

Louisa Vergozisi

“Ο Άγλος”
o ágios

The destination, the
undetermined and the
experience



Part one: *The destination*

What is the purpose of walking? Of using those two legs to move around, to move on earth, to discover what's beyond the world we see. To look for food, to look for a place to spend the night safely, to survive. What's the purpose walking today? Is it the route or the destination? I have a strange admiration for our human kind that managed to use one of the primitive abilities that helped us survive, the ability of walking, of moving around, crossing big and small distances, to turn it into a part of a modern concept for the development of our spiritual world. Because, that's what a walk has become, a luxury, for the western people that have time, free time to spend on, one could say, pointless wandering around. There is a specific type of walking (different from the walks you make to go to work or -let's say- to let your dog out) that it's like meditation and helps people that use it consciously, free their mind and connect with their selves and their environment. It helps them get inspired and frees them from their daily routine. Not everyone has this luxury, for some people is walking still a matter of survival, like immigrants that left their homes because of war, like homeless people that look for some food or a warm and dry place to rest.

This considered, I can now place my self consciously on the part of the world that has walking as an option, as a tool for self-growth and artistic exercise, as some kind of meditation. For a long time, I wandered around, crossed long distances through mountains and by the sea but there was one route only that influenced my life on many ways. Back in Greece, my fatherland, I would walk almost everyday the same route, alone and sometimes followed by my dogs that would run and disappear into the forest looking for wild boars. I would never meet other people when walking there and that gave me a safe feeling. The feeling that I could get lost into a world of being for myself and with myself, get lost in my thoughts, observe the nature, get closer to a part of mine that was hidden the most of the time.



The chapel of Agios-Athonas

The walk would start by following the dirt road behind my house that would make me go up a hill first, then go down again a little bit, take a sharp turn and walk near a small river. Then, pass by some cherry trees and when the cypresses would appear I knew my destination was getting closer. At last, I had to follow a path paved with stones that would lead me to the top of another hill where the end of my route would be. There, on that top was a small chapel, abandoned from it believers, lonely, with the view of the mountain Pelion rising on the right and smaller hills and the Pagasitikós gulf laying underneath it on the left. Built there, exposed to the sunlight from the beginning of the day until the end, overflowed by all those lights and having the north wind coming from the mountain rubbing its cracked walls, it was the chapel of Agios-Athonas.

After taking a deep breath and realising my condition: the warmth of the sun, the soft breeze, the birds, the smell of the sunburned stones, I let the feeling of gratefulness take over. Having the ability to stand there with a timeless world of light and life around me, colourful and rich, that doesn't even notice the my existence, I would go and open the door of the chapel and get inside the small, dark space closing the door behind me. Immediately there was quietness, I could feel the quietness. The only noise there, was the wind trying to get inside from a small hole on the roof, like a whistle, a dimmed song of an invisible force that for some reason would make the quietness more notable. The next thing I would do, was light a candle in front of the icon of the holy, of Agios-Athonas, whom the chapel is dedicated to and sit on a chair and look at that small source of light. Being as powerful and vivid as the light of the sun outside, it felt like I

brought all this light inside creating this flame, giving birth to the holy spirit inside the chapel. After sitting there, looking at the candle and the icon for a while, I would go outside again and leave the chapel, following the road back home in deep thoughts until, the next time.

It was not only the route, but it was more the destination or maybe both of them, even the way back, that made this experience give it the sense of completeness, it was the goal I had, that would bring me to a place and connected me with the divine inside and outside of me. I felt that energy and named it God because that was what I only knew. After named it light, that poured a warm flow of life into my soul.

All the walks I made after that period where a shadow from that walk I made back then on consistency. Nothing but an effort to reach the same condition, experience and the same feelings. Those feelings became the starting point of a journey where I would try to name them with the help of religions, of spirituality and morality, of understanding our humanity and its need to connect with something bigger. I noticed that those feelings, that where covered in light as that chapel was, where an experience with a nature that was undetermined to me, a nature that everyone and everything carries inside. Some people spend a whole life trying to find that undetermined thing that they feel inside of them, some others never notice there is something and some of them find it and complete their journey.



