

**Argentina between brackets
(argentina)
Eduardo Stupía**

Colección Fotógrafos Argentinos (2º Edition), Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2015

Eduardo Gil puts Argentina between brackets. Perhaps that is his way of suggesting that it is not a question of imposing a single, definitive vision, and that we should not infer from the strength of his images, however eloquent and significant they may appear to us, that he has been excessively confident as to the fidelity per se of the documented moment, and that furthermore there is nothing in them that should lead to solid or definitive assertions, manifestos or denunciations, not even based on the gestures, attitudes and circumstances of his subjects that are most clearly typical and identifiable as to the class to which they belong.

The use of parenthesis seems here to be a conceptual rather than an ideological decision, the adoption of a form of reserve, deliberate elusiveness. An alert and curious eye seeking to become almost imperceptible, impersonal, absent, not only not intervening but without even registering the most explicit aspect of the tension of the event. Gil approaches situations as if to photograph them were to leave everything in suspense, as if the key were about to be revealed, and would in any case remain untouched, even in the face of the inexorable partiality of the photograph.

The two graphic components of that parenthesis, the two delicate curves on the left and right, are the lateral limits that define the circumscription of a territory, the selection of a sectorizing, in an operation that is both a practical demarcation and a critical reluctance to resolve the logic of the event in a categorical manner, so that everything is left hanging from that hypothetical productive instant. Even when the author himself in the first edition of this book in 2002 contributes the only more or less explicit clue he will allow himself to provide in relation to what we are observing, confessing that the photographs that make it up are an attempt "to create a metaphor for Argentina from the military dictatorship to the present time."

Gil's metaphorical machine proposes a fluid anti-poses mechanism, with subjects as natural as they are indifferent to the lens, busy as they are in their pre-photograph avatar, in an immense out of frame effect in terms of time and space. Even a couple of exceptions to the rule are less portraits than they are allegorical masks: an old man dressed up in some unidentifiable uniform looking into the camera and waving a baton in a threatening manner, next to a modest bed that would appear to be in a hospital or care home – suggestively placed by Gil outside the book's central sequence – and the ghostly duo with their skeleton disguises in a frank and frontal pose, like members of a carnival troupe lost in an abandoned building. These two motifs, exemplary landmarks in a no less exemplary book, to some extent add new meaning and reinforce the idea of society as a cosmetic apparatus in crisis, a constant unequal feast of appearances, simulations, disguises and makeup that share the stage, and their historical ideological and ethical differences, rigid formality, ceremonial finery and anonymous attire, each with their own allegorical burden, tacit tragedy, and mannerism.

Gil's Argentina is at once undeniably familiar and immediately uncomfortable, desolate, distractedly ominous, meaningless, where strangeness is nourished not by what is bizarre, but on the contrary, by what is most common, closest, sharply hinted at and ritualized. Gil's implacable timing in his urge to instantly capture the bare minimum needed to identify the class data of the situation is as amazing in its political sharpness, in its anthropological efficacy as is the photographer's incisive astuteness in triggering the camera right there, up close, very close, just an instant before being unmasked as an intruder. This resolutely physical proximity is perhaps only possible because Gil has already taken the necessary objective distance from his subjects, and that makes him almost invisible, an unseen demiurge who unobtrusively isolates them from their surroundings, as if they were more than ever out in the open, suddenly deprived of a place in the stage design and the spontaneous or programmed choreography that had sheltered them. Despite their materiality and their ritual disguise, faces, actions, objects and postures are displayed in a different light, making it possible to guess at an unknown remainder, a dark and unnamed residue. Gil's ability is to connect to the event without allowing himself to be deceived by its immediate expression, extracting from it that hidden virus, that essential symptom in the rhetorical architecture of the event, beyond the folkloric mythology – information that is nevertheless recorded in considerable detail – spying out what lies behind the always didactic sociological nomenclature.

Paradoxically, for Gil the center of the event, whether plural, singular, intimate or public will

always be peripheral. This sideways shift in search of the backstage, the minimal situation of the bit player, at the edge, anonymous, with a gesture that goes unnoticed, a bitter or circumspect grimace without mime, an expression without theatricality or literature, is not a gratuitous displacement from the center of the scene but instead the materialization of experience that has led to the certainty that everything is to be found there, except that it is in the background. With the sharp eye of a detective, Gil looks for clues and revelations not in the usual characters but in the subjects who look into the camera without understanding that they are being photographed, those in the dance troupe as it takes a break, in the people who pass in front of the camera without noticing it, or without interest in it, in the withdrawn wait of those who line up to take part in processions or public ceremonies, in those who turn their backs on the camera because they are busy with something else.

His program is diametrically opposed to that of classic photo-journalism, although he preserves that ubiquity that allows him to mingle in places where he was never invited, and the automated courage to shoot just at the right moment. Gil brings together the necessary inquisitive impetus and awareness that the complexity of the event leaves us, leaves him, bereft of the containment provided by journalistic standards: ostensibly, here there is no caption to situate us in time or place, to sum up what we are observing. In turn, like a virtual correspondent in an undeclared war, he seems to be warning us that this Argentina between brackets is an object that is dangerous to handle. Because they are there, belying their indifference or unflinching attitude to the camera or the presumed invisibility of the photographer, those who are keen-sighted who look to the front, detecting the presence of that intrusive, foreign eye.

Some look without seeing, always obstinately locked away within their circumstances, but others acquire the grim look of those who detect an outsider, and are about to challenge him. It is the wronged look that betrays itself and betrays the ultimate reason for the photographer's presence, the look that warns that his presence is not innocent, and it has seen, or intends to see, something that should never be seen, a hopeless, inhibiting look that distorts the whole meaning of the photograph and simultaneously brings the shot to an end, or better said, forces it to be concluded. It can be said that it is at this point, at the very moment of his imminent expulsion as a witness, when Eduardo Gil encounters the most perfect metaphoric synthesis, and thus the philosophical justification and categorical evidence of a diagnosis as precise as it is somber, which for the moment he prefers to leave within parenthesis.

Buenos Aires, December 2012