

## Kirill AZERNYI

## End of recognition

*"Let us descend now into the blind world,"  
Began the Poet, pallid utterly;  
"I will be first, and thou shalt second be."*

*--Dante Alighieri*

I haven't probably tried enough to give you (where 'you' is anyone, yet precise, pretty much like my uncle's suit) the reason to visit my hometown and behold the glory of being here – among the untouchable preciousness beyond estimation. I've never compared it with discreet patterns of happenings taken times and places I've never seen, neither described, passionate beacons with their detailed common sense of beauty – its inevitable beast, or am I not the one who is meant to hide, yet unveils the hidden torture of growth. Which one, you ask. For gross is this cup of coffee I am drinking, so transparent and mild that I can both drink and tell you about every corner of each swallow, and breathe it, like horses do when looking into their vaguest perfections, left alone, being here. My visitor, my tourist, drinks his own coffee, the same as mine, for it's been pretty much the same for sleepless years, but, oh miraculous gap, he feels differently: dissatisfaction, arrogation, ache. We suddenly end up where we begin – in a cafeteria close to a train station just used as a handkerchief just to transport him here. He hasn't been neither kidnapped (not a kid anymore, he's probably stolen a nap, and now sudden heat of reality, its pure witness, takes him to the custody), nor lured, he's been taken here by a swift train with blurred windows and sudden stops filled with shiny cars, smoking children, dogs of traces, but the only mystery of his arrival stays the reason. But the reason is something that needs to be created, it's a question to me personally - what's been forgotten here by a vague stranger looking at me suspiciously? Demand is clear, but I have nothing to give except for what I have. Another waiter, in white dirty uniform, is looking at me with distinct attention: he's recognising. A long process of recognition is being fulfilled in his distant memory full of firm objects, which have long ago lost all subjective features: untouchable world of memory surrounds him. I'm not into it.

For what is recognition? An unquestionable silence of anything which could stop the solid presence, the precedent of the liver (two or three precedents may be enough to prevent the third one, my dad has died that way: up ahead, turn right, big picture of accidental title), no bar allowed in this sphere of positive knowledge - a nap between the now and the never. The precaution of your given hand, of all the five milk-livered misdirected fingers. Inconsiderable experience of sin and herd shames away all the possible appearances of appearance. I see a small woman in front of us ('we' equals his worldly-wise spine and my palindromatically red eyes), with a milk-shake she is, the borders of glass are covered with whiteness and thin scars, the straw is crumpled (you do not see any psychology here, do you?), she looks at me with doubled distance of stranger. Doesn't remember me, used to be my classmate (haven't actually I got used to be her classmate), has her hair cut and brushed, a white one. Who would shake her expectation with some witty notice, some vacant sight, some prolonged hat, or maybe the summary of all those, often misled, but always practical jokes. Close empty cases they are - those falling leaves (the only trajectory of leaving, I suppose) of curiosity and indifference. Her glass is empty, her shake is over, but she is not going to leave yet, and I would not like to be the reason of it.

Here we are beyond presence and departure, held carelessly with the help of details taken into any consideration. I've had a small scar on my toe which I'd cut when swimming in a noisy lake

representing nature among the industrial improvisation of my hometown. That was a piece of glass, one of thousands (only a solitary snag was, and still, waiting for its reason right in the middle of the lake, where even nosy boats never get), and, when it's been taken away, in my hand it was looking at me through my blood like a remote relative, living from poverty to poverty through your wedding, drinking wine, wearing one of your best costumes, with precision and recognition (you think: something has been stolen, and cannot tell anyone the joke, as if the joke itself has been stolen by your remote relative). Before getting away with something, absence of which you'll realise afterwards, he must see your eyes.

Though maybe that was merely an imitation, a handmade cog whose bare hands can barely hold treasures of what they wait to be destiny, dignity, dormitory, doom (I alphabet on this list), life, love.

