

DAPHNE VITALI

An encounter with the Other

*All creatures born by our fantasy,
in the last analysis, are nothing but ourselves.*

Friedrich Schiller

GEORGE HADJIMICHALIS' new project, entitled *George Hadjimichalis - The Painter A.K. - A Novel*, is an installation that consists of 265 small and medium-sized paintings, 29 photographs, a structure and a video, which comprise the retrospective exhibition of an imaginary painter. Adopting the practice of a novelist, Hadjimichalis envisions a fictional person and creates his artwork, telling a story. It is a work open to multiple readings and includes a plethora of references and correlations. In this work, Hadjimichalis connects the personal to the collective, the experiential to fantasy, fiction to reality, identity to otherness, and the self to the Other. The work also contains an underlying autobiographical element, as the life of the imaginary painter inevitably meets that of the novel's creator. In this narrative piece, George Hadjimichalis addresses issues such as the human body and the human soul, illness, loss, memory, psychosis, and death.

The title of the project and, by extension, the title of the exhibition, is, in essence, the information given about a book. *George Hadjimichalis* is the author, *the painter A.K.* its title, and the type of the book is *a novel*. It is, therefore, clear, that A.K. is a fictional hero invented by George Hadjimichalis. There is also no doubt as to who has created the work exhibited. The author's identity is known, and all that remains to be discovered is the identity of the hero. It clearly concerns a visual novel, which isn't written in words but images, mostly painted but also photographic and moving (video). Hadjimichalis works as though writing a book or directing a film, using details from his own life for the script. As he has said himself, "I take a subject and I narrate it to the viewer through my own experiences and means. [...] Of course, I direct with different means to those used by a director. I'm a painter. As a painter, I construct images using various means and materials, as appropriate, to best serve my narrative."¹ In this project, the artist, as well as an author, director and painter, also functions as a curator, as he designs and sets up the painter A.K.'s retrospective exhibition.

The work took approximately four years to make. The name A.K. was invented in 2005, the year Hadjimichalis created another piece, entitled *A Moment in the Mind of Mr. A.K.* That piece is not linked to this exhibition, but it served as the starting point for the idea of constructing an imaginary person. It is a directly autobiographical piece by Hadjimichalis, and consists of a projection of successive still and moving images, depicting the memories of an entire lifetime.² What's interesting about the video in question is that the story narrated by the artist is not that of an Other person, but his own. We could say, therefore, that the initials A.K. used in the title of the piece function, on this occasion, as a pseudonym, as a way for the artist to avoid using his own name. The piece could just as well be called "A Moment in the Mind of Mr. G.H." The use of the false name makes it easier to tell a very personal and private story, the story of Hadjimichalis' life.

The starting point of *George Hadjimichalis - The Painter A.K. - A Novel* is the construction of an Other person, and its objective is to tell the story of that person's life. By

¹ George Hadjimichalis in conversation with Katerina Koskina in *Hospital*, the catalogue of the Greek participation in the 51st Venice Biennale, Hellenic Ministry of Culture/Agra Publications, 2005, p. 16.

² This piece is part of the installation entitled *Hospital*, with which Hadjimichalis represented Greece in the 51st Venice Biennale.

constructing a new person, Hadjimichalis is charged with imagining the details of his identity, namely his gender, his ethnicity, his age, the time in which he lived, his occupation, state of mind, etc. Therefore, Hadjimichalis puts together a character that is, primarily, of interest to him, for his own personal reasons and artistic preoccupations. So we have a male artist, a painter in particular, who, were he alive today, would be 87 years old, though he died at the age of 60. We could argue that these biographical details of the fictional hero are not accidental. Hadjimichalis makes his hero exactly 30 years his senior – so he could be his father's age – and has him live to around the same age that Hadjimichalis is now.

It is obvious that the name A.K., in the case of this particular piece, is not merely a pseudonym, as in *A Moment in the Mind of Mr. A.K.*, but a heteronym, to use Fernando Pessoa's literary sense of the word. Just as Pessoa attributed his works to literary alter egos, so Hadjimichalis, in a similar way, doesn't just choose a pseudonym for this piece, but creates a character with a complete identity, an alleged biography, a particular physique, and a personal painting style. He creates, in other words, an artistic alter ego, which he then confronts. The difference is, of course, that Hadjimichalis makes us aware of this practice, highlights it, in fact, in contrast to the Portuguese author, who kept it quiet.

