

The photo is more a product that interrogates  
the visible than an object that gives it away.

SUSAN SONTAG

Photography is ultimately subversive not when it frightens,  
upsets or even stigmatizes, but when it is thoughtful.

ROLAND BARTHES

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### **Notes on a lens that contains time**

#### **Anamaria Garzón Mantilla**

In 2008, Armando Salazar began to visit the Concentración Deportiva de Pichincha (Pichincha Sports Concentration) to portray young athletes in their training moments. This space gathers young people in different disciplines who spend their afternoons, vacation days, or weekends preparing to play or compete. The effort of minds and bodies in training moments in the images seems to make a call to the viewer. They seem to demand the same measure of understanding, the same dedication to connect with them, to see beyond, into the depths of what the image makes discreetly evident.

Against time is a photographic work in which Armando searched for those moments in which the game, concentration, and effort in each training session produce minimal gestures that stop time. The characteristic energy of the sport, in these photographs, is condensed, becomes thick, stops and becomes an image, a trace, a record of something that can never be perceived in its complete state. That state, the scenery, the noise, vertigo, and collaboration are a privilege reserved for the photographer's memory and the momentary link created with the photographed athletes.

The images in *Against Time*, unlike the sports photographs we are used to seeing every day in social networks or traditional media, do not

focus on the outbursts of emotion generated by triumphs or losses. They are not scenes that stop dramatic plays forever, nor do they focus only on those who win. Instead, they are quite the opposite: contained scenes whose documentary nature borders on a particular curiosity crossed by the melancholy of time that passes relentlessly, without letting us return to the past.

The young faces convey moments of concentration and sometimes uncertainty. Each image contains the story of a fleeting moment, a past moment that demands to be seen and relived from the present. The frozen movements in the pictures sometimes reflect the pain of physical effort. Others remember moments of failure. Yet, in some are present the security and lightness that comes from knowing they are masters of their bodies, masters of the possibility of crossing the limits of movement.

When Armando talks about the process of taking the photographs, the time spent searching for the perfect image in the negatives and the passing of time while he is immersed in the reflection of the multiple possibilities of the same image, I find echoes of what Jacques Rancière called the pensive image. Knowing that it is people who think and not images, the philosopher explains:

A pensive image is then an image that is suspicious of unthought thought, a thought that cannot be assigned to the intention of the one who has produced it and that affects the one who sees it without relating it to a determined object. Pensativity would thus designate an indeterminate state between the active and the passive ( ). It is to speak of a zone of indeterminacy between thought and not thought, between activity and passivity, and also between art and non-art. (Rancière, 2009, p.107).

In these crevices and in the subtle tension of representation, the athletes in this book inhabit an indeterminate space in time. In this book occupy an indeterminate space in time. The time in which they were there has already passed. The present belongs to them in other

ways that we do not know. Sport may still be in their lives, or perhaps it has gone, just as their childhood and adolescence have gone. In the photographs, we see moments that freeze the action, that summon us, while at the same time keeping us distant in their mystery. The bodies we see are in physical activity and thinking themselves. The physical effort of sport is also a structured mental effort, separate from instinct. That aligned work between mind and body expresses, as a whole, something that leaves no trace or written file. It translates into movements contingent on the time they inhabit. The negatives included in some pages are material testimonies of the multiple possibilities of each image.

The first time these photographs were enlarged and printed, they were shown at the Coliseo Rumiñahui, in 2011. They were part of the project **Photography in the Open Sky**, organized by the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Quito, in 2012. The process of photographing, exhibiting, and publishing has been as slow and as contained as the time invested in taking, developing and selecting the photographs

Against Time is not just a work of portraits of athletes. It is a process of deep thought about photography and the life that revolves around it. In the closing of this book, Paulina Simon gives us a glimpse of a part of that life, which does not separate the outings from photographing, the development processes, or the photographs' selection from domestic routines. I have often heard them talk about "documentary and life" without really understanding what they mean. Photographic work, too, is work of affection and the presence of the people photographed, the one who photographs and those around him - Paulina, Elias, Nael - are inscribed within the photograph and are marks of lived experience, when we understand "the idea of 'presence' as a site of abundance that indexes affective histories within the taking of photographs." (Phu, Brown & Noble, 2019, p. 25).

This, like Prelude Armando's previous book, contains some clues about those affects, the stories that are in the images. Still, they also

include accounts of the reflections and presences at work as the photographic act occurs and the successive processes of developing, editing and selection that it triggers.