Made of us, my hometown is full of solemn fragility of fortunes gathered here for good, of goods gathered here for sale: from generation to generation cheap watches are transported (sophisticated logistics of that song about river that I heard when I was a singer), stopped by the time, their transparent, vivid doom. Dummy tombs are pleased by constant attraction of their own. When I cut myself, someone was watching me from the highway that was nearby, parked locally, looking for someone to look at, looking at me. At that age I had long hair and was pretty as girl, whom the person maybe thought I was (I didn't happen to disappoint him by taking my trunks off), and his attention took me to the nearest hospital. I was fit into a robust seat, placed in a complicated mixture of scents, and whispers of radio - someone sang and stumbled, began speaking, stumbled and sang. There was a song popular that days among the singers and listeners, ladies and gentlemen of heresay, layers of rounds have been made by the rumor (more like a famous resident) in search of escape or death, capability or deafness. With shake, I realized that there was also some dry blood on the car's floor. My new one was covering it, like Jane Eyre covered Helen during her final departure.

After the accident I expected my scar to become a necessary trait of my outside, but it deceived me: in a year nothing was already left of the scar, and I was to find another feature to identify myself beyond the visibility of evidence. The things I did suddenly began to mean more than the thing I was. For instance we take the waiter who did his best and succeeded to avoid showing he was familiar with my busy looks. Meanwhile, I owed him money, and he had no tools to press me for that. He was scanning me with desperate helplessness of a pictorial masterpiece, struggling to tell, but knowing that, when there is a stranger with me, I am at work, on duty, occupied. We left the cafeteria without obstacles, or tips.

In front of his thoughts and doubts he stands among passing locals, but then he makes a step, and I follow. We take the path of several scattered lanterns, one big puddle (the eagerest liner) and three robbers - they want us to stop and, as if we began doing something indecent, a dirty trick of existence (insistence I would say, but who am I to insist?), they do not hesitate to ask.

- The guests, - Says one of them, - are welcome.

I look at my visitor, my tourist. Something outer and heavy as heavens themselves strangle me from the inside, and I become responsible for anything that's going to happen, and going it is, coming and cannot face me with its approach, constant adjustment when there is no way back in changing, and there is only fall performed by things we know, and way up ahead the form is meant to be. I have nothing to pay for this peaks of evanescence, and receive a strike - my face does, and I fall just near the puddle, and look at the things above - everything's been moved to this category. Unexpectedly I receive a hand from my visitor - as if it was a postcard from different place, and we both stand lit by lamp which I thought was a lantern: in reality, it was a domestic light behind a crossed window, left alone. Then the light turns off, and in the darkness he asks me a question:

- Well, what made you come this way?

I am happy to hear that, for at least I can give him the idea:

- I am sorry. Something like this, - I wipe out the inexistent blood from my face, - doesn't happen very often. Things like this are pretty rare.

- Sounds like I should be pleased now. Something rare, - He steps into the puddle and doesn't feel it, - has just happened in front of me. And also I should feel sad - no role for me, I've been ignored, obviously...

- And you thought everything here must concern you? I should remind you that my hometown existed long before your arrival.

The silence follows - I understand that the remark might have been premature and even disrobing, but something, I think, should change from visitor to visitor - there is some common sense which is meant to accrue, pile up in those corners which lead them here, in the open care of misjudgment. I have a pure conviction that, however big the world is, our guests gather outside, and manage to say something silent about what they've seen, and no one leaves the place without new views of it. I even have an idea that my personal mission is to repeat the ritual of sightseeing until it becomes pure sleepwalking - I do not need scents to fill the unstoppable honesty of behaviorism and its misled hunters of sense, or at least scenes which can enlighten anything from the ringing list of demands. For what does he want when he looks at me like that, with his soaking shoes, what could I do to prevent the accident? Nothing, so I just stay local, and do my best not to smile. For if I smile, what joke would I unveil? And what joke would open in front of me, empty as my coffin. No smiling then.

