

# The Night of Memory: Andreas Embiricos and the 'Optical Unconscious'

Eduardo Cadava  
Princeton University

*It is after all another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye, other primarily in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is usual, for example, that someone gives himself an account of the way people walk, if only in general terms, we have no idea at all what happens during the fraction of a second when a person "steps out." Photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret. It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis.*

Walter Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography"<sup>1</sup>

I

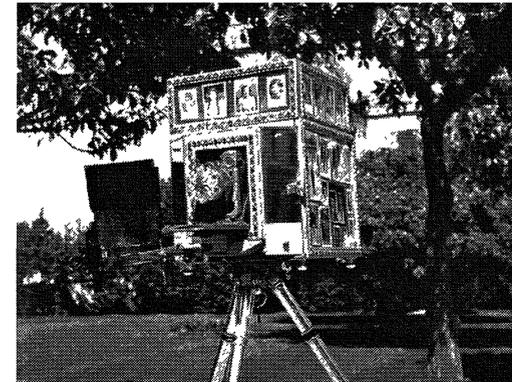


Figure 1 Athens, 1954

<sup>1</sup> *One-Way Street*. See *One-Way Street, and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kinsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 243.

Eduardo Cadava, "The Night of Memory: Andreas Embiricos and the 'Optical Unconscious'", *Culture & Memory*. Special Issue of *Modern Greek Studies* (Australia and New Zealand), 2006: 81-100.

Within the mad world of photography, it is each time a story of what the eye can see and what it cannot – of what the camera can capture and of what eludes it. To say this, however, is simply to say that our experience of photography is always an experience of the eye – of an eye that seeks to see where it does not see, where it no longer sees, or where it does not yet see. At every moment, we are asked to respond to a play of light and darkness – the light and darkness without which the eye could not be what it is, and without which the eye would have no story – and we respond to the silence of this play by inventing stories, by relating each of these shifting images to several possible narratives.

We will never know, however, if the stories we tell – about what we think we see as we look, about what we think we see even when we are not looking – will ever touch or engage the images before us. What happens, for example, when, as is so often the case in photography, a photograph gives the experience of the eye over to what it cannot see (to a kind of blindness), when it leads the line of our sight toward a light or shadow that prevents us from seeing? What happens when our eyes meet what they cannot see, or when they encounter what cannot be encountered? What might this experience of blindness and shadows have to do with what makes photography photography? In what way does photography tell us that sight is essentially linked to an experience of blindness or darkness, an experience of mourning, an experience of mourning that mourns not only experience but sight and light themselves?



Figure 2: Greece, ND

As the works of Andreas Embeiricos would have it: from the moment a technology of the image exists, these questions tell us that sight has always been touched by the night. Whether we are asked to view the interiors of rooms, the hidden recesses of ruins or stores, the inner chambers of houses or long-forgotten streets, or the many other dimly-lit enclosures or spaces that punctuate and compose Embeiricos' images, sight is shown to be inscribed in a body hidden by the night. It is irreducibly linked to the night. It tells us that the night falls on us – and perhaps falls on us most when light is at its brightest intensity, when its brightness blinds us. Even if it

were not to fall on us, however, we already experience darkness, we already find ourselves in darkness, as soon as we give ourselves over to optical technologies that can function without light, that indeed require darkness in order to be what they are. In the darkness that inhabits the body of the camera, in the nocturnal space in which the image that we are about to seize is produced, it is already night. This is why his photographs exhibit a light that never arrives alone. It is always attended by darkness. We might even say, following Embeiricos, that the relay between light and darkness that characterises photography also gives birth to it. Luminosity emerges in his images from out of the coincidence of light and dark, of day and night – from the play of light and shadows that touches and shapes our everyday existence, and that signals the oscillation between consciousness and the unconscious that is the signature not only of Embeiricos' photographs but also his writings. Suggesting that there is no moment of illumination that is not also a moment of darkness, that there is no moment of consciousness that is not also a moment haunted and touched by the unconscious, these photographs tell us that it is only when light is no longer light, no longer simply light, that it becomes light. A light that does not break with night or darkness, photography can be said to occur when a moment of illumination refuses to remain self-identical to itself, when it is interrupted by what is both less and more than light, what is not light. If these photographs stand as an homage to light, then, it is because they also celebrate darkness – a darkness without which light could never be experienced. If they take light as their theme, it is because this theme is shown to be indissociable from that of darkness. Or, to be more precise, if the theme of these photographs is light, it is light as what withdraws from theme, as what cannot be thematised. This is why, as soon as it takes place, the photograph, consenting to its own disappearance, vanishes – and, in vanishing, it tells us that it never appears without its shadows, without its hidden features, without the night from which it emerges, and to which it always returns.