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## **Images and memory**

Armando Salazar

We are in the year 2021. 13 years have passed since I went to the Concentración Deportiva de Pichincha with the desire to photograph sports scenes. That was the initial idea: to take pictures of the world of sports, to see what was there. I was 42 years old then. I'm 55 now. Time has passed. I'm the same photographer I was then, and I'm not the same photographer I was then. Some things have happened in my life, and that's also part of the change. But not too much has happened either. Time has passed.

Photography is mysterious because it deals with two elements that, for human beings, have always been a problem to solve: light and time. If we add to the concept of memory, the photographic act is charged with a unique aura. Maybe that's why I am a photographer. I feel my material is unmanageable and ambiguous, almost always surprising in the way the image appears -not only because of the developing process of the negative but also the doubt of knowing whether or not there is a photo.

Over time I began to believe photographs almost always appear from an intermediate place between the intention of the shot and the constant movement of the observed world. That idea sustains my practice and craft.

The complication that now appears for this text comes from memory. 13 years after walking, camera in hand, through the Concentración Deportiva de Pichincha, my photos question me and shoot arrows at my memories. Memory is the first path for these vague ideas about the image. In this, I am joined by William Klein (New York, 1928) when he says:

"I have found that I would look at a small contact and everything would come back to me, the feeling I had at the time I took that photograph: whether I was tired, whether I was excited, whether it was raining or whether I had walked too far. Everything would come back to me, and I think a little photograph on a contact sheet is like Proust's famous madeleine." (Risch, 2012)

It's almost the same for me. Every image of me that I see transported me to my feelings when I was there. Look at the photo takes me to be again that person with the camera, insecure, doubtful, walking silently in places that are alien to him but that attract him. This is just a feeling because, although it happens that way, this only corresponds to a small-time around the image in question. It is as if, for me, the photo extends a little beyond its limits, its visibility. I took the above image during the basketball final on the court of the Coliseo Rumiñahui in Quito, the final game between Pichincha and Guayas in the 2012 National Games. I look at this image, and I feel I am there again.

I feel my presence in that space and in that specific time, in reality, I feel that I am there in two times, past and present, a sensation of two moments at the same time, the one I was and the one I am; the one that continues to be, the one that is no longer, and the one that is now something else.

I look at the image, and I feel I am there.

But something is missing. I don't remember the character in the image. I don't know if he arrived and sat down or if he was already sitting down and I approached him with the camera or if a second later he stood up. I don't know. I don't remember.

Sometimes it seems to me that photos don't have much to do with memory.

I take a step back, look for the negative sheet, and next to it, its sister, the contact sheet; as crucial an instrument for the photographer as a lens or the type of film used.

To take the contact sheet, put it under the light and with a magnifying glass in my hand, to begin an observation of the path taken while photographing, is to face an implacable diary where sometimes, a surprise appears, a photo, a captured moment.

My memory is fragile. The photo chosen is the second shot of the basketball player seated resting during a break in the game. It is negative number zero-four of KODAK TRI-X ASA 400 film roll.

There are six more frames following the photo and six more attempts to create an image. It becomes clear that looking at life and looking at the pictures of life are two different things, two ways of looking, two other times.

I have few memories of that game. Instead, my memory and my relationship with the photographed is apparently summed up in the chosen image, which is the one that comes closest to an idea: that moment that was best looked at.

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Looking at contact sheets is like going through a personal diary to search for clues of who you were what you thought or believed. These sheets help me to see myself as someone else. I see someone who photographs, who takes a distance, then another sometimes gets closer; searches don't find, approaches another moment, changes the position of the camera. Finally, I see someone with doubts.

Cristina García Roderó, Magnum photographer says:

"A contact sheet provides a great deal of information about a given photographic session; by analyzing that succession of images in the order in which they were taken, it is possible to know many things about the photographer who created them: how he relates to the characters (and whether or not he does so), how he frames the images and how he uses them. or not), how he frames, how he measures, how he looks for the most suitable point of view, if he uses the right optics, if he risks or conserves if he is lazy if he gets bored easily if he explores..." (Barros,2014)

Contact sheets are visual diaries. Diaries are almost always relentless; most of the time they leave a bitter taste because they. Most of time, they go a bitter taste they reflect the constant impossibility of arriving on time, is to live the difficulty of the creative photographic documentary intensely. For the documentarian world escapes his hands, the images appear after an act of resistance on the part of reality. Documentary images occur in constant tension in a continuous tension between reality and its dynamics and the viewer's intention.

They are images that resist being captured.

But from time to time they are capable of giving us certainty, the joy of having encountered the world at the exact moment when it was revealed to our gaze. When the forces were arranged harmoniously when the image was shot.

These photos are halfway between the intention of the beholder and what the world proposes. They arise from a relationship, the documentary relationship. They document at the same time what one sees and what one feels when seeing. To look is then to listen to the other.