In addition, the artist's decision not to reveal his hero's full name enhances the sense of mystery and leaves room for doubt and questions as to the painter's identity. Finally, his choice of the letter K surely cross-references the anonymous protagonists of Franz Kafka's works, as well as Bertolt Brecht's Mr. Keuner, whom the artist had in mind when he chose these initials. The issues that Hadjimichalis explores in his novel are similar to those in Kafka's works. Art, death, isolation, asceticism, futility and personal failure are themes central to the Czech author's literary work, and we come across them in A.K.'s paintings. Furthermore, the absurdity and despair also in evidence highlight the common existential element of the work. A significant difference, however, between A.K. and Kafka's heroes is the fact that, in A.K.'s story, the protagonist's relationship with society is not a big deal, while that relationship is central in Kafka's works.

Hadjimichalis' choice to construct a personality and to create a body of work signed by someone else, allows the artist to keep a distance from the artistic subject (himself), as well as from the artistic object (the artwork he creates). Subsequently, that distance gives Hadjimichalis the opportunity to visit mental states and issues – personal or artistic – that concern him with greater ease. As psychoanalysis teaches, our issues are easier to deal with when they are projected onto an Other. Through A.K.'s psychological state, Hadjimichalis reveals the personal thoughts, ideas, needs, phobias and difficulties of an entire life. Thus, the artist creates a painter to tell us, indirectly, about his own story, his own journey through art, his own preoccupations and desires, revealing secret moments from his own life.

It is probably worth clarifying that Hadjimichalis did not invent A.K. in order to analyse himself, but for the purpose of studying the psyche of a painter who starts off as depressive before moving on to the threshold between neurosis and psychosis. Furthermore, it investigates the artistic preoccupations of such as man, namely the themes and formal characteristics of his painting. Thus, he constructed a man with these particular features in order to examine the life, the work, and the emotions of his protagonist. Many issues, however, that preoccupy Hadjimichalis have inevitably leaked into A.K.'s personality and, ultimately, as a result, the former is actually broaching and examining his own issues as well. This important project was a constant search for Hadjimichalis while he was in the process of creating it. Nothing was predetermined. The creator didn't know which direction and form his project would take. And the project ultimately became a solitary journey or, more accurately, a common voyage with a fellow traveller: an imaginary person who perhaps took on, for Hadjimichalis, the features of a different subject, each time. The painter A.K. embodies several different people connected to and associated with Hadjimichalis' life, like his father, himself, and the Other.

The exhibition is divided into five chapters. At the beginning, we are given certain details on the painter's life, which appear in a text printed onto the wall that functions as the book's back cover. Everything else there is to know about A.K.'s life, we are called upon to discover by reading the chapters that make up the exhibition. The introductory note, signed by George Hadjimichalis, states:

The painter A.K. was born in 1924 and died in mid-80s. From 1948 onwards, he lived in a first floor apartment at 51 Polyly Street, in the Kypriadou area of Athens. At some point, probably in 1976, he confined himself inside his home and never left again until he died. His last piece is a film named for his home address, which he filmed inside a black model of his house that he made himself, at a scale of 1:1 in terms of wall height, and 1:2 in terms of the plan view.

These details serve to condense the story we are about to see. It is, therefore, an adventure through the soul of a painter, who became psychotic a few years before he died. The painter's work is mostly divided into two parts: the works he created before and those he created during his confinement. Hadjimichalis tells the story by taking on the painter's role rather than acting as the narrator. This first-person narrative process creates an identification between Hadjimichalis and his hero. Hadjimichalis takes his lead from the painter's psychology. Through the artworks, their subject matter and their visual writing, as well as through the succession of images and the associations that arise, we can make out the story "painted" by Hadjimichalis in the approximately 300 pieces that comprise the exhibition.

