



# EXPLORATIONS ON THE EVENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Dasein, Dwelling, and Skillful Coping  
in a Cuban Context

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Across Latin American and Caribbean cultures, the practice of photography has been used to establish and celebrate a country's national identity (Cánepa Koch & Kummels 2016), to create commemorative cultural artifacts of Day of the Dead celebrations (Morales Cano & Mysyk 2004), and for anthropological documentations of indigenous peoples, mixed races, and criminals, categories which have been historically used as mechanisms for exclusion (Hopkinson 2001). The practice of photography, additionally, is frequently used as a means to document violence, which is typically presented ethnographically through realist and sensationalist lenses (Schwartz & Tierney-Tello 2006).

Discourses of photography have, since the medium's emergence, routinely embarked with a Cartesian character, in which links between thinking and seeing, and visual perception and certainty, are forged. This perspective has imbued the practice of photography with a certain objectivity, wherein an author utilizes a technical instrument to produce a mechanical or digital representation of something *that-has-been* (Barthes, 1981 [1980]). Through this Cartesian understanding, the author is rendered not as a subjective framer, an entity who purposely constructs

Justin Michael Battin  
RMIT University  
Vietnam  
RIAS Associate Editor



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0761-3235>

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a world imbued with meaning, but rather as a detached observer who creates a notation of reality afforded by his or her technical device. Although this notion has persistently endured, it has been challenged, perhaps most prominently by Susan Sontag (1977), who argued that a photographer intrinsically possesses a certain bias, which presences in framing strategies and the chosen subject matter.

Ariella Azoulay, however, has shifted priority away from the “photographed event,” or that which has been captured, and towards the “event of photography,” a phase emphasizing the spatio-temporal moment when a photographer, a camera, photographed subjects, and even those with potential to be photographed, encounter one another; Azoulay attests that “photography is a form of relation that exists and becomes valid only within and between the plurality of individuals who take part in it” (2012 [2008]: 85). Her position shows that photographs lack a stable point of view or single sovereign, irrespective of whether one approaches the photographer, those occupying the shot, or those who eventually reconstruct the image for display. She challenges audiences to rethink the institutionalized discourse of photography, as well as how “it is entrapped in the hegemonic opposition between the aesthetic and the political—one maintained not only by the discourse of art but also by political discourse itself” (2010: 27). With this interpretation, she invites new possibilities to read political life through a visual dimension, as well as to trace and confront different forms of power relations.

This article commences with an exploration of a series of photographs taken during an eight-day visit to Cuba in 2016. The photographs include residents of Havana, the country’s capital, and Viñales, an agricultural town roughly 180 kilometers from Havana, well known for its plentiful tobacco plantations. The purpose of this trip was to document background practices, routinely performed behaviors that, upon first glance, are seemingly of little consequence. Dreyfus (2015), however, shows that background practices are complex structures that sustain meaningful action and reveal how human beings characteristically cope with the world. A phenomenological approach, influenced by Heidegger’s topographic articulation of being (Malpas 2006; 2012),

is employed to elucidate the manifestation of the photographer, the role of the camera, as well as those who are the focus of or external to the captured image within a unique spatio-temporal context. Per Azoulay, “photography is an event that always takes place among people” (2010: 13), and thus all those present during the manifestation of the event must therefore be considered for the part they themselves play.

Heidegger has been chosen as the article’s theoretical and methodological center as he provides a valuable lexicon to express Azoulay’s thesis; for instance, the recognition of one’s taking part in the event of photography is articulated through an intertwining of *Ereignis* and *Augenblick*, the camera as a *thing*, the photographer as *Dasein* (human being interpreted as being-there), and others populating the area of photographic interest as *mitsein* (being-with). In addition to the methodological and vocabulary affordances, using Heidegger frames photography as a topographic practice, and thus presents a unique opportunity to provide new insights and frames into Latin American-focused photography.

