

I L L U M I N A T I

A DISCOURSE ON PHOTOGRAPHY BETWEEN DEAN KALIMNIOU AND ARI HATZIS

TEXT BY DEAN KALIMNIOU

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ARI HATZIS AND MARTINA GEMMOLA

You don't take a photograph. You ask, quietly, to borrow it.

Author unknown

I am rather wary of photographs, both taking them and being in them. This is because I am extremely unphotogenic, possessed of a bizarre tendency to stare or snarl, rather than smile, at the camera. Though not averse to the taking of photographs per se, I am conscious of the fact that invariably, and in Orwellian fashion, the photograph one takes gradually supplants one's actual memory of the event or scene it is supposed to record for posterity. Further, unlike painting, which empowers the artist to recreate or reinterpret his or her own cosmos anew, through the use of colour, texture and depth, photography is flat, a parody of the created world at best, and in its subjective portrayal of the objective eye, contrived. It lends itself easily, by its very physical nature, to the danger of being superficially considered, giving credibility to Ansel Adams's words, 'A photograph is usually looked at—seldom into.'

When I first met Ari Hatzis, photographer extraordinaire, he was completing his Bachelor of Arts at Melbourne University, where he also taught black and white photography. Having become entranced by Palamite theology, which encourages one to view the world through

noetic eyes rather than physical organs, as well as Klusian¹ philosophic thought, which holds that the artist creates the myth in order to obscure the art, I voiced voluminous objections against the art of photography. As my final weapon I wielded, I hoped to devastating effect, W. Eugene Smith's conviction, 'The world just does not fit conveniently into the format of a 35mm camera.' Ari turned, laughed and riposted, paraphrasing Ansel Adams, 'Yes, but there are always two people in every picture: the photographer and the viewer.'

We became firm friends, a friendship cemented by spending a summer in Greece, a country that Ari considers to be of special significance to him as a photographer. In his eyes, it is fitting that the land of gnosis is bathed in an apocalyptic sunlight that heightens and highlights all things that are hidden but at the same time knows what to conceal in shadow. In Greece the sun illumines an augmented reality, the epitome of surrealism, to the point that technical distinctions become blurred and ultimately inverted. As Ambrose Bierce held, a photograph taken in Greece is 'a picture painted by the sun without instruction in art.'

Over the space of three months, we reveled in the bizarre, the uncanny and the downright incongruous. Ari faithfully snapped away with his camera while I looked on—both of us working diligently in concert to impress a certain but not unmanageable quantity of remarkably pneumatic Eastern European exchange students of Byzantine history. Together we discovered the pea green lawn of seaweed lining the lagoon of Messolongi like a psychedelic putting green, the mysterious reflections of geometric immortality in the compact eyes of the saints in the golden mosaics of Osios Loukas, and the flaming blood-red passage carved upon the waters below Mount Taygetus at sunset—a silent scream of the murdered Spartan infants emanating from the depths of time.

The apogee of that exploration would definitely have been our visit to the temple of Athena Aphaea at Aegina. Intoxicated by the inexorable light mitigated by the trees and the straight lines of the Doric columns, or so I assume, as a British tourist had trod on my glasses minutes before,

¹ Jean Bernard Klus, a fictional mathematician and philosopher created by Australian writer David Solomon.

causing me to take in the scene only through my noetic eyes, Ari lay on the ground and stared up at the temple above him. Then he stretched out his arms as if to embrace the soil beneath him and exclaimed ecstatically, ‘Φίλε, τα έχω παίξει παντελώς.’²

Years later he would attempt to reprise and analyse his semi-psychedelic experience at Aphaia, in monochrome. In his composition *Temple of Apollo Pythios* the austere, ravaged ruins of an ancient Greek temple stand forlorn underneath the bleak arch created by the almost implausible twists of an equally ravaged tree. Is this a homage to an ancestral homeland ravaged in both body and spirit, or are we to view the disquietingly erotic coupling of the primeval element with the imposition of order as intrinsic to our understanding of the cosmos? One can only suspect that here lies hidden Ari Hatzis’s manifesto to his existence. The parallels to Egyptian painting and legend may provide a key here. Geb, god of the earth, portrayed often enough as an erect phallus—and who can deny the phallocentricity of Hatzis’ composition?—is overarched by Nut, goddess of the sky, their tortured, unrequited lust exacerbated by their father Shu, the god of space and light, who separates them in order for the universe to come into being.

It is this attitude to photography, that of a lover perennially exploring the labyrinthine and sensuous curves of his beloved’s corporeal and psychic existence, that marks Ari Hatzis as a truly accomplished photographer. Returning from Greece, we gradually lost touch, though I still have a black and white photograph he had taken of me, on the back of which he had scrawled, ‘If you’re photographing in colour you show the colour of their clothes—if you use black and white, you will show the colour of their soul.’ These words emerge from the page and attach themselves to his startling photograph *All for Charity*, a stark and yet earthily emotive portrayal of the man who plays music with his fingers, a Melbourne icon, baring just as much soul as Hatzis wishes us to see.

² My friend, I have totally lost it.

(end of excerpt)