## II

Generally recognised as the first surrealist poet in Greece, and the country's first psychoanalyst, Embeiricos was also a gifted, and we might even say "uncanny", photographer. With the publication of two recent collections of his photographs – the first published in 2001 and entitled *Photophraktis: Oi photographs tou Andrea Embeirikou (Shutter: The Photographs of Andreas Embeiricos)*, after one of his short prose poems in *Oktana*, and the second, a collection of photographs that, over the course of his life, he took on the island of Andros, the island of his family, published in the summer of 2004 and simply titled *I Andros tou Andrea Embeirikou*

(*The Andros of Andreas Embiricos*), the persistence and range of his photographic work is now more legible.<sup>2</sup> While he began taking pictures in 1919, when he was eighteen years old, and continued this work, with greater or lesser intensity, until his death in 1974, the most intense period of his photographic production took place in the early to mid-1950s, after he left his psychoanalytic practice in 1951. I will say more about the relation between psychoanalysis and photography – within the corpus of Embiricos' work but also more generally – but, for now, and in order to begin, I simply wish to register the range of his photographic interests.<sup>3</sup>

Embiricos' early photographs include mostly souvenir pictures taken during several trips to Paris, Venice, Geneva, and Greece, but perhaps the most interesting and important of his pre-war photographs come from the material discovered in the historical archive of the Benaki Museum, in the archive of the poet, Matsi Hatzilazarou, Embiricos' first wife. Their marriage lasted from 1940-1944 and the photographic material from the archive was most likely produced from 1938-39. Taken in Greece, the photographs range from souvenir pictures from different excursions, portraits of Matsi and other relatives and friends, but most importantly a series of photographs influenced by French surrealist photography. Among them is a series of images that, referring directly to May Ray, stages a number of figures with masks.

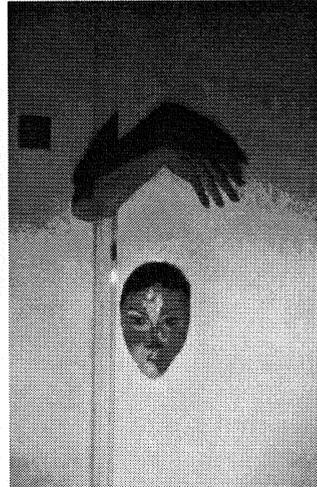


Figure 3: Greece, 1938-1940

<sup>2</sup> See Andreas Embiricos, *Photophraktis: Oi photographies tou Andrea Embeirikos*, Yannis Stathatos (ed.) (Athens: Ekdoseis Agra, 2001); and *I Andros Tou Andrea Embeirikou* (Athens: Ekdoseis Agra, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The account that follows of the history of Embiricos' work as a photographer is indebted to Yannis Stathatos' "Introduction" to *Photophraktis: Oi photographies tou Andrea Embeirikos*, pp. 11-27.

Each detail in these images has its particular logic, force, and significance, but, in general, the effect of the images is one of destabilisation, disorientation, and defamiliarisation. In this instance, for example, the image presents a disarticulation of the body, it fragments it, rearranges it, puts the face, the mask, beneath an arm whose shadow-effect suggests another form of doubling. The interplay between light and shadows reinforces the separation between the arm and the mask and the bend of the arm at its wrist suggests an arm in search of a door knob, an invisible door knob, perhaps hidden by the head which may soon be turned and twisted in order to swing the door open. At the same time, the arm and mask seem fixed on the door as if within a frame that is meant to display these amputated body parts (or, more precisely, this representation of body parts), even as the arm refuses to remain within this same frame. The arm that exceeds the borders of the door's frame becomes a figure for Embiricos' own efforts to turn around, to exceed, the perceptions that frame our understanding of the body, and especially the relation between the body and issues of representation in general.



Figure 4: Greece, 1938-1940

This point is reiterated in the above photograph, where again the image stages a play between hands and the face, between hands and a mask that conceals a face, this time within the context of the reversal of a woman's front and back. These two photographs belong to a larger series of images

that, placing masks on faces, on the backs of heads, on hands, on feet, on knees, not only ask us to reorient our relation to the body, but also belong to Embiricos' persistent exploration of subjectivity and identity, to his sense that the self is never unitary or present, that it instead is always non-identical to itself, always presented as an other, always a series of masks and, because of this, never simply one thing. The alterity and strangeness that inhabits the self – something that corresponds to Embiricos' psychoanalytic understanding of the role and place of the unconscious and language within the self's constitution – points to the irreality of reality itself. This is why even less clearly surrealist images – images that do not involve the doubling, the superimpositions, solarisations, distortions, negative printing, or multiple exposures that so often characterised surrealist photography – take on an air of surreality.