The first piece of the exhibition is a self-portrait painted by A.K. in 1942, at the age of eighteen. It is the portrait of an elegant, thin and peaceful young man. On the right hand side of the painting, a shadow is cast on the grey background; something like a reflection, a shadowy figure that follows him. Is this an encounter between A.K. and his shadow? His Other self? His Double? I believe this painting encapsulates one of the key themes of the entire project. A man's encounter with his shadow; in other words, his encounter with himself. The shadow, the mirror image, the reflection are symbolic notions of the soul and pertain to the theory that our soul is independent of our ego. The various forms of the soul (shadow, reflection, etc) refer to the concept of the Double, which is a representation of the ego. Thus, in the first piece of the exhibition, A.K.'s encounter with his shadow symbolises Hadjimichalis' encounter with A.K., which takes place in this novel, since A.K. is the projection, the double self of Hadjimichalis.

That encounter puts me in mind of a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, in which the author engages with the concept of the Double. In the short story entitled *August 25, 1983*, Borges weaves a narrative of an encounter with himself as an older and dying man in a hotel room. This short story is a sequel to an older story entitled *The Other*, where Borges comes across a younger version of himself on a bench in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In both those stories, the alter ego is similar but also different, older in the first case, and younger in the second.³ As Danny Nobus remarks in his essay entitled *Borges' and Hitchcock's Double Desire*, "this double take on self-doubling elicits thought-provoking exchanges between the ego and [the] alter ego about dreams, the dreamer and the dreamt, which could be regarded as reflections upon the relative status of selfhood and subjectivity."⁴

In the encounter narrated by Hadjimichalis, we have a complex junction. In contrast to Borges, Hadjimichalis, through his encounter with A.K., does not meet himself at a particular moment of his life, but instigates, instead, several encounters with his Other self, at various moments of his life. Through the micro-narratives of each chapter, the artist

³ Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, Penguin Group, London, 1998, p. 411 and p. 489.

⁴ Danny Nobus in *It's a poor memory that only works backwards. On the work of Johan Grimonprez*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildrn (Germany), 2011, p. 69.

confronts, each time, an Other self and a different desire, anxiety, phobia, and other conscious or subconscious emotions that he has experienced at different stages of his life.

It is not accidental that the second and third pieces of the first chapter are copies of Hadjimichalis' paintings created when he was fourteen and fifteen years old. Through those early pieces by A.K., Hadjimichalis brings about a meeting with himself at a young age and renegotiates the subject matter of his painting, his painting style and his influences. The second piece portrays several anxious and animated expressionist faces pulling odd grimaces, clearly referencing the mask paintings made by the Belgian artist James Ensor. The mask as a symbol is also connected to the concept of playing a role, of disguise and of embodiment, which we discussed above.

After the second piece of the exhibition, dated 1939, the rest of the works are presented in chronological order, which is also the order in which Hadjimichalis created them. The paintings that make up the first chapter of the exhibition and the accompanying book were created between 1939 and 1951. On the first wall of the chapter we encounter weary, worn and distorted faces, human screams, a hanging man, a man about to be executed, a face that looks burned, a mummy in foetal position. Faces expressing pain, emotional angst and terror. The intense dark colours and the painting style allude to German expressionism and artists like Edvard Munch, Chaim Soutine, Oskar Kokoschka, etc. This section also includes a series of night-time landscapes that capture a highly evocative atmosphere of mystery and darkness, which deeply engage the viewer.

The reason A.K. portrays a world of corruption, pain, sickness and worry is possibly related to the time in which he created these paintings. It was a calamitous time for Greece, a decade during which it suffered through Metaxa's dictatorship, the German occupation, and a civil war. As a young man living through such hard and tough times for the Greek nation, A.K. creates works that, albeit not depicting the events as such, nonetheless carry that prevailing sense of hardship and desperation. Beyond that hypothesis, however, we could also assume that A.K. was going through personal difficulties, possibly connected to psychological problems or health issues, his own or a loved one's. In these paintings, individual suffering and misery meets collective misfortune and trial.