#### DASEIN, DWELLING, AND THE EVENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY

In his existential account of human being as *Dasein* articulated in *Being and Time*, Heidegger emphatically counters the then-dominant Cartesian view of the world by showing how, prior to any detached or skeptical view, such as those adopted by the natural sciences and analytical philosophy tradition, one is always immersed, pre-theoretically, in a world of care (*Sorge*) and concern-for-others (*Fürsorgen*). Care, specifically, is the fundamental constituent of human existence (Heidegger 1962 [1927]: 227). This term should not be confused with ontic states like gaiety or sadness, but rather as the structure of *Dasein* itself. Heidegger shows that since people fundamentally care about themselves and where-they-are, in an existential rather than spatial sense, they are innately driven to experience and pursue their ownmost possibilities for being-in-the-world. Moreover, as people are, also, ontologically being-with (*mitsein*) others, it is equally important to acknowledge how people tend to and nurture their fellow human beings. Through this care structure, Heidegger reveals his ethical position. Although the philosopher is rarely regarded

for commentary on ethics, Dreyfus argues for a closer look, showing that recursive, banal, yet skillful practices orient people to a shared world of meaning. These practices can catalyze a fully authentic *Dasein*, igniting the recognition of care and enabling the disclosure of whole new worlds (2017 [2000]: 27–44). Dungey (2007), further arguing the point, notes that to engage with ethics properly, like Heidegger, people must first raise the question of who they are and the way they find themselves in the world.

This line of inquiry is constant throughout the entirety of Heidegger's thought, yet in his late philosophy he demonstrates a noticeable shift (although one that is often overstated in commentaries and analyses) from *Dasein* to *Dwelling*. This shift is inspired by an urgent need to resist an omnipresent technological understanding of the world, which Heidegger refers to as enframing/the framework (*das Gestell*). Within this framework, various things, which includes the self and others, manifest as little more than manipulatable resources, objects incapable of making existential demands on us (Heidegger 1977 [1954]). By giving priority to dwelling, Heidegger is able to convey the emotional care that stimulates, coheres, and preserves the relationships that people find themselves in *as Dasein*. In his own words, "the way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is *buan*, dwelling [...] the old word *bauen*, which says that man is insofar as he dwells [...] also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and to care for" (Heidegger, 1977 [1956]: 325). The caring and looking after of dwelling provides a path for human beings to fathom how their *involvement in the world*, such as by using tools and being alongside familiar others, allows them to *inhabit a world*; as dwellers, the world becomes familiar, a home with resonance and deep existential connection; "in dwelling we stay close to things and are connected to them" (Malpas 2006: 76). In a world seemingly dominated by instrumental, technologically inspired thinking, the importance of dwelling is quite clear—it brings things and people's situations *nearer* to them. As explained by Malpas, "nearing is not just an overcoming of a purely objective spatial distance but also a 'picking out' or a 'bringing into salience' that overcomes the distance of inattention or 'not seeing' (76). Further, Dungey argues

that that dwelling enables a person's ethical being to be revealed through the manner in which their engagement with things, people, and locations comes into presence; thus, "Heidegger's philosophy, insofar as it reveals the essential relationships that disclose and characterize human existence, is itself a form of original ethics. And, for Heidegger, access to such a way of thinking begins with reflection on the essence of dwelling" (2007: 238).

The photographs included in this reflective account all depict a person performing embodied skills in a well-known setting. The photographs of the painter, for instance, took place in his home-based art studio. In accordance with ethical research practice, all participants were informed about the project, its goals, and the likely forms of research dissemination. None seemed fussed about assisting; in fact, all exhibited bewilderment about why such rudimentary behaviors were deemed as worthy of documentation, supporting the claim that background practices are routinely interpreted as inconsequential. As the investigator-photographer, I would occasionally speak to each participant, typically for clarification about a practice. We would sometimes banter, as doing so was commonplace for each while they worked and thus would replicate their customary workplace patterns. In all other respects, however, I remained as unobtrusive as possible. For instance, the participants were never instructed on where to stand, how to pose, or how to behave as they performed their quotidian duties.