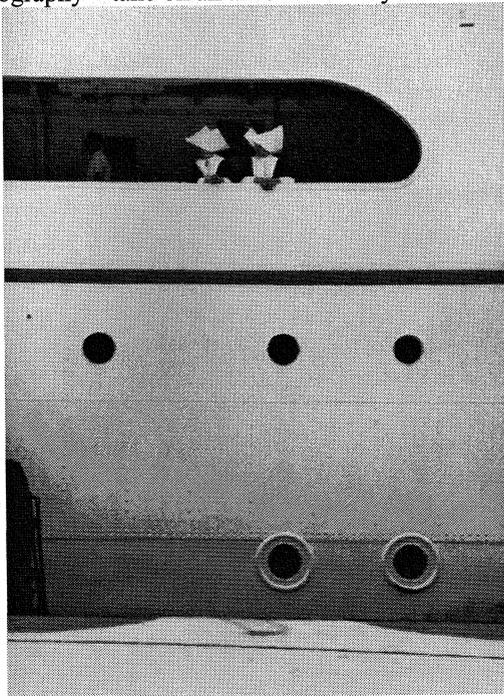


Figure 5: Venice, 1961

In this particular image, for example, taken in Venice in 1961, a “straight” photograph begins to wander from its presumed depiction of a particular moment in time and space and instead opens onto a series of almost hallucinatory motifs at the heart of Embiricos' surrealist enterprise. Here, the way in which Embiricos crops his photograph, frames the ship and

some of its passengers, transforms the ship into a composite of geometrical figures – circles, circles within circles, rectangles, and so forth – whose light and shadows relate to each other in a way that conjures several unconscious associations, perhaps the most striking of which is the shadowed passageway that moves from the top left of the image toward the right and does so in the silhouetted form of a kind of dildo. This silhouette – whose shape comes to us with a certain shock of recognition – forms the backdrop for the two nuns leaning over the ship's railing. This association between religion and eroticism not only evokes some of Embiricos' favourite motifs (the relation between transcendence and sex, and between religion and phallic energy) but also suggests the way in which the unconscious emerges within “everyday reality”, the way in which it touches and transforms what we see. There would seem to be nothing more everyday than the emergence of the unconscious, than its inscription within perception, memory, and the photographic surface. That these traces are legible within the photograph suggests that the photographic surface – no matter how “straight” it might seem, and no matter how faithfully it seems to reproduce what is before the camera – is configured and coded, is haunted by the dark, but not always entirely invisible recesses of the unconscious.

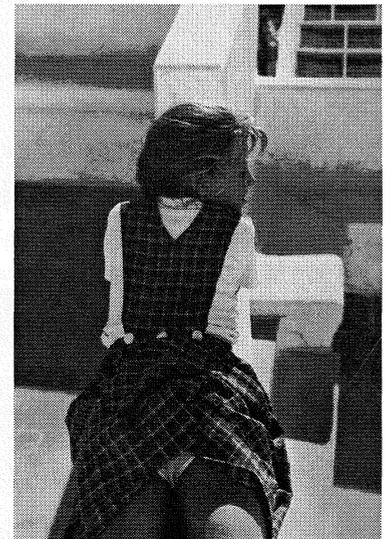


Figure 6: Mykonos, 1954

This can be seen in the series of images of young girls that Embiricos took on Mykonos and in Paris in 1953-54. There, the girls are marked sexually by the trace of their underwear that appears under their skirts as

they raise their legs in the air or bend over ledges. This play between innocence and sexuality is reinforced in several of the images because the girls – like this one, whose raised skirt simply may have found itself in this position when she laid down on this narrow wall or may have been raised there by the photographer himself – seem to reveal their underwear unwittingly, without knowing they are being watched, but in others, like Figure 7, the young girl seems to smile at the photographer, as if she is playing with him, perhaps taking some pleasure in the fact of her being photographed, but perhaps also because she knows he can see what is between her legs. What makes this photograph interesting is that we cannot know what the girl knows, and, in viewing it, we therefore reveal as much about ourselves as about what we see, how we interpret and respond to what is before our eyes, and the role that our libido has on these acts of perception and interpretation.

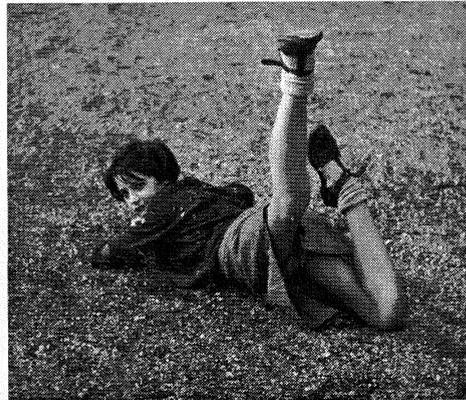


Figure 7: Paris, 1953

How are we to respond to this image, for example?