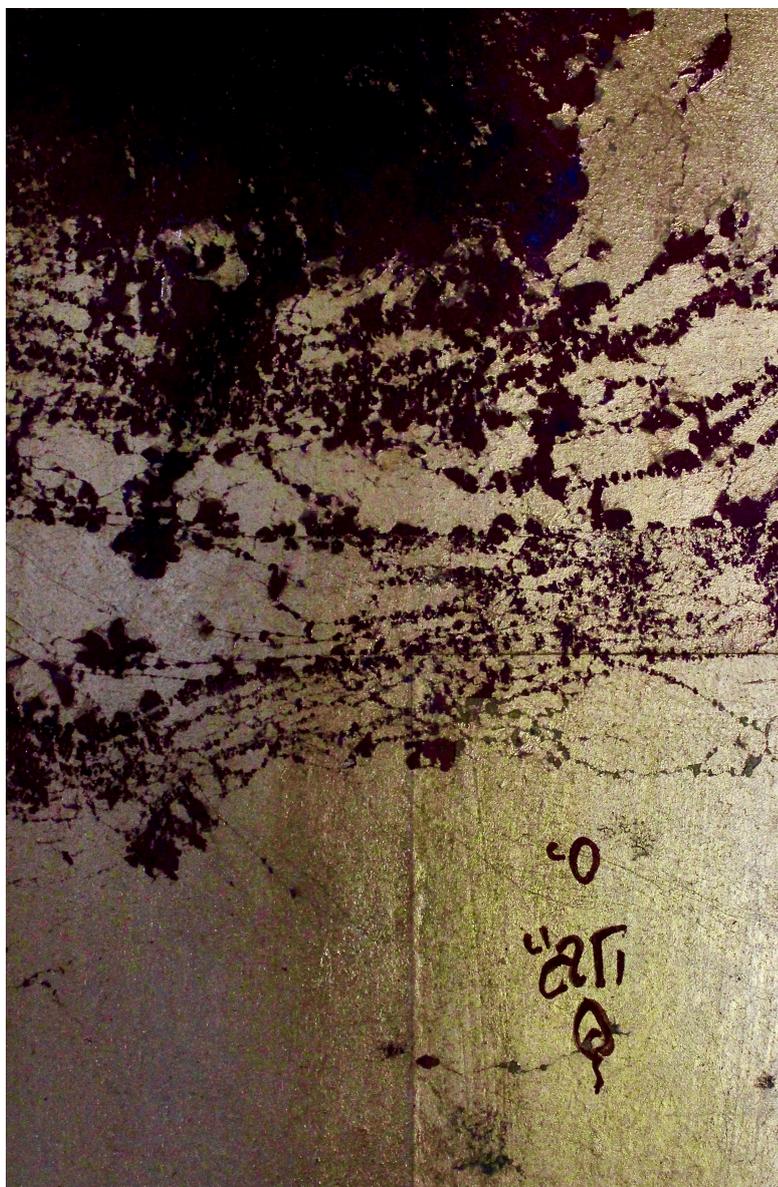
To ιερό - To ieró
Part of the chapel of Agios- Athonas

Part two: *The undetermined*

“But, what would any one say of the very ray of the sun? For the light is from the Good, and an image of the Goodness, wherefore also the Good is celebrated under the name of Light; as in a portrait the original is manifested. For, as the goodness of the Deity, beyond all, permeates from the highest and most honoured substances even to the lowest, and yet is above all, neither the foremost outstripping its superiority, nor the things below eluding its grasp, but it both enlightens all that are capable, and forms and enlivens, and grasps, and perfects, and is measure of things existing, and age, and number, and order, and grasp, and cause, and end; so, too, the brilliant likeness of the Divine Goodness, this our great sun, wholly bright and ever luminous, as a most distant echo of the Good, both enlightens whatever is capable of participating in it, and possess- es the light in the highest degree of purity, unfolding to the visible universe, above and beneath, the splendours of its own rays, and if anything does not participate in them, this is not owing to the inertness or deficiency of its distribution of light, but is owing to the inaptitude for light- reception of the things which do not unfold themselves for the participation of light.” (Pseudo-) Dionysius the Areopagite. Works (1897) pp.1-127. The Divine Names.