That is what my photos are: the traces of a back and forth feeling. Each image in this book, Against time, being a framing, an arbitrariness and an alteration of the continuity of the world, can evidence that feeling that is on both sides.

I like to believe that these characters, all young people, and I, connected momentarily in the fraction of time of creating the image - for fractions of a second, nothing more-, and in that moment of connection, we had a shared feeling.

For me that feeling is that of Concentration, with a capital letter. Concentration in looking and Concentration, in the complex practice of the sport.

Sport, finally. The one that is made to be and to be, not to appear or win. These images intend to honour that attitude, that of Concentration, despite everything. That of the young early risers who

push their bodies to the limit because that is the way they feel is true.

I wonder what motivates them, what is their intention?

I think it is a matter of passion, pride in oneself, and identity. An identity against the clock, when the athlete's body gradually stops responding and the practice of sport ends up pitting their being against time.

If one is an athlete, the time that passes is also that of youth and not only the stopwatch. From those years of youth, one lives the present with a great force and feels that time will not pass, that the body will always be young, and the mark, the record, the physical achievement will continually improve. You feel and think this way, but suddenly, the mark does not improve, or life takes us to other things one day. So, without much ado, the time has passed, and the sport, more often than not, takes a back seat. The race against time is lost. These images are my small tribute to those moments in life when youth and sport are one.

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## Notes from a notebook

Photographing is not only loading film and shooting. It is also thinking, walking, reflecting, and finally writing. In my camera bag there is always a space for a small notebook, for my work diaries:

2008-07-04: the moment to photograph is the moment of the pause of the physical movement, this is a world of contained intensities, of fears and lacks that are waiting for the sport to cover, the joys are not so interesting, neither the extreme defeat, what motivates the athlete is a middle ground, not delimited; that moment of reflection that the end of the sports practice gives when the body has relaxed, and the mind is clear and thinking about what has been done.

2008-07-11: athletes live in a world of tensions. Achievement is always ephemeral; it is not a matter of triumph but a way of life-based on constant worry.

Monday 28, 7:00 am: Colegio 24 de Mayo. Today's quest is friendship, bonds, needs.

Wednesday 13th: to approach to photograph a world far away is to come anthropologically, when it is very close, it is almost impossible or at least very uncomfortable; when it is an intermediate territory, when it is familiar but not intimate, to take pictures is to move constantly between the near and the far, the region of the uncertain makes that sometimes the images are given and sometimes not, it is a being between the photographic fact and the human fact.

June 8: Box, La Tola. Here in La Tola there is blood... the voice of the father accompanies.

May 31: Rumiñahui Coliseum. Luis Hernandez, 36 years old. There's nothing like boxing all the time. You couldn't take pictures all the time. You'd get bored.

Luis questions me, and his image examines me.

An image is the fruit of its time and its space. Time and space as one. It moves with the years to other times and other areas, but it never leaves aside its original belonging; its reading will always depend on those two times: the time it was made and it is seen.

I feel Luis' photo with the same energy as that afternoon in May 2012. Both Luis and I are still intact in that shared moment finally. Yet, it is only a feeling because it is most likely that we are no longer the same ten years later.

Today, in 2022, his gaze is the concentration of one who surrenders to what he is, to his constituent element. I am on one side of that image. I am on my path, that of photographic concentration, a path that I still travel and that does not close with this book.

My path against time.

Armando Salazar

Tababela, 2022

## **Invisibles against time**

**Paulina Simon Torres**

Sometime in 2011, I was pregnant with our first child. As if sensing that the time for photographing in the outside world was coming to an end, Armando was trying to go to the Concentración Deportiva de Pichincha as many times as possible. At that time, we were working together on editing the photos for his first photographic book, PRELUDE, dedicated to Conservatory musicians.

I would help him see contact sheets and point out my favourite photos with a green pencil. At the same time, I was trying to find a publisher, a fund, a resource to make tangible those ten years of work that Armando carried in folders of negatives and prints (which were placed in a tin can with magnets) from house to house, in our third move. All of PRELUDE travelled along with each one of his many laboratories and improvised archives that, in each new home, shared space with the shared space with laundry rooms, bathrooms or any other domestic area adaptable for their work.

We edited the order of Prelude while he continued to photograph the athletes, and he also photographed me in the vicissitudes and joys of that first pregnancy. Their projects gestated simultaneously as we gestated our son.

One weekend there were some sports games at the Catholic University Coliseum, and I resented being alone like this.