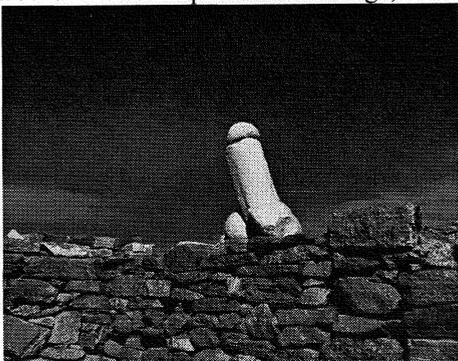


Figure 8: Delos, 1955

Taken on the island of Delos in 1955, this erect phallus (and we should remember that it is not alone there, that the island has several of these monuments) stands pointing to the heavens and, within the context of this extremely important Panhellenic sanctuary, perhaps even to Apollo, who, according to mythology, was born on the island, along with Artemis. As the god of light, poetry, and prophecy, Apollo could even be said to bring together the several interests of Embiricos: photography, poetry, and an oracular relation and orientation toward the future. Apollo's relation to photography is perhaps strengthened further if we recall that his most famous attribute is the tripod – the sign of his prophetic powers, but, in our context, the antecedent of the photographer's tripod, that apparatus that later also will help the one who, like Apollo, plays and creates with light. The several images that Embiricos took of Delos' phalluses also evoke not only fertility and generation (both corresponding to Embiricos' obsession with the spermatic character of poetry, what he calls in *Oktana* "Logos Sperma"), but also serve as monumental signs to Apollo's notorious love life, his relation, that is, to sexual energy – again, one of the poet-photographer's most central motifs. That Embiricos took so many photographs in Delos also suggests that, consciously or not, he may have known, sensed, or imagined that the history of this sacred sanctuary also belongs to the history of photography, since, in a certain sense, it is the god of light who will have granted photography its life. Suggesting that reality is constituted by signs, and that how we read them makes our psyches and selves more legible, even if never entirely clear, Embiricos repeatedly encourages us to understand the relays among reality, the unconscious, and photography, and it is here that we can begin to understand the psychoanalyst's attraction to photography, and perhaps the reason why he turned to photography after leaving his psychoanalytic practice.

### III

As Walter Benjamin explains in his artwork essay, the emergence of photography concurs with the advent of psychoanalysis. With its devices of slow motion and enlargement, photography reveals what sight cannot see, what generally escapes it, what at times makes it impossible. The photograph tells us that, when we see, we are unconscious of what our seeing cannot see. In linking, through the photographic event, the possibility of sight to what he calls the "optical unconscious," to what prevents sight from being immediate and present, Benjamin follows Freud, who, in his own efforts to trace the transit between the unconscious and the conscious, often returns to analogies drawn from the technical media, and

in particular from photography.<sup>4</sup> In “A Note on the Unconscious in Psychoanalysis,” for example, Freud sees photography as corresponding to the relation between unconscious and conscious thought: since every photograph must, in order to become developed, pass through the negative process, and since only certain negatives are selected for positive development, the photograph can represent the relation of conscious thought to the unconscious. This is why, for Embiricos, what links the laws of photography to those of psychoanalysis is that both require a thinking of the way in which this passage between the unconscious and the conscious, the invisible and the visible, takes place. The emergence of an image, however – within either the psyche or photography – does not mean that the image is the transcription of the unconscious into the conscious. For both Embiricos and Freud, neither the unconscious nor the conscious can be thought independently of one another – there can be no passage between them without there already being relays or paths that would facilitate such a passage. As Freud explains in the final chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (a text that Embiricos knew very well), in a discussion of the way in which an unconscious thought seeks to convey itself into the preconscious in order then to force its way into consciousness: “What we have in mind here is not the forming of a second thought situated in a new place, like a transcription which continues to exist alongside the original; the notion of forcing a way through into consciousness must be kept carefully free from any idea of a change of locality.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, the unconscious, strictly speaking, is never simply the unconscious, is never simply elsewhere waiting to be transposed or transported. It is already a weave of traces – traces that have never been perceived, whose meaning has never been lived in the present, has never been lived consciously. The unconscious tells us that we may never experience our experience directly, and that everything begins with reproduction.

If the psyche and photography are machines for the production of images, however, what is produced, as Embiricos knew, is not simply any image, but an image of ourselves. And we are most ourselves when, not ourselves, we are an image or a photograph – an image or photograph that we may never see “before our gaze.” As Benjamin writes in his 1932 speech on Proust:

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin uses the phrase “optical unconscious” in his book, *One-Way Street*. See *One-Way Street, and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kinsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), p. 243.

<sup>5</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 5, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974): p. 610.

Concerning involuntary memory: its images do not only come without being called up; rather, they are images which we have never seen before we remember them. This can be seen most distinctly in those images in which – just like in some dreams – we ourselves can be seen. We stand in front of ourselves, the way we might have stood somewhere in a prehistoric past, but never before our gaze. And it is in fact the most important images, those developed in the darkroom of the lived moment, that we get to see. One might say that our most profound moments have been furnished, like those cigarette packages, with a little image, a photograph of ourselves. And that ‘whole life’ which, as we often hear, passes before the dying or people in danger of dying, is composed precisely of those tiny images.<sup>6</sup>

This photograph of ourselves registers our lived experience and points to our absence in the face of that experience. The self-portrait that emerges from what we remember of our past tells us that what once took place may never be given to us in the present, may never be brought before our gaze. We can neither see nor remember anything before the photographic image that brings forth both our sight and our memory, and, indeed, the photographic image also points to our mortality, since, in arresting us, in petrifying us, it also mortifies us, it announces our relation to death.