THE LIGHTNES OF LIGHT, a veil of brightness that reveals everything laying under it. An untouchable energy, a source of hope and life. Its undetermined state of being

became the starting point of a study that focused on the observation and exploration of its divine definition in our culture and nature. To understand light, one must understand darkness. To understand goodness, one must understand evilness, the same with life and death, even beauty and ugliness. The duality of things has a long history, dualistic religions, for example, believed in the existence of two gods, the good and the evil one. According to dualism, the good god created pure, eternal souls who lived in a blissful spirit world. But the evil god -sometimes called Satan- created another world, a material one. Satan could not make his creation eternal, whereby everything in the world of matter rots and decays to dust. To breathe life into his flawed creation, satan seduced souls from the pure spirit world that he put into physical bodies. And so that is the human, a good, spiritual soul that is locked up in a bad physical body. Dualism says that people must have these material bonds broken in order for them to travel back to the spiritual world, which is

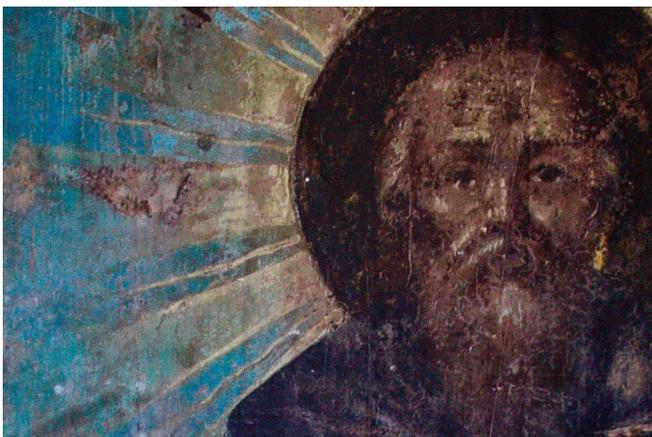


Detail from a Greek Orthodox agiografie where time destroys the gold background icon and gives it place to dark spots.

completely unknowable to us but where we naturally belong. Base on this philosophy, I separate the material world, not only the body, but also trees, rocks and objects from the spiritual world and this is what I call the undetermined: the spirit, the light, the darkness and everything that comes together like hope, faith, melancholy, death.

The undetermined is a void where the human being stands in the middle as he is the carrier from both the material and the spiritual world as he has a body and a spirit. He stands in the centre of the world as the creator and the destroyer, the one that defines good and evil, the one that gives meaning to life. This meaning that we give, at something that we can't define, separates us from our nature but at the same time it becomes our weakness that for a long time we tried to hide by creating powerful, strict gods who controlled and

gave meaning to our chaotic and meaningless lives. As for many centuries, we followed the holy sayings that protected us, as we wanted to believe, from our nature, our weakness and illiteracy, today our faith has taken another form, we believe in humanism. The humanistic religion, as sometimes it's called, declares the human holy and expects humanity to play the role that God played in Christianity and Islam and fulfil the laws of nature that we saw in Buddhism and Taoism. For a long time now, the great cosmic plan gave meaning to life, but humanism reverses the roles and expects humans to give meaning to the cosmos, to find meaning in a meaningless world. This changed the nature of the world's mentality. The external universe, which used to be teeming with gods, muses, fairies and monsters, became a great, empty space. The inner world, which was always an insignificant enclave of blunt passions, became uniquely deep and rich. Angels and demons changed from existing beings who wandered through the forests and deserts of the world into inner complaints in our own psyche. Heaven and hell were also no longer existing places above the clouds or below the volcanoes and were now interpreted as mental states. Hell is what you experience when you get the burning sensation of anger and hatred in your heart and you become part of a heavenly bliss when you forgive your enemies, show repentance in your crimes and share your wealth with the poor. This is what Nietzsche meant when he said that God is dead. In the West at least, God became an abstract idea that some people embrace and others reject. It is your own decision to believe in God or not. If you believe, you do that because you feel the proximity of God and your heart tells you that He exists. But if you no longer feel the proximity of God and if your heart suddenly starts to believe that there is no God at all, then you stop believing. In both cases, your feeling is in control. So even when you believe in God, you actually believe much more strongly in your own inner voice.



Detail from an original icon of Agios-Athanas

As this voice became our leader, as we became the centre of the world, still there is the undetermined part of our nature that makes us want to believe that there is something more, something bigger out there that blows life into our bodies. I associated that undetermined, unknown, with light. I saw light as the main creator of our spirit and its environment, of our hope, faith and everything that kept our material and spiritual world alive. If there was no light, you would not have been able to see,

to hope, to have faith, to wake up and live another day. Flowers would not be able to bloom, the world would not have been able to breathe and follow its natural flow of creation and destruction.