I resented being alone, so I decided to go with him to take pictures. It was the first time I had done it, we lived surrounded by his images, but I had never seen him in the middle of the photographic action. We attended the finals of a Taekwondo match. I sat in the stands and saw him disappear among the athletes. He was invisible among the dressing rooms, the bouts, the family members, the moments of stretching, the moments of celebration, the moments of sadness, the moments of rest. He camouflaged himself in every situation and moved

in a perfectly rhythmic choreography with the photographed sport; and the predominant emotions of the moment.

A few years earlier, Armando was bitten by a scorpion on his finger in one of the houses where we lived for a short time. It was a sudden bite. The scorpion appeared out of nowhere, stung and disappeared. We had a scare, which later became a comical anecdote, which we recovered for this moment of camouflage among the taekwondists. I told him a little jokingly but also very seriously that he had obtained his powers after the scorpion's bite: Appear, sting and disappear. Appear, shoot and disappear. His scorpion power had to do with moving silently to find the right moment, to shoot when his subjects have lowered their guard when they are at their most vulnerable when they show themselves as they are.

That day I felt that I had better understood his craft, the nobility (unlike the scorpion) of placing himself in an invisible position to allow the other to appear in his most vivid and most vigorous essence. To slow down time, to immortalize the moment while he, the photographer, disappears from the scene, is lost, is nobody, is only the tool for eternity in the fight against time.

Ten years have passed since that moment, many other athletes were photographed, many athletes, boxers, swimmers. Also, the musicians saw the light in a book published by the Institute of Cultural Heritage of Quito. Other laboratories, in two more moves, have been built and deconstructed.

The family has grown. Now there are four of us and a dog, all photographic subjects during domestic life and the children's growth, everything always in whole boiling and change.

Only the photographer has not changed. He continues to maintain his invisibility, his anonymity. He works silently in a tiny corner of our house, with a magnifying glass, in front of hundreds of contact sheets. He continues to clean every tiny lint of his digitized photographic archive. He locks himself in a 4 x 2-meter room to bring his images to life. Time goes by, the work accumulates and grows, more

sensitive, more intense, more profound and intimate; but just as invisible. Nevertheless, he has generously given me a place amid his solitary and concentrated craft, that of looking. I have been privileged to curate and assemble a narrative from the phrases, sequences, and verses that his photos inspire.

It has taken more than ten years for the athletes to come to life in this book that you have in your hands. Almost six years of being photographed, another four between editing them, cleaning them, choosing them, looking at them daily, letting their image rest, become eternal and make sense; until finally someone is interested in turning it into a book and making it exist for the world. With the musicians of the Conservatory, the times were similar. Sadly, that beautiful book in which they live is kept in the cellar of a public institution, waiting for a miracle, for the will of a bureaucrat who is motivated to disseminate and distribute it. This has been the most complicated thing in these almost 20 years in which I have accompanied my husband's photographic work, his invisibility.

Occupying the most hidden space in the house and occupying a "no place" in the culture of our country. Not only is the photographic act invisible to the subject beautifully portrayed, but sadly, this gesture is transferred to the culture, diffusion, and the gaze of others.

Photography has no place in the imaginary of our culture. Almost nobody knows that there are, like Armando's, analog and digital photographic laboratories in small corners that nobody looks at, where moments, experiences, faces, transcendent situations for human life are eternalized.

There are no photographic archives, collections, publishing houses, museums, and interest in the culture of the immediate and the ephemeral. We live in a country that does not look, stops to look, forgets, and do not wish to preserve any memory.

Doing Against Time has been like the career of athletes, who little by little grow old and are forgotten; a race of endurance and tenacity, of which only a few friends have been part, to whom we will always be grateful.

Athletes, like musicians, like photographers, live in permanent invisibility, and this beautiful book made with patience and perseverance is a tribute to each of them, to all those invisible characters who continue to love their professions despite always having time, and many times, the world against them.

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Armando Salazar Larrea

Quito, 1966

Photographer and documentary filmmaker. Professor of Documentary Cinema and Cinematographic Aesthetics at the San Francisco de Quito University USFQ. Master's Degree in Screenwriting from the University of Barcelona. He has accompanied more than one hundred and fifty documentary projects in the last ten years. As Director of Photography, he has photographed the feature films *Qué tan lejos* (2006) and *En el nombre de la hija*, (2011), award for Best Cinematography at the International Film Festival of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (2012). Recognition for Cultural Merit Bicentennial Medal - Ministry of Culture of Ecuador (2012).

In 2015, he published the book *Preludio*, a documentary photographic work about the National Conservatory of Music. Between 2008 and 2012, he photographed *Contra el tiempo*. Between 2010 and 2020 he photographed *Diario de familia*, a series about fatherhood and family building.

He is currently working on the feature documentary *Los dos lados de la mente*, an approach to the creation of a stage work by the contemporary dance group *El pez dorado*.