Figure 9: Paris, 1953

<sup>6</sup> See Benjamin, “Speech on Proust”, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 2, Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (eds) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972 - ), p. 1064.

## IV

But what is death? This is the question that all photographs ask us to engage and it can be posed at each step of Embiricos' photographic trajectory – from the images he took in Moscow to those he took in Paris and London, and especially in Greece – and not only those taken of cemeteries, of tomblike stones, funerary monuments, columns, archaeological sites, decapitated statues, or long-forgotten objects in antique shops. Indeed, his encounter with death is legible in the persistence, for nearly fifty-five years, with which he remained open to the photographic registration of memorial ruins and monumental signs of death (including broken and fragmented statues and funereal urns). But it also is legible in the disappearance of the places and people that he photographed during this time. The world he photographed – including a Greece that belongs to the past, to yesterday – this Greece no longer exists, and already, even as he was photographing it, it was in the process of altering and disappearing. This is why Embiricos' photographs recall the traces and specificity of a particular culture and history, even as they inevitably mark the disappearance, loss, and ruin of this same culture and history. His images therefore carry the signature of an act of mourning that is perhaps more than simply a surviving testimony, since it remains in love with a country that could be said to have died several times, even if it is still living, even if, in its living, it remains haunted by its past and its deaths. It is perhaps precisely this survival, precisely this living on, that reminds us that things pass, that they change and alter, and this is why, throughout his literary, psychoanalytic, and photographic career, Embiricos always remained most interested in, and most faithful to, this process of change and transformation. Indeed, the very law that motivates and marks his writings and his photographs is this law of change and transformation.

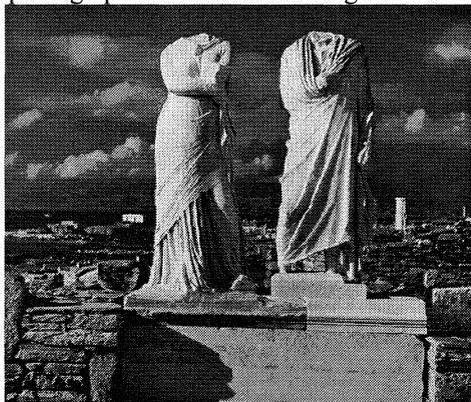


Figure 4: Delos, 1955

We could even say that, in a certain sense, Embiricos the photographer, because of his fidelity to the finitude and evanescence of things, already signals and bears the mourning of Greece – this country that, as he always suggested, belongs to death, and according to different temporalities. As Jacques Derrida has suggested in another context, speaking of the photographs of Greece taken by the French photographer, Jean-François Bonhomme,

the mourning of ancient Greece, archaeological or mythological, the mourning of a Greece that has disappeared and which shows the body of its ruins, but also the mourning of the Greece which he knows, even as he photographs it, in the present of his snapshots, will disappear tomorrow, is already condemned to pass away, and whose testimonies effectively will have disappeared as soon as they are “taken.”<sup>7</sup>

But, as Embiricos also knew, it is not simply a matter of things disappearing even in relation to the photographic act that would seek to preserve them, because there also is another form of mourning, one in which photographs might capture scenes which remain visible today, but which will disappear tomorrow. Embiricos knows that everything will pass. The figures and people in his photographs, the sites, the objects, all these are destined to death. This is the law. As Derrida goes on to explain, there are at least

three deaths, three instances, three temporalities of death in regard to photography – or, if you prefer, since photography makes things appear in the light of their *phanesthai*, three ‘presences’ of disappearance, three phenomena of ‘disappeared’ being: the first *before* the taking of the picture, the second *after* the taking of the picture, the last, later still, tomorrow, but always imminent, *after* the imprint’s appearance.<sup>8</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that Embiricos' understanding of this photographic temporality leads him to title one of his collections of poetry, *Today as Yesterday and Tomorrow*, since this title reveals and confirms his sense of the relations among the past, the present, and the future.

