

Collage with triangles.

During my recent stay in Japan, I figured out that I could use the clouds in Japanese folding screens as a metaphor for suggestive space that gets the imagination going – the clouds cover big parts of the depicted action. Only the use of the viewer's imagination makes the contact between the picture and the viewer direct and personal.

How much space does association need? How does the imagination work when the direction is not clearly specified, when the given information is absurd or chaotic, or simply too much – when you don't know how to begin to understand. How can one find a balance between subjective associations that are perhaps too personal, and common metaphors that tend to be clichés?

Launching a chain reaction of associations is one of the main tricks of poetry. I found some descriptions of this process; here they are in my free translation.

Haiku's cannot be read and understood without knowledge of the historical context, says one little book.

The long associative rows start to unfold when things are named and placed next to each other. Each of the carefully chosen parts refers to a number of set associations (mood and weather, always ending with transience. There is a history of associative implications; a well-educated reader with experience does it almost automatically. Without the traditional reader there is no context. A translated haiku is only the peak of an iceberg.

Henri Bergson made a drawing of a cone to illustrate his time duration theory. This cone, a funnel of accumulated memories and experiences, slides over the plane of the present. The point of the cone that touches the plane is where the actual time duration takes place, what he called 'attention to life'.

If a poem is an iceberg, then obvious associations stick out above the water.

Joseph Brodsky writes about his style models, Boris Pasternak and Osip Mandelstam: they find a detail or metaphor and start to unroll it, unfold it. Like a rose. A poem acquires centrifugal force. It accelerates itself. Like a whirlpool, as I imagine it – water streaming through a funnel; the Titanic crashes against the iceberg and is sucked into the water. All the Russian writers I mention here are tragic martyrs of the Soviet regime, a whirlpool of history.

In 1927 a group of leftist St Petersburg writers started the 'Association for Real Art'- OBERIU. The association existed only for 3-4 years. One of the members later collected the archives of his repressed friends. The aim of the group was to 'broaden the meaning of thing, action, word'. Alexander Vvedensky does it by 'tearing the act in parts' – what seems absurd doesn't, in fact, lose its creative logic. The reader should be more curious, not so lazy, according to OBERIU Manifesto. The 'fantasmagoria' of Konstantin Vaginov appears as if seen through a mist of vibrations. But through the mist one can feel the closeness, the warmth of the object. Daniil Charms concentrates his attention on the clash between things and their inner relations.

In short, life is alogical. In the depth of chaos and absurdity one might be able to discover a flash of true meaning.

In another essay about Vvedensky I read that one should move through his poems as if in the dark – from one sparkle of understanding to the next. The poet measures the intervals between the

'clearings' with great precision – slightly bigger and we are lost, a bit smaller and the path is too straight. As we reach the end of the poem we cannot trace back the covered route of associations. Our wish to find meaning activates the imagination. The active reader reaches for the stock of his memory.

We are back at Bergson's funnel, shaped like a triangular clearing between the trees.

Try to see all that Russian namedropping as ink spots - a Rorschach test.

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