Photographing these people in their everyday environments invited a plethora of considerations. Although I would only photograph subjects who agreed to participate, it was still critical to consider how the unusual presence of a photographer could disrupt their well-established routine. Secondly, although the camera can act as a catalyst for conversation and engagement with potential participants, it can also elevate the photographer to an unequal position of power, as someone who is able to 'choose' what to document, when to document it, and how to present it. This is a particular point of emphasis for Azoulay, who writes that:

[...] the photographed persons will not necessarily view the photographs taken at the photographic event of which they were a part, but this does not obliterate the fact that it took place [...] not all of those who take

*Justin Michael Battin*  
RMIT University  
Vietnam  
RIAS Associate Editor

part in the photographic event do so in the same way. Not all are even aware that this event is taking place, certainly not at the time of its occurrence; nor can all those involved view the product of this event and those who do view it are not necessarily permitted to use the product in the same way. (2010: 12)

The above suggestions further encouraged me to consider the perspective and situation of the participants. They could question my intention, as well as what might become of the visual artifacts produced through the camera. They might wonder, is he a journalist? Could these photographs be used as tools for punishment? How might he display my personal likeness, and in what context will it be explained for potential spectators? Given the digital affordances available, will any alterations occur prior to exhibition or dissemination? These considerations were particularly relevant in light of the country's authoritarian political system. Thus, to address each, my goal was to foster an environment wherein *the truth of the spatio-temporal moment* could freely manifest, one that acknowledges the role the photographer, the other parties, and how we simultaneously create an inhabitable place, albeit through different contexts and motivations. How one comprehends truth, however, is of the utmost importance. Such is where Heidegger's thinking is most valuable.

The use of Heidegger to understand photography is widespread across academic literature. Greenwald (1992), for instance, argues that photographs meet Heidegger's criteria to be considered art (as articulated in "The Origin of the Work of Art" [1950]) by way of its revealing of *original truth*, or truth as *unconcealment*, which occurs prior to a Cartesian or prepositional understanding of truth. He suggests that, like a painting, a photograph on display invites an interplay of revealing and concealing (Heidegger uses the Greek words *alētheia* and *lēthe* to elucidate this happening), through which one achieves an ephemeral attunement with the world. Although Greenwald's analysis focuses on an individual encountering a photographic image, it is possible to apply the same considerations to photographic practice. For instance, as a photographer peruses the city streets looking for possible shots, they may encounter a scene which facilitates taking a photograph. The incredible urge to engage with that scene through the camera is accompanied

with a withdrawing from their everyday casual attitude. Suddenly the world is not one deprived of consequence, but rather is ripe with meaning and imaginative possibilities for one's ownmost being *as a photographer*. Once inspecting at the outcome, being the photographic image, the photographer might feel as though they have, through the camera and their own unique sensibilities, discovered or excavated something previously hidden. Taking this phenomenon into account, Costello (2012) has argued that the practice of photography, by way of its ability to unveil *original truth*, resists rather than conforms to the pervasive technological understanding of being. More recently, both perspectives have converged via Evans and Forrest (2018), who use Heidegger to insightfully articulate how the Hungarian photographer, André Kertész, grasps authentic dwelling. In their work, Kertész is argued as exemplary of a photographer engaged with art as *original truth*, as he demonstrates the capacity to attune himself to people and places, as well as disclose worlds by way of his prudent (and skillful) use of the camera (see also Seamon 1990).

The photographs chosen for inclusion in this article are based on how they, from my perspective, showcase each participant as uniquely synced within their world context. In accordance with phenomenological research, which is to “question the world’s very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us” (van Manen 1990: 5), I was eager to understand what specific instances encouraged me to respond to each participant through the camera. I would repeatedly question—“*what is it about this moment that has impelled me to create a photographic image?*” The practice itself, the subject’s stance, nor the overall composition of the image provided sufficient answers. Through reflection, it became evident that the myriad characteristics and qualities coalesced to disclose a moment *as a moment*. A nimble brush stroke from the painter’s hand, the fisherman frustratedly untangling a fishing line, and a weary farmer eager for a rest, or the printer carefully adjusting a letterpress’ letter blocks (see Fig. 1), best encapsulated the truth of *their* practice by way of *their* exclusive relationship with *their* world. Each was absorbed in familiar task within a familiar setting, as evidenced by a discernible flow. This dis-

Justin Michael Battin  
RMIT University  
Vietnam  
RIAS Associate Editor

play of skillful coping (Dreyfus 2015) reveals the limits of cognitive rationality; moreover, it demonstrates that a person's performed activities contribute to the manifestation of a world of meaning, one where they confidently feel their way through their tasks, driven by perceptual and embodied motivation (Dreyfus, 2015 [2005]: 117).