The constellation of these deaths suggests – and this truth informs the entirety of Embiricos' photographic practice – that the photographic image

<sup>7</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Demeure, Athènes”, in Jean-François Bonhomme and Jacques Derrida, *Athina et Skia tis Akropolis / Athènes à l'ombre de l'Acropole* (Athens: Olkis, 1996), p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, “Demeure, Athènes”, p. 49.

allows us to speak of our death, even before our death. As I have suggested elsewhere, the photograph already announces our absence: “we need only know that we are mortal – the photograph tells us we will die, one day we will no longer be here, or rather, we will only be here as we always have been here, as images. It announces the death of the photographed,” and, by implication, the life and death of the beholder. This is why these photographs suggest that “what survives in a photograph is also the survival of the dead – what departs, desists, and withdraws”: there can be no photograph without the withdrawal of what is photographed. “Photographs bring death to the photographed” and, because “the conjunction of death and the photographed is the very principle of photographic certitude, the photograph is a kind of cemetery. A small funerary monument, it is a grave for the living dead.”<sup>9</sup> As Roland Barthes would have it, if the photograph bespeaks a certain horror, it is because “it certifies that the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing.”<sup>10</sup> Embiricos stages this truth in his many photographs of statues, dolls, and subjects and objects in various stages of transformation, subjects and objects that have been immobilised and arrested by the photographic gaze. These images ask us to think about the transit between life and death, and between motion and stillness. They evoke the photograph’s capacity to arrest or immobilise historical movement. Indeed, as Benjamin notes, there can be no history without this medusa effect, without this force of immobilisation that makes it impossible to distinguish between life and death.

The petrifying force of photographic light is evident in this image (Fig 10), taken in Delos in 1955, an image whose play of light and shadows beautifully reinforces this point. But this transit between life and death also explains why photography always appears to us in the mode of bereavement. This bereavement acknowledges what takes place in any photograph – the return of what is no longer here, the return of the departed. Although what the photograph photographs is no longer present or living, its having-been-there now forms part of the referential structure of our relationship to the photograph and this is why the return of what was once there takes the form of a haunting: this is why the possibility of the photographic image requires that there be such things as ghosts and phantoms.

As Embiricos knew, it is perhaps precisely in death that the power of the photograph is revealed, and revealed to the very extent that it continues to

<sup>9</sup> See Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 8, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Inc., 1981), p. 79.

evoke what can no longer be there. In photographing someone, we know that the photograph will survive him – it begins, even during his life, to circulate without him, figuring and anticipating his death each time it is looked at. It tells us that there is no life except the “life that signifies death.” This means that there is no photograph, no image, that does not reduce the photographed to ashes. As Man Ray wrote in 1934, in an essay entitled “The Age of Light,” images are the

oxidised residues, fixed by light and chemical elements, of living organisms. No plastic expression can ever be more than a residue of an experience....[It is rather] the recognition of an image that has survived an experience tragically, recalling the event more or less clearly, like the undisturbed ashes of an object consumed by flames.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 11: Elefsina, 1955

This image, taken in Elefsina in 1955, brings together several of these motifs: the relation between the past and the present, the archaeology of ruins and the traces of mortality and fire, and the relations among representation, time, and death. Configured within the scene of a single image, accumulated in the knowing disorder of a playful taxonomy, it offers a cross-section of all the visible aspects, of all the “ideas,” we might say, of everything Embiricos’ images show, and it is perhaps no accident that Embiricos takes numerous photographs in Elefsina. The sanctuary of Demeter, the goddess of fertility, but also of the cycles of life and death, Elefsina is a site whose story turns life and death into a kind of couple, and whose buildings and architecture are often – like so many of Greece’s temples and sanctuaries – a kind of photograph of earlier buildings and architecture (the courtyard at the sanctuary’s entrance, for example, has two

<sup>11</sup> Man Ray, “The Age of Light,” in Christopher Phillips (ed.), *Photography in the Modern Era European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art / Aperture, 1989), p. 53.

arches that are identical copies of Hadrian's Arch in Athens and the Greater Propylaea is a nearly-perfect copy of the propylaea on the Athenian Acropolis). The fragmented statues in different stages of ruin also evoke the fragmented and partial memories given to us by photography, as it seeks to preserve the broken remains of the past. Embiricos' Elefsinian images therefore bear the traces of a history that, like that of Delos, seals references to motifs that he associates with photography: in this instance, those of life and death, light and darkness, repetition and citation, and the relations among the past, the present, and the future.

If Embiricos emphasises photography's capacity to arrest and fix its subjects, he also suggests that we can recover the movement sealed within each image – we can enliven and animate it – through an act of the imagination. In a rather extraordinary passage from *Oktana* – the brief prose-poem to which I already have alluded, "Photophraktis" – Embiricos brings together reminiscence, desire, the camera's shutter, stillness and movement, sight and what escapes sight, and the flowing, always-changing waters of the unconscious, he writes:

The hours flow through the iridescences and play of the waters, just like the transparent waters flow through the anemones. With its keys, remembrance opens the horizons, which continuously expand and grow, like the ripples of a stone that falls on a surface that is imperturbable by mortal and bastard acts. Dawn is the first hour. Behind it, the beautiful morning, with red hands which quickly (I almost would say unexpectedly) turn and become golden. A lens with an amazing shutter seizes even the most fleeting moment and transfers it onto the surface of a smooth plate of unbelievable sensitivity. And now that the shutter opened and closed like an incorruptible eye and time was arrested, remembrance expands life and gives to every image the movement and flexibility that, from the depths of a fountain (its own), calls forth its most secret meaning. And behold, it transforms the image completely. It changes it from a static (let's say, 'pinned') moment to a multiply-waved dance of hours and plastic bodies with good rhythm, to a tangible and specific realisation (materialisation) of every vision, of every desire.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Embiricos, *Oktana* (Athens: Ikaros, 1980), p. 29. I am grateful to Liana Theodoratou for her assistance with this translation.