Many religions chased "light" as it was the definition of goodness, of God, of life, of the Divine. In the Christian-Orthodox art, light was represented by gold. Gold-leaves

placed carefully on wooden tablets called “Agiografies” or “Iconografies”, on objects and furniture making them look precious and fragile, elegant and eternally holy. In a gloomy church, in the darkness, the gold-dressed icons and objects emit a soft light that shows off their divine power, the presence of hope and faith in a dark place, that *Go(l)d is light* for its faithful people. What hides behind the light of go(l)d is nothing more and nothing less than our great source of life, called *sun*, as very beautiful Honoré De Balzac described in one sentence in his “*Unknown Masterpiece*” from 1845 : “Is not this the method of the sun, the divine painter of the world?” Although he does not refer to a specific God, he still refers to the sun and its light as *divine*. The divine, the light with its shadows, God and Devil, our inner voice and spirit, creators of the undetermined that changes shapes along with our beliefs. But as long as the light of gold in our churches will remain, fragile and elegant like the remains of a forgotten glory, the light of God will remain, as the remain of a contested, fading belief that for centuries gave shape to our unknown, undetermined part of the world.

Part three: *The experience*

In the following extract, a memory of an experience gets described which gave a unique symbolisation to light and how it afflicted my later study and interest to explain its power and influence on our mentality and culture. This memory played also an imported role in how I try today to “catch” light and use it in my artistic practise witch I will refer at in the end.

“A small sunbeam of light came threw the split of my mothers old, dirty curtains and reached my palm that was lying on the floor unconscious. I looked at it, I couldn’t tell if it was my palm or someone else’s, there was nothing, no feeling. I lied there still, in silence, unable to read my thoughts. Then, I suddenly felt a little bit of warmth coming from the sunbeam of light, on my palm, spreading slowly, to my hand, then arm, neck, chest, like there was some kind of electricity flowing in my veins. In less than a minute, life had returned back in my whole body. I blinked my eyes, took a breath and stood up. My palm still felt warm, the sunbeam was now falling on the carpet. right on the point where the weaved pattern of it had a red blooming flower. I walked to the window and pulled the curtain aside, just a little bit, so I could take a look, where was this light coming from? And there, there was the outside world, bright and endless. Drowning in shades of clean light, every brick, every leaf, every cell was covered from it vividness. Drowning in warmth, in life -a sea of life. I closed the curtain and left my hand rest, then I looked back at my small, dark room and thought of me, standing there not an apart of this beautiful, luminous, outside world, I was a part of this miserable room. How deeply did I want to escape and find light, my light, that breathed life into my dead body, that passed through the split of the curtains, called me friendly, cuddled me softly. With a move that came out uncontrollably , I opened the curtain and within a second my room was not gloomy and miserable as it was before, I was not a part of that dark place anymore, I was now, light. The light, it was, the God inside me.” (May 2016, Greece)

The feeling of “*the light is, the God inside me*” together with the “undetermined” and the experience I had during those walks back in Greece are the base, I could say, as I mentioned before from where I started researching religions and spirituality. I tried to copy the experience I had or create new ones, where I picture the fragility and sensibility of the light, where I create a new image of religion based on the greek-orthodox religious art I grew up with, find this gold light from inside the dark church and place it in a new setting. I create an image where I keep the holiness, the delighted element alive as the centre of the existence of the unique human spirit connected to a bigger spiritual total. In this bigger spiritual total, nature plays a fundamental role for me, as it connects everything and is our

begin and our end. Nature is the result of an eternal coexisting game of survival in order to find balance that comes from the fight between dualistic, fundamental elements found in every corner of the earth and every living organism. The human, as a part of that game can not be seen separately from those rules that created this game, therefore the nature, that’s why I put the human being as a part of the nature and the nature along with the human as a part of the undetermined. My goal is to create an experience where the person will meet its own belief whether it’s based on a religion or a personal, unnamed, spiritual need. Where he or she meets the fine line of the spiritual and the material world and gets in touch with new observations of the existence of light together or against the dark.



Φοβερά προστασία - Foverá Prostasia
Acrylic and gold leaf on glass

There are many reasons why my interest and passion lay on such a controversial topic, reasons like, that religions have been an integral part of our history as our need to believe in something bigger is part of the human complex psychology. It is also very interesting to point at the shapes religions get in order to survive through

time, how people use them or fall back in them and what they serve in difficult times or at times of fast economical and cultural growth. In any case, every religion, at any time, comes from a need that's much more complicated, beautiful or ugly, light or dark, good or evil that just the name of Jesus Christ or other prophets and the figure of God won't be enough to justify the existence of it.



Still from videos 02: Pygí Fotós, 09: Lámpa, 05: Héria. From a series of videos about light called "Light of Go(l)d"

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<https://vimeo.com/419881922>*



“ο ἅγιος”
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Maastricht 2020

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*All photos taken by Louisa
Vergozisi*

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