Admittedly, while the photographs chosen were not the most technically proficient ones taken during the trip, they are the ones that best pictorialize skillful coping. The photo of the painter (see Fig. 2), for instance, depicts him effortlessly creating a drawing that would, eventually, become an interpretation of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (*The Little Prince*). While the in-progress rendering is of interest, the depth of the image and the narrative it tells can be grasped by how key components amalgamate to communicate the artists' practice and its local influences. As customary art supplies like canvas boards are difficult to acquire in Cuba, he employs discarded prints of *Granma*, the official daily publication of the Cuban government. His visual creations feature a combination Cuban state culture (such as Che Guevara styled propaganda), popular culture influences, and Havana's vibrant street life (see, also, Fig. 3).

Yet, in accordance with Azoulay's thesis, an obvious factor of the event is omitted. As the images indicate the photographer's close proximity to the subject(s), what of this individual? Irrespective of my distance to the subjects, my presence still mattered as we occupied a similar location. Moreover, by responding to the performed practices of each subject with my camera, I contributed to the making of the photographic moment *as an event*. To believe otherwise problematically disregards not only the various power influences stated above, but also my own embodied motivations and inclinations. Like the painter and printer, I too was immersed in an environment guided by *care*. My own interest in documenting their practices and their relationship to their being-in-the-world must therefore be accounted for. Using Heidegger, the remainder of this article offers a series of reflections about my experience photographing the subjects above as *original truth*.

Knowing the precise moment to shoot is complicated regardless of whether one is an expert or novice photographer. While collaborating with these participants, numerous ideas would emerge, yet only a few ignited an urge to meaningfully engage.



*Justin Michael Battin  
RMIT University  
Vietnam  
RIAS Associate Editor*



Fig. 1. (photo by Justin Michael Battin © 2022)



Fig.2. (photo by Justin Michael Battin © 2022)



Fig. 3. (photo by Justin Michael Battin © 2022)

Most of these ideas, it seemed, were stimulated not by our *being-together* but rather by pre-conceived desire to obtain a specific image, a photographic rendering that adheres to conventional visual standards. Such an approach, clearly influenced by an instrumental understanding of the situation, would result in a manufactured and, ultimately, *inauthentic moment*. Thus, rather than embark with a list of shots conceived for each participant, I instead remained observant to the most minute of details, as these can invite the photographer to distinguish how a potential subject exists in a spatio-temporal alignment with other things populating the frame. The heightened focus on details bolstered my ability to be flexible, in the sense of being open to improvisation, as one cannot predict when an opportunity to shoot will show itself. In the case of the printer (see Fig. 4), although he expressed that he did not see the point of documenting his specific profession, he exhibited much exuberance when speaking about using a still operational antique German printing press and the meticulous craft of putting each letter block in its appropriate place. This photograph was taken immediately after a demonstration of the machine's functionality. While stepping back following his tutorial, the painted mural on the wall depicting a historical account of printing throughout Cuba's history drew my attention. Fidel Castro and newspapers communicating the 26th of July Movement are visible. Although the man in the photograph is not old enough to have experienced that historical moment, his profession and correlated daily practices, and maybe even this specific printing press, which is possible given its age, are forever linked to it.

The photo of the farmer (Fig. 5), taken in Viñales, occurred immediately after spending a few hours bailing tobacco leaves. Like those above, this image communicates not simply a person, animals, or rural life, but rather an *inhabited world*. The physical toll of the tobacco farming profession, as evidenced by the farmer's dirt covered clothing and labored stance, as well as the relationship shared between him and his livestock. Regarding the fisherman (Fig. 6), one of the most common sights one will find in Havana's early morning hours is myriad people fishing along the Malecón the extensive esplanade on the city's coast.