I bring my insomniac guest (he's complaining about sleepless nights all way long, till I get him to his teeny BR with a giant bed and a pocket bible on it) to the hotel, where the hotellers already expect, look at us customary. He beats the automat with coke, without coke (no tally-ho), then ascends to his fourth floor, where disappears from my vision. Till the time comes. I spend some time looking around the familiarity of the hotel, and the keepers keep looking at me, whether I am interested or not. Some stare demands words I haven't ever told as a person local enough to avoid treats of hospitality, mirrors of glass stand beside me - whether I am tired enough to stay, tied to remain.

- Maybe next time, - I say, and believe: all those guests are pretty much the same, nothing changes from time to time. I seek for a thin path leading to my school - its echoing corridors and imposing arcs, here I am, for instance: a guide with several acoustic effects to keep you interested. But sometimes, when I almost feel falling apart, see my hometown scattering into shades and shadows, something exciting jumps out of the fracture, and I see my visitor satisfied with the horror and the glory. Some couple is kissing beside the fence, or a dog is barking at a small house, or wind blows away cloth from grass - I cannot see details from this point, but something that looks like these things (for I cannot call them those - I am afraid of letting them go so far. I know nothing about how heavy they are - what if they fall at once, and break at once, like at the moment of their appearance, when they frighten you with such possibility, and then are secured without any recipe or hope, covered in thin cloth).

Gentle changes twinkle like little stars, hinting about something among what I know, what I knew, and my absence, which dwells in vague darkness, for only a deed of will can make this darkness as deep as it is. Can they lead me to an ambush, break the ice of my ignorance? I cannot even use these lexicities, those laws of disappearances (quiet assassins of everything we call routine) to figure out a distance between me and this hometown, to refresh my view of it. How good would it be to know anything else about our benches scattered all around the school, but they roots become deeper each day. As well as roots of our families - they have already cloaked the world with their provincialities. When they come back for a short visit, I tell them about recently opened bars where we sit with them - drunk, they look around and do not know where they are (well, probably I've just described a situation with a single badger who's shambled home with a huge advertising campaign with all the attachments of a good one - languishing fatigue of necessity, sudden joy of belonging). I trace my reflections back to the list or varieties. My steps are footprints.

The whole structure seems now weird to me and looks like a dollhouse - it's unfolding rapidly like a space music, but cannot finish a slightest thought about itself. Windows are now broken, and images in them are crippled - they give us no information anymore, and are in constant search of a form. I see a yard, for instance, and meanwhile I can swear that the yard is inside - in the reflective hall with photos of the best basket players that have ever thrown litter here they are, the granted packs of junk that life leaves behind the scenery of the setting. I remember a school play in the end of it, in our empty concert hall, about the setting sun and everything that stays unsettled. The remembrances fade one by one and now ignite with demands of understanding - several layers of them protect us from being found in that state of development by the enormous responsibility of existing. I've been an apple in that play (now I speak about it, but who cares and remembers?) - that

was a very uncomfortable toilet, though I used to be plump that days. How can I understand that? Recollection feels like returning in that uncomfortableness, and it is obvious that shapeless man is more convenient. Expectation of freedom is sound, and the concept of it is always premature. What is the point of checking every inch of knowledge if the bars are always here, distributed into steps of tollhouses, and every piece of experience is taken for granted? Does it ring a bell?

My visitor stands among the school's corridors, bored and simplified by the context of my past and its complete darkness. He is surrounded by rings of recognitions - the ones that lace volatile, and die out, giving him freedom of randomness. Some kind of politeness there is in his blunt attention. I know he wants to say something, but he has nothing to say on that.

