

Oh, JAPAN!



It all started somehow imperceptibly.

As a student, I was very fond of the engravings of old Japanese masters. I could and can now sit for hours and watch reproductions. But apart from the Japanese, I also loved Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Petrov-Vodkin, Chi Bai Shi, Matisse, and... and many, many artists. And I can also look at them for hours...

So I don't think that's the point here.

I rarely visited cinemas then.

At that time, I had a sharp sense of being. I liked to meditate, to wander the streets in silence, under open sky. Everything seemed so amazingly alive, saturated, full of cosmic vibrations. But to sit in a dark cinema hall for a couple of hours, staring at the screen from which someone's fiction, or sometimes even someone's 'brain vomit' is

boxed up into you, seemed unbearable to me. The reality was so much more interesting, more complete, more authentic. Why make up any stories?

The Japanese film "Gonza the spear-bearer", has appeared in cinemas, most likely our distribution has given the film its own name as always. I don't know the original title the movie. So, I decided to make an exception and go to see it.

In advertising photos you could see kimonos, samurai, streets of an ancient city and scenes from Japanese life of 17-18 centuries. Everything looked very authentic.

I didn't care about the story, I wanted Japanese culture, art, details of everyday life.

Of course, it was a sacrifice to sit in the dark, being cut off from life, the sky, the sun, but ... once in half a year, you can.

The light in the hall went out. I suppressed the sensation of suffocation, protest and a slight disgust because I was "cut off from all life" in a "black box". A neighbour next was chewing something quite loudly and sometimes rustling his package.

To "drown" and losing yourself into that which will be shown on the screen is unlikely to work. A rodent neighbour with his loud junk consumption will bring me back. I became silently angry at myself, "why am I doing these experiments on myself?"

But I didn't have the guts to leave, the intrigue of the film was holding me here.

And so, the action began to unfold on the screen.

Without expecting anything special from the script, I admired the actors' clothes, Japanese interiors and the typical Japanese folding screens.

I didn't immediately notice that something was bothering me.

Something was preventing me from being a detached aesthetic observer, just a 'connoisseur of Japanese beauty'.

This "something" was my heart.

It was beating faster, sometimes its rapid beats didn't seem to match with my breathing and caused tension in the body. A vibration appeared, which brought tightness inside the body and the desire arose to get up and vigorously do some squats. But my head remained sober and ironically, I said to myself, "it seems that the love for asymmetry in Japanese composition, makes you crazy".

But at the sight of old Kyoto, its houses, streets, rickshaws, my heart was racing.

And it was not just beating, it was "crying"! And it rushed "there", causing muscle tension and a slight shiver, greedily getting into each frame on the screen.

All the horror was that I recognized all those streets!

What's more, I knew how to pin the hair correctly, even before the heroine on the screen did it!

I felt in my fingers the forgotten sensation of the tight silky hair, when the heroine combed them sitting in front of the mirror.

I knew how to serve a cup of tea, how to bow!

I stopped following the script. I just couldn't.

I couldn't bear it - the acute feeling of nostalgia and love for everything I saw on the screen hit me.

Inside of me a cry was growing.

A cry like a clod stuck in my throat.

When I tried to take a deep breath to free myself from obsession, a sob came up. My eyes were wet.

I somehow, for a while, forgot about my chewing neighbour, but now I wanted him to chew and not notice that a mad woman was sitting next to him.

"God, I miss all this! I know everything there. How much I want to go back to that life! How much I love all of this! I want to go home!"

Holding back the stupid cry that was attacking my throat with strong spasms led to a slight headache and dizziness. But it wasn't me who was trying to cry, it was someone else who suddenly woke up in me. I was terrified to think how I would cope with all this when the hall lights will be turned on.

Well, the red and wet eyes, that's can be survived, I think it was a drama film.

But what if I still burst into tears like an idiot?

"You'll be ashamed", my sober head answered.

I have never experienced this split on "the head and the heart" so brightly.

Smacked like schizophrenia.

The head watched, analysed and tried to prevent these subconscious memories from getting out of control.

The head was "here", and what can be called a "soul" flew into ancient Japan, dressed in a satin kimono, wandering around in once favourite corners, touching the shadow of the past with hungry fingers.

My head did not give up: "This can't be happening! What are you, crazy? That's enough already! A lover of Japanese pictures! What kind of stupid emotions are you having?"

And the soul would agree and swallow another spasm in the throat.

But it was not possible to return back "from there".

I tried to focus on the storyline of what was happening on the screen.

A Japanese boy, about ten years old, performs a tea ceremony.

I have never seen a tea ceremony with its smallest details before.

I knew about it, I read about it. But that's all.

And now this boy, with a serious face with rhythmical movements, is showing me this mystery.

He wipes the cups with a special gesture, a cloth folded in a special way...

Inside of me, a voice noticed: "This fragment of the ceremony he is not doing quite clearly, but he's still so young, he'll learn..."

I am dumbfounded.

That was too much! It was too much that I really knew at that moment how to do it right, perfectly. Where did it come from?

My sober head didn't find anything to answer.

I can't remember how I got home.

The feeling of nostalgia and loss did not go away. The world around me began to seem strange and cold.

It was strange to see my seemingly empty physical shell wandering amidst faceless grey, everywhere exactly the same high-rise buildings in the area where I lived.

It felt as if a part of me had escaped through a canvas of a movie screen, like through a Portal, to old Kyoto and stayed there. And when it ran away, it took all the colours with it, leaving me with a black and white world, a black and white cinema.

A week has passed since then. I tried not to dig too much into what happened in the cinema. It was jamming my mind.

Of course, I read about past lives, and I knew that this can happen.

But it wasn't just an understanding, it was a real experience of some old emotions, feelings, another life, another personality, another worldview and that world stuck in me. All of this felt much more real than what was around me. There something very precious for me left, something that had been lost. There was no return to that place. It was difficult and painful to accept. It took away the already poor joy of being in the reality around me.

Once I got out into the city to do some shopping, I saw a poster of an exhibition of a Japanese or Chinese calligrapher. The exhibition was held in the Kiev House of the Union of Artists.

The next day I was already standing in the exhibition hall in front of a long narrow sheet of rice paper absorbed in hieroglyphs.

I began to observe an exquisite letter full of dynamics.

Each hieroglyph was winged, had lightness and completeness. Music.

I listened to this music, moving my gaze from one sign to another, as if it were notes.

I wanted to move on to the next scroll, but my body did not move.

I obeyed. I ran this "score" through my eyes, starting from the top.

And as I gazed at the lines of each hieroglyph, my breathing changed uncontrollably.

My hand, bent in my elbow, moved from my shoulder, mentally drawing each sign.

My body knew how it needed to exhale easily and smoothly through my mouth in order to draw a vertical line diminishing at the bottom. How and when to inhale to make the line fly and how to round the mouth sharply and briefly exhale for placing the point.

I somehow withdrew myself, watching the manipulations of my body, or rather of my subconscious.

After "writing" the entire sheet to the bottom, feeling and experiencing every line and dot, I felt tired and emptied. Perhaps this is how the maestro, who has put himself completely into a masterpiece, feels after his work. I no longer had the strength or curiosity to look at other scrolls.

The question - "where did this come from in me" – the question did not arise. I just knew that I used to be able to write like this.

I wandered into my Kiev flat.

1986 Kiev