*Justin Michael Battin  
RMIT University  
Vietnam  
RIAS Associate Editor*



Fig. 4. (photo by Justin Michael Battin © 2022)



Fig. 5. (photo by Justin Michael Battin © 2022)



Fig. 6. (photo by Justin Michael Battin © 2022)

Per my conversations with a few of these fishermen, most of them perform this practice not as a profession, but rather as a hobby and for socialization purposes. The practice also, for some, such as the one depicted in the photo, allows for tranquility prior to what will inevitably become a laborious day. The familiar sounds of seagulls, a glistening sunrise, and the smell of the ocean, none of which are overtly detectable here, but were certainly palpable in the moment of capture, are of great importance to those who repeatedly frequent the Malecón during the day's early hours.

Heidegger often used the word *Ereignis* to distinguish this sort of happening; it expresses the appropriation and belonging of *Dasein* to its immediate spatio-temporal place, in addition to the unique features that collectively establish it as such. In his commentary on Heidegger, Wrathall suggests that it is “a kind of belonging in which the things we deal with really matter, that is, they make demands on us that we cannot ignore” (2011: 204). For a photographer, sharing in *Ereignis* shows itself, most overtly, by way of the embodied compulsion one feels to capture a specific moment, to render what has come into view into a photographic image. In such happenings, photographers and the world of which they find themselves are involved in a unique mutual appropriation. The photographer experiences *ek-stasis* (ἐκστασις)—standing-outside oneself, fathoming the self as belonging within a distinctive spatio-temporal place, one that is only (and genuinely) applicable to *this specific photographer*. This belonging, however, is not any sort of cozy feeling or connection, but rather, as stated by Polt, “the way in which the givenness of given beings—including ourselves—comes into question for us” (2005: 383).

It is only once solicited with a photographic opportunity that one is able to distinguish their partaking in *Ereignis*; moreover, in part due to the keen attention to details, these moments unveil as a collaborative happening featuring an array of constituent parts. For instance, while spending time with the farmer, he would occasionally speak about the craft of tobacco cultivation and how it provided him with an enjoyable livelihood. Although the strict government requirements forced him to deliver the bulk of his harvest, impeding his economic potential, he took solace in that he could work outdoors and away from a chaotic urban center.



In one instance, air cured tobacco hanging on wooden planks were relocated to a spot that provided better ventilation. Following the hanging of one plank, the farmer stopped for one moment to catch his breath and, unexpectedly, his eyes glanced towards the drying tobacco leaves. In this instance, the hanging tobacco leaves appeared to me not as an iconic crop (for Cuba, specifically), nor the means by which this farmer supports himself, but rather as his vast experience and an embodied expertise of his craft, realized over a near fifty-year duration (see Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. (photo by Justin Michael Battin © 2022)

Justin Michael Battin  
RMIT University  
Vietnam  
RIAS Associate Editor

At first glance it is unmistakable that the photo is a simulacrum, a representation of drying tobacco leaves, yet to conclude with such a hasty claim ignores the spatio-temporal conditions by which that photograph came into existence, and thus eliminates its potentiality to exist within a broader yet more truthful narrative.

In the English renditions of Heidegger's work, the term *Ereignis* is translated as "event" or "event of appropriation." This interpretation, while immensely useful, can result in one inadvertently overlooking Heidegger's crucial point. Stambaugh (2002 [1969]: 14), for instance, notes that the etymological roots of the word are *er-eignen* and *er-äugnen*, which respectively indicate *own* (to come into one's one, to come where one belongs) and *eye* (to catch sight of, to see with the mind's eye, to see face to face). Thus, the happening that is *Ereignis* invites consideration of another term, *Augenblick*, which