V According to Embiricos, the experience of the photograph is always associated with a kind of delay or belatedness, and not only with the interval of time necessary for memory to activate the life arrested and sealed within it. No matter how instantaneous the action of a camera might be, there is always some measure of delay, always some interval of time, between the click of the camera and the taking of a photograph. This delay structures the photograph that, emerging with the click of the shutter, corresponds to the transit between light and darkness, and it corresponds to the duration that arrests what we call an image, even if this image only becomes a photograph later, when it is developed. This is why Embiricos' hallucinatory meditation on the delay built into the photograph could be said belong to the contours and motifs of two Greek myths: that of *photography* (which literally means the writing of light) and that of *aion* (the space or interval of time). The possibility of a delay traverses the length of these two threads. This perhaps explains Embiricos' obsession with delay (an obsession that is not unrelated to his understanding of the psychoanalytic concept of latency), and even his love for the madness that he brings to all the figures that, within the photographic apparatus, organise the technique of the automatic delay – something that he often associated with the Surrealist understanding of automatic writing and that, for him, always encourages us to ask when a photograph is actually taken. Is it taken when the photographer directs his lens toward a person or object, when he focuses the lens, or when the click signals the capture of the image? Or later still, at the moment of development? How are we to understand the vertigo of this series, and especially when it invites a kind of endless reflexivity? And, indeed, Embiricos' photographs are extremely self-reflective.

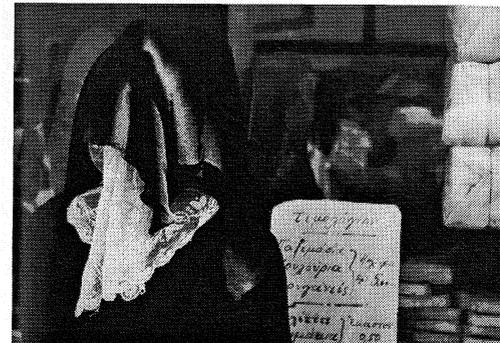


Figure 12: Kerkyra, 1955

They often are traversed by different mirror effects: from the images cast upon reflective glass to the mirrors in which objects and persons are

reflected to the several images that include different pictures of cameras themselves (some, like the first image reproduced in this essay, even having photographs attached to the outside of the camera) to the various modes of representation represented within the images (writing, photographs, statues, buildings, newspapers, portraits within various kinds of frames, and signs on storefront windows). These reflections operate in Embiricos' photographs as a means of photographing photography itself. These are photographs, in other words, that tell us something about photography and not only because, within a photograph, *everything is representation*. Embiricos relentlessly confirms this in several of his photographs, since so many of them stage an almost endless series of reflections, including this one, taken in Kerkyra in 1955, but also this one, taken in Andros in 1960.

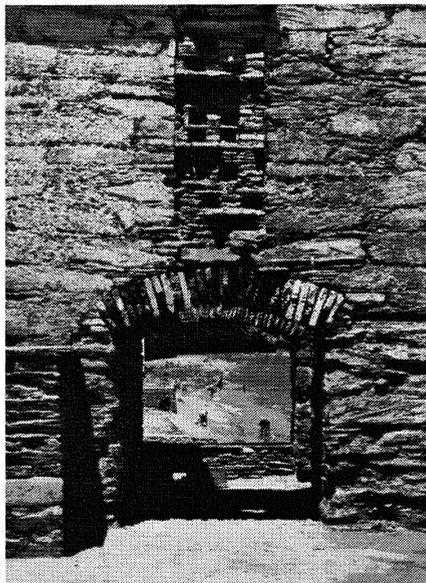


Figure 13: Andros, 1960

This image of a stone frame – itself evoking photography's petrifying force – here transforms a beach scene into a framed photograph and therefore presents a kind of photograph within a photograph. The photograph lures us into its world, inviting us to pass through its threshold. Drawing us into its space, the photograph tells us that, in order to see it from the outside, we must already – or still – be in the photograph. In order to bring the truth of photography to light, we must be ready, as Embiricos always was, to bring it into the light of photography. To say this, however, is to say that we can only speak about the photograph from its threshold. And the photograph is

itself perhaps nothing other than a threshold – like the camera's shutter, an opening and a closing, simultaneously a greeting and a farewell.