In addition, these dark and weird paintings are highly reminiscent of the work created by Hadjimichalis when he was young. The third piece of this chapter is also a reproduction of a painting entitled *Funeral*, painted by Hadjimichalis in 1969, a year after his father's death. Looking back over Hadjimichalis' early work, it is evident that his artistic influences are the same as A.K.'s. As Nikos Daskalothanassis remarks in the catalogue of his retrospective exhibition, "His father's death (1968) awakens in him an early 'sympathetic' interest in the *Pinturas Negras* produced by Goya after 1820 in 'Quinta del Sordo' (House of the Deaf Man), and in the expressionistically oriented works of [...] Chaim Soutine."⁵ The influences on the early work of the two painters are shared. It is obvious, therefore, that through A.K.'s first pieces, George Hadjimichalis is re-examining his own early paintings and his own artistic influences. Subsequently, through the pieces that comprise the first chapter – as well as most of the artwork in the exhibition – Hadjimichalis renegotiates not only his own artistic development, but also the entire history of art.

We could further argue that the project *George Hadjimichalis - The Painter A.K. - A Novel* is also an exploration of the potential of the medium of painting. The contemporary "dead end" of painting has occupied Hadjimichalis for years, given that, despite working with a wide range of media, he considers himself, quintessentially, a painter. This project reactivates Hadjimichalis' painting, even if the artist wears the "mask" of another painter to

⁵ Nikos Daskalothanassis, *George Hadjimichalis. Works 1985-2000*, National Museum of Contemporary Art and Agra Publications, Athens, 2001, p. 11.

create the work. Through this project, Hadjimichalis puts a fresh outlook and a new interest into contemporary painting.

The second part of the first chapter presents a series of paintings made with pencil, charcoal, crayons and pastels. These are dark pieces, showing night-time landscapes, where darkness is pitch-black; some are lit by moonlight. Other paintings depict faces emerging from the darkness, while even paintings of the inside of the house reveal the darkening of night outside, through the half-open door. Standing out among these pieces is a portrait with large, almond-shaped, restless eyes and a clear gaze, reminiscent of Fayum portraits. This portrait exudes a spirituality that is also evocative of Byzantine murals. Fayum portraits are, after all, predecessors of Byzantine art, which has informed Hadjimichalis' work in the past.⁶

Another enigmatic piece presented in this unit is a portrait of multiple faces resembling Janus. Through the face, three more emerge, one in profile and two head on, one of which is lit up and the other dark. This is another piece illustrating the concept of the Double and of the dual identity that Hadjimichalis explores. The rest of the artwork in this unit projects a surrealist, metaphysical and dark atmosphere and reveals that the person who created it is unhappy and restless, if not depressed.

The next chapter of the book refers to the years between 1952 and 1961, when A.K. is in his thirties, which seem, for all intents and purposes, to be the happiest time of his life. The first pieces in the unit function as heralds for the difficult tale that follows. There are ghosts hinting at the fear of something that is about to take place, or a phobia of the past. An owl makes its appearance, which, as well as a symbol of wisdom, is also the bird of darkness and death. This allusive introduction is followed by a series of bright paintings, characterised by vivid colours, real light and the female presence. Women appear naked, sensual and seductive. The sense of erotic and physical desire is palpable, as is the suspicion of a spiritual uplift. A.K.'s sexual coming of age? The bright light shining through a crack now breaks into the room, lighting up the woman's flesh and bringing the space to life. Even the landscapes of this unit are bright and colourful. Studies of a female body and peaceful landscapes are interrupted by the appearance of a snake. A symbol of evil? All of a sudden, the woman is connected to a series of images depicting pieces of fabric and paper towels stained with blood. The woman is there, but stigmatised.

The first part of the third chapter (1962-1969) begins with a painting that depicts a bloodstain, taking us through to a narrative of impending death. A female head, hairless, clearly alludes to the treatment of a serious illness. Next, the woman is shown on her back – dead. This is followed by a man's scream. Her partner? A.K.? The man suddenly loses his identity and appears, in another painting, without eyes. His gaze is lost; he feels lost himself. We see a light bulb and a crack, motifs that come up regularly in A.K.'s work. Real, vital light has gone, and we return to electric light and the isolation that the light bulb suggests. The crack and the slit denote a way out, an escape and a sense of hope that is now, however, lost. Finally, a shapeless lump, a pile of the belongings of the deceased. All that remains of her.

