to St. Petersburg exemplify the city's transformation into a popular travel destination and prescribe a practice of European sightseeing. This paper examines the production of imperial St. Petersburg as a tourist attraction at the turn of the twentieth century by exploring the textual and visual strategies codified by popular period English-language guidebooks and handbooks for travelers. On the one hand, the paper seeks to theorize the process of sightseeing as a cultural, visual, and textual practice, and attempts to locate its ideological underpinnings. On the other hand, it situates the Russian imperial capital within the context of mass tourism, travel literature, imperial politics, and local initiatives for self-study. The paper contends that it is precisely the ideological lining of sightseeing which renders the city doubly attractive as a tourist sight.