Figure 14: Andros, 1954

This framing effect also can be found in this beautiful image, taken in Andros in 1954. Again, the photograph presents a portrait of a woman whose face and upper torso are framed by a window in a door. Like the earlier image of the arm and mask, this image frames a subject that simultaneously seeks to exceed its frame, even as she seems to suggest that all subjects are framed and captured in this manner, as if, once again, we exist only to become images, for others and ourselves.

It is important to note, however, that no matter how diverse these reflexive gestures may be (simulacra, phantasms, representations of representations, photos of photos, photos of painting or of images in general), they simultaneously evoke and refer to the experience of mourning. Within the world of Embiricos' photographs, there is not even a single one of them that is not associated with death. Whatever the represented thing may be, whatever its theme, whatever its content – and even when death is not shown there, not even indirectly evoked or figured – it is still touched by death, by the fact of its passing. We know that even the sun will one day pass, will one day no longer cast its light on the earth. This is why, with a sense of urgency, Embiricos repeatedly asks us to leave

the sun's finitude behind and return to Greece, to the light and shadows that make Greece Greece. For Embiricos, there is no mourning, no death, except in relation to the sun, this sun that illuminates at the same time that it blinds us, this sun that both enables and prohibits sight. All photography belongs to the sun, which is why, for Embiricos, in a certain sense, it belongs to Greece.

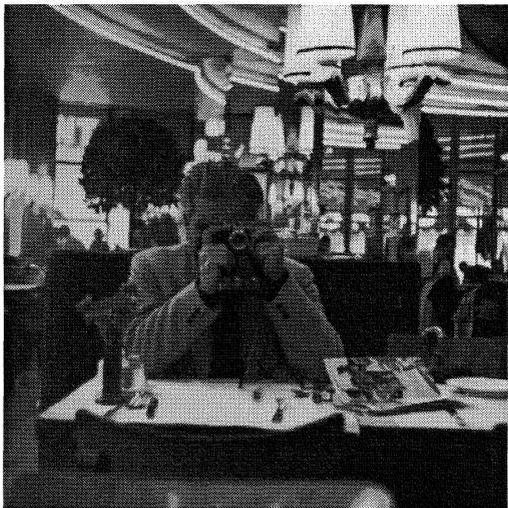


Figure 15: Paris, 1961

And it is Greece that he thinks about every day. But what is it that happens within his imagination in relation to Greece? What is it that haunts him? What is it that encourages him to focus, like a kind of camera, on the relations among photography, psychoanalysis, and the day or night of the unconscious? What is it that, for Embiricos, makes memory a Greek thing?

Embiricos' photographs are the indices of his particular vision, the traces of a declaration of love, and, if we listen to the silence of his photographs, we perhaps can hear him say, across this silence, and to the Greece he loves: "I can only find myself in relation to you, my love, even though I know that, because of this relation, I can never be simply myself. Obsessed with you, and by you, I lose myself in the madness of a single desire: to alter time. I want nothing else than to arrest time, to stop it, to seal it within the surface of a photograph. I want nothing else than to archive and preserve, within a series of photographs, not only the speed of light but also the night and oblivion without which I could never know what light could be cast on the permeable contours of my unconscious, and, yes, also the death and mourning without which neither I nor you could be what we are."

## Friedrich Hölderlin: Cultural Memory as Fiction

Anthony Stephens

*University of Sydney*

The major German poet I am concerned with has never become a household name in the English-speaking world. Friedrich Hölderlin was born in 1770, the same year as Beethoven, but he was to have a much shorter creative life. Mental illness – most likely schizophrenia – set in his early 30s, and his last complete poem is usually dated to 1803. For the few years after 1803, he continued writing, occasionally producing short passages in which his genius briefly is present. In 1804 he published surprising translations of Sophocles' *Oedipus and Antigone* – surprising because, in the language of the text, German is often bent to fit Ancient Greek linguistic forms. In a translation, the qualities of the object language are usually sacrificed for the sake of the new expression. But here the opposite occurs. This is a process which began with Hölderlin's translation of seventeen of Pindar's Odes in 1800, and which ended with the occasional subordination of German to Greek.<sup>1</sup> From 1806 until his death almost 40 years later in 1843, he was confined as mentally ill and the only verse he produced in these years showed nothing of the powers that had made his mature work so extraordinary.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. B. Harrison, *Hölderlin and Greek Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975), p. 280: "But he regarded as inspired not only the scriptures in the narrow sense of the word, but also prophetic works from the divinely inspired Greek past. It is in this context that we must see not only Hölderlin's Sophocles translations, but also his translation and interpretation of the Pindar fragments." Cf. also David Constantine, *Hölderlin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 291: "The translation, keeping very close to the Greek, arrives at a German which is odd, but striking and intelligible; the lines retain the strangeness of translated poetry" and p. 295: "The ground of feeling in Hölderlin's work was always a longing for immanence, and his increasing preoccupation with these two holy texts and with the mechanics of tragedy has undertones of an increasing desperation Steiner detects in Hölderlin's Sophocles 'a solicitation of chaos', rightly, I think."