On the second wall of the same chapter, the death shroud has been laid over the dead woman. There are boxes alluding to tombs, caskets, coffins and sarcophagi, with memories interspersed among them: the memory of illness, the stain on the sheets. Another memory from a more distant past emerges; there is a portrait of a child. A fifteen-year-old boy, whose face is etched with the hardships of the occupation years. A.K. at a young age? The death of a loved one brings up memories from hard times in the past. The woman's terminal disease calls to mind the illnesses and deaths of the occupation A.K. lived through as a teenager. Once again, individual pain meets collective misery. Next, we see an empty bed in a cold,

⁶ For an analysis of the influence of Byzantine art on George Hadjimichalis' work, see Peter Wollen's text, *Visual Metaphor - Mosaic Image*, in *George Hadjimichalis. Works 1985-2000, op.cit.*, p. 37.

almost clinical bedroom, while the peaceful, covered-up face of death is juxtaposed to that of a man with his head blown up. The image of the crack returns, courtesy of a half-open door, as the need for hope. A little further away, an enigmatic slit, reminiscent of a vagina, and allusive of Lucio Fontana's ripped canvases.

In the chapter we just narrated, it is plain to see that the subject matter of A.K.'s work is almost identical to that of Hadjimichalis' work. Themes such as loss, death, and memory are basic lines of enquiry in Hadjimichalis' own artwork. In his *Burial* pieces [*Tomb I* (1987-1988), *Burial II* (1991-2000), *Burial IV* (2000)], Hadjimichalis refers to death, while in *Hospital* (2005) he explores the issues of illness and memory. Furthermore, the years of the Occupation served as an object of study in his recent work entitled *The Famine of the Winter 1941-1942 in Athens* (2009). The dramatic element is present in many more of his pieces, culminating in *Schiste Odos* (1990-95/1997), where he tackles the story of Oedipus, the quintessential dramatic theme.

In addition, A.K.'s figurative and autobiographical paintings are reminiscent of Hadjimichalis' work between 1974 and 1985. During his "autobiographical realism" period, the artist "abandons photorealism and turns to recording his experiences i.e., to a type of pictorial autobiographical documentation. Emphasis is now laid on the inward-looking, an introverted registering of complex personal psychological states, often with a dominant erotic element."⁷ Finally, the concept of the archive, which is fundamental to Hadjimichalis' work and important in understanding it, is also central to this project. As has been remarked, Hadjimichalis' work "is a quintessential archive of images of human history;"⁸ in the same way, this project, too, is an archive, an archive of the images of a fictional human story, the life of the painter A.K.

The fourth chapter, 1970-1076, is also divided into two parts. The first part deals with loss and loneliness and warns of A.K.'s isolation. The work is dark, and light is completely absent, as though the painter has created it in darkness. These pieces show the traces of a man who is lost, the tokens of his life and his memories. One painting depicts a framed photograph of the woman with the bare head that we came across before. This time, she is shown with her eyes closed. The ghosts and the fear return at a time when the inside of the house seems armoured, bereft of even a single ray of light to bring some hope. A series of portraits, of himself, of the other, of the man he chooses to be, but also of his dark double, the man he doesn't want to be. The shady grey figure that follows him is here. The first painting in this unit takes us back to the first piece of the exhibition. A self-portrait of the painter A.K. around fifty years old, where he appears aged, tired and scared.

The second part of the fourth chapter includes a series of black and white photographs of great visual interest. The photographs evoke, once again, Hadjimichalis' visual and photographic perspective, which we have come across in photographic pieces such as *Let the dogs bark around you* (1996-7). A.K.'s photographic composition includes abstract photos, reflections, geometrical arrangements and games with light. A.K. photographs his personal archives, discarded or useless documents and details from around his house. He takes us on a "tour" through his personal space, allowing us to delve deeper into his personal life. What is revealed through the photographic unit – since photography captures reality, thus serving as proof – is that A.K. once again allows the real light of day to penetrate the interior of his house, perhaps for one last time. The light bulb and the electric light are not on now. The last photographic image of the unit presents a series of paintings wrapped in paper. The painter A.K. has packed up all of his work so far, in order to embark on a new chapter.