Meanwhile, though decades ago, there is a young girl crossing the same corridors like a wooden pointless arrow - only with a sharp wooden end, with nothing but a wooden end. Her youth holds besiegements of years that pile up into a scar-less night, slips into the time being. For flesh is a form of time, the only form is time: with time, form is granted. It is only time I love, and know. But my visitor is bored and dull, and I have to say that I love her with her nameless halve-given presents received in packages of time passed, a peck lost in metamorphoses of metaphors: lost in space of detached phenomena where facts build no wall against resolution. Their very existence is based on one. Taller than the bell itself, she laughs among empty corridors and triumphs over the arches. I would like to join her without interrupting. She stares at me in anger when I look at her close. The pupils laugh at me. Pupils and eyeballs (how many efforts I have to make her look blind).

She was a plum in that play, her father (a bold old-fashioned coach) insisted: in the beginning, she had been asked to be a peach. Nothing could be done with her plumage consisted of us - poisoned boys without even a slightest purpose. We have just realized the burden and levity of the opposite - their bells and rings, their bellies and belows, their rights to own. That days I couldn't even imagine the solitude of a precocious girl in a collective of neighbors and overseers (little doubled eyes between suspicion and admiration). Her sleepwalking actions were well-known and completely incomprehensible. Now I understand, that probably there were some unseen hobs that tacked her behavior to a certain pattern that nobody wanted to see. Probably some keepers had her secrets locked, kiss-curved distantly, so that only I could now see it, and bleed. I saw her throwing a ball - playing with walls of our school, saw that the ball ran away and saw her looking for it.

Maybe I even saw it rolling down the stairs, as if they were a river without transparency, following steps without prints. I know that a rolling ball reflects all the turns of space it crosses, yet no space there is for a ball, but only a thin line that cannot be crossed in its turn. Especially you note that when you play bowling and the trajectory is straight but unsatisfactory - you know that only a pin will be knocked, though probably the one in the center - the one from the center: the row has already sacrificed the central pin, and, when it falls, nothing else will happen. That distant forest of remotely humanoid figures will remain untouched. Thus, hold your fingers crossed as the purposes are.

- May I be excused? - He asks me, and at first I cannot understand what his guilt is. But then he says that he's been looking for a restroom - an indiscernible door on the second floor. Our restrooms haven't changed much, but two or three details have been added by time - that details are also indiscernible, and do not seem sinister omens of consumption: their master looks as harmless as its messengers if we compare them with messengers of deed and profusion that fill the boy's restroom up to its vestal ceiling with only one humble order of glory - indistinct signature. Maybe some babe tried to escape the disgrace of men by senseless exploit. This signature tries to add some scent of uncertainty in common purpose of resters to make the room as different from the neighboring one as it can be. This sigh somehow shows us the limits of such difference - as you can see from the outside, no difference is made by the seers. The situation has been complicated by the fact that none of the wall artists with already wasted tradition of obligatory self-portraits (some person, however, has broken the mirror. He hasn't been found) has ever seen the girl's restroom close. We only knew overlapping layers of light that came from gapping that become color on a stage which could only be painted with colors we had - close, but not close enough. However, there was a story about a novice, maybe the sighner, that has been locked by men in the neighboring room. Silence followed the entrance, so the effect was unclear.

Lockers have also been popular rooms for speculations. For once I've been locked there - unintentionally, after classes, and after an hour and a half spent in the locker I began feeling it as a

part of my clothes, some kind of armor (arms, however, aren't appropriate) which can as well be a grave for some next non-humanoid generations that would like to have an idea of how we looked. For I am convinced that a locker, as well as a closet, is based upon basic concepts of human body. In this case matched costumes hanged there seem tautological to me.

But what irony is that only from inside the tautology man can see the shape of his being. According to my experience of repeat, rounds do not explain anything: only previous rounds follow steps of logic that are traced from a lost point of view. A link can always resist up to a certain point, but finally becomes what it is, realizes its simple function of distribution. Will there be sense at the end? At the end there are stranger's eyes staring at you in horror. My grandfather died like that - with my eyes pinned to his massive self. I've been clinging to a loop light that in an hour became world to me - to my never-knocking demand, I've lost the border between the window and the landscape.

[...]