⁷ Nikos Daskalothanassis, *ibid*, p. 12.

⁸ Nikos Daskalothanassis, *ibid*, p. 15.

The project's fifth and final chapter begins in 1976 and ends with the death of the painter A.K., in the mid-80s. Those are the years when A.K. decides to seclude himself in his house, making a series of small-scale paintings, acrylics on wood, one after another. In a true borderline state between neurosis and psychosis, he paints, obsessively and with extreme accuracy, details of his house, such as door knobs, handles, keyholes, tiles, pipes, switches, sinks, radiators, cracks, etc, as well as certain personal objects he finds scattered around the place. A.K. focuses on details and creates close-up "painting shots," striving for faithful representation and absolute perfection. What the painter seems to struggle with in these pieces is his need to hold on to the realistic element, in an attempt to stay in contact with reality. With extreme dedication, he clings onto details, trying to keep his grip on himself and not lose his mind. The Kafkan stereotype of a solitary figure writing in anguish and agony makes its appearance here through A.K., who paints amidst a similar sense of agony, torment and need.

These acutely realistic and figurative pieces are completely different to the work he created when he was depressed, and, despite revealing his psychotic condition, they are imbued with a lighter sense than their predecessors. The large number of paintings (170 in total) states and highlights the painter's psychotic state. These are works devoid of any visual quest or artistic preoccupation. Effort is pointless and futile. What characterises this unit is its disjointed and fragmented nature. The act of focusing on the details and the harsh light of the paintings result in the loss of the whole. A.K. thinks he can see and that he still has a grip on things, yet, in truth, he is blind and lost. A.K. dies in the mid-80s "completely out of touch with his environment."⁹

While, as we observed above, A.K.'s work before his confinement refers to earlier artwork by Hadjimichalis, the pieces made during the confinement years are all unique. Hadjimichalis' strength and patience in creating this work is at once admirable and puzzling. Could the artist's intention be to experience, first hand, the irrational obsession of a psychotic man, or is it all about lending the story credibility? Whichever the case, in order to create and narrate the chapter of A.K.'s confinement, Hadjimichalis had to identify with his mental state. This chapter reveals an acute tendency for solitude that is, clearly, not exclusive to A.K., but also characteristic of his creator.

A.K.'s final piece is a short film, which the painter made inside a model of his house. The exhibition includes the model as well as the film; the former being an exceptionally plain, black structure that calls up theatre sets. The film is a flashback through the life of A.K., and summarises his personal story. It is, in other words, a synopsis of his work as a painter in cinematic terms. Many of the themes and details he has painted, and which we have come across in the five chapters of the novel, have now been captured on camera and brought to life through the moving image. The expressionist writing and dark atmosphere of this black and white piece allude to Robert Wiene's 1920 film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

The film opens with the painter's home address. The piece is named after his address, the site of his confinement. Next comes a high angle shot (with the camera angled downwards) of the model of the house. The camera descends into a room and captures a seated human figure, wrapped in a semi-transparent piece of cloth. An abstract image, like a fantasy, interrupts the narrative and we are led, through a slit, to a memory of the past: the carefree laugh of a child, which seems, here, so far away, forgotten and out of place. We have come across this scene before, in Hadjimichalis' autobiographical piece *A Moment in the Mind of Mr. A.K.*, and according to the artist himself, it is Hadjimichalis as a child. After this flashback, we are taken back to the house, where mister A.K. makes his appearance. Elegant and well dressed, he waves in greeting and offers a gesture of welcome. The camera moves

⁹ George Hadjimichalis in conversation with Artemis Kardoulaki, *Ta Nea tis Technis*, No. 199, August-September 2011, p. 3.

on to another room of the house, and captures a dead woman, covered by a black shroud. It then enters yet another room, where we witness a passionate but violent love scene between two people. The sound of rain can be heard outside; it's a dull and dark day. The camera zooms in to a pile of discarded women's clothes and accessories. The remains of a woman? The light bulb is on and the house is dark. Next comes a close-up of a man's hand; the man is slicing his fingers with a razor. Blood pours out. An act of desperation and misery. The wrapped-up figure returns, like a mirage. The ghost and the fear we encounter repeatedly in A.K.'s work are here. Finally, we are shown the figure's reflection in the mirror, the ghost of the Other. The film ends with the reflection, the dream, the shadow, the second self.

The final scene of the film, which is also the final image of the exhibition, is enigmatic and evokes psychoanalytic issues such as our reflection in the mirror, the portrait of the self and the Other, and the idea of the Double, concepts at the project's very core. A quest for the self through the Other, as well as of the self as the Other, is ultimately the *raison d'être* of the entire project. The motivation for its creation doesn't seem to be the painter's artistic quests; that would have us wondering which of the two painters we were talking about. And here we have an oxymoron: in truth, the individual paintings do not belong either to A.K., since he is not actually a real person, or to Hadjimichalis, who wouldn't sign them or present them as his own outside of the particular context of this project. On the other hand, however, the work belongs to both of them. To Hadjimichalis because, since he has made them himself, they bear his personal visual writing – even if his intention was to give the pieces a neutral style and impersonal nature –, and to A.K. because they tell his story, even if that story is fictional. It follows, then, that this project depends on the two painters coexisting. Identifying with one another and yet remaining separate.

As we have seen, Hadjimichalis uses the Other painter to address the concept of the Double, a concept that has been the subject of studies in numerous disciplines and cultures. It is the classical *ka* of Ancient Egypt, the double Soul that has the same memories and emotions as the original person, or the double ghost of Scandinavian myths, or the *doppelgänger* of German mythology, namely the paranormal Double of a living person, which commonly represents evil. The first to bring the concept of the Double into psychology was the Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank. His book *The Double* is essentially a study of the idea of the *doppelgänger*, as it appears in European and American literature, with examples from the work of Goethe, Dostoevsky, Oscar Wilde, etc. Employing psychoanalytical concepts and knowledge derived from poetry, mythology and literature, Rank examines issues at the centre of human existence, such as identity, narcissism, the relationship between past and present, fear and death. According to Rank, the Double refers to the representation of the ego, and comes in many forms, such as a shadow, a reflection, a portrait, a twin, etc. He also asserts that the creation of the Doubles primarily serves the narcissistic desire to secure immortality for the physical ego. The motif of the Double appears in several plays, films, works of fiction and poems, sometimes as a reflection in the mirror, as a spirit, or as a shadow, and sometimes as a natural person. In Hadjimichalis' visual novel, the Double manifests itself in all those forms.

Freud classifies the matter of the double self under the concept of the uncanny (*Unheimliche*). Indeed, Freud discusses the uncanny nature of the Double addressed by Rank. The uncanny is that form of terror that leads back to something we know very well, as it was once very familiar, but has become terrifying because it corresponds to something repressed that has returned. The double self has become a picture of terror. The phenomenon of the dark double body has been used at length in cinema. From the classic *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1931), to Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010), where we witness a war fought between the two souls of the same self.

This idea, the encounter of the Self with its mirror image, which becomes manifest and literal in the last scene of the film, inevitably brings to mind Jacques Lacan's mirror stage

theory, used by the French psychoanalyst to describe and explain the way in which a child's ego develops and emerges, as a result of a conceptual identification/recognition of its reflection in the mirror. In the image we described, what transpires is not merely the identification of a subject, of the ghost with its image, but, that subject – A.K.'s terrifying Other self, and, therefore, the one who invented A.K. – also brings about Hadjimichalis' recognition of his Self as the Other. Through this complex visual novel, which was a long and often painful process for the author, Hadjimichalis seeks to talk about himself through the Other, and to explore his identification with and his differentiation from the person he's invented. As the American poet Walt Whitman wrote in one of his notebooks, ``I cannot understand the mystery: but I am always conscious of myself as two – as my soul and I."¹⁰

DAPHNE VITALI

Translated into English by Daphne Kapsali

¹⁰ David Cavitch, *My Soul and I: The Inner Life of Walt Whitman*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1985, p. 193.