was frequently used by Heidegger to denote a decisive, personally defining 'moment' or a 'moment of vision' (see also Grant 2015: 213–229; Ward 2008: 97–124). Whereas *Ereignis* is frequently used to accentuate a person's belongingness with being by way of mutual appropriation within a specific place, *Augenblick* speaks to its temporality. As explained by Engel, "the moment's sole purpose is initiating the transcendence of everyday time into the supposed primordially (*a priori* temporality) that infrastructures it" (2018). In a photographic context, any moment recognized as worth capturing with a camera appears as such due to the photographer's implicit understanding of that moment's finitude. An urgency is discerned as the photographer understands that the moment, although rich in meaning and substance, and one they are very much a part of, is ultimately destined to fade, an interpretation that goes against everyday publicly derived understandings of time (Heidegger, 1962 [1927]: 412). Ward advises that the use of 'moment of vision' in the *Being and Time* translations can direct readers to consider *Augenblick* as a purely visual occurrence; therefore, as with *Ereignis*, interpreting *Augenblick* without considering its deeper implications neglects its relevance. Rather than a mere visual acknowledgement of that which transpires, "what is attained in the *Augenblick* is the 'vision' into Being which reveals *Dasein* in its ownmost possibilities of Being, and through which *Dasein* can experience an extraordinary and totalizing sense of Being" (Ward 2008: 112). This sense of urgency is illustratable with the tobacco leaves image above; the embodiment of the farmer's skills as residing within these cultivated leaves is not perceptible without a catalyst, which in this case was his transient glance. Equally as transient, however, is the elucidation of this interpretation. Thus, it was necessary to respond to this spatio-temporal moment accordingly given my interest in identifying background practices and their correlation with worldly investment.

For a photographer's world to manifest with this unique intelligibility, one where their ownmost possibilities for Being are revealed with clarity, yet another consideration is required—a comprehensible referential nexus. Once an opportunity to create a photograph is revealed, the camera is realized not as an object of indifference or void of context, but rather as *ready-to-hand* (*Zuhanden*).

A photographer skillfully takes the camera and understands its use by way of how it relates to other *things*, such as the subjects sharing the photographic environment. If skilled, the photographer will pre-reflectively adjust the focus, zoom, and even know which position to assume to achieve the anticipated shot. In his essays on skillful coping, Dreyfus cautions that one should not regard such exhibited practices as habitual motor skills, but rather as a way of grasping the world in accordance with one's embodied proficiencies (2015). The thesis on equipmental nexuses, a central focus in *Being and Time*, is augmented in the philosopher's later turning by way of his articulation of *thingness* (1951). Edwards writes that "history washes some words clean, tumbling them along the bottom until all their edges have been smoothed and all their glitter ground to matte" (2005: 456); such a statement is certainly applicable for the word *thing*. Per Heidegger, the word *thing* conveys not an object or entity of study, such as in the natural science or metaphysical traditions, but rather, gathering; "a thing always 'gathers' the other things that belong together with it. Its being—its significance, its meaning, its sense—is always given in relation to those other things, just as their being is always given in relation to it" (461).

Using a camera not only illuminates its relation to applicable entities, it also brings together a foundation for which the nature of Being, a person's inherent position as a dweller, can draw nearer. Earlier it was stated that this nearing provides a moment of salience, but for Heidegger, it is much more substantive. Things bring people nearer to specific locales based on how they tangibly function in the world. They facilitate an existential locale based on how innumerable elements are gathered. In a photographic context, the camera, as a *thing*, contributes to the intelligibility of the world, yet it also contributes to the conditioning of the world as photographable, one's belongingness in it (as a photographer), and the realization of the self as *Dasein* (to be a photographer *in this moment*); "to think photographically also means to see the world imaginatively and find creativity within everyday life" (Evans & Forrest 2018: 104). For people to comprehend and understand themselves as *Dasein* and their state as *dwellers*, it is important to consider the very tangible role played by the technologies they

Justin Michael Battin  
RMIT University  
Vietnam  
RIAS Associate Editor

routinely use. Without the camera, can the photographer comprehend their unique potentiality *to be* within this context? Can the potentiality of the subjects and their environments, in conjunction with the photographer, as *Dasein*, manifest as profound? Without the appropriating presence of the camera and its ability to support a photographic interpretation of the world, the photographer is impotent to consider practice-specific questions like *why this angle, why this subject*, and, most importantly, *why this moment*.

In Evans and Forrest's exploration of Kertész, they ask what he can reveal about the nature of dwelling and everyday life. In non-Heideggerian language, Kertész invites a closer examination of the fabric of everydayness and paths to make the invisible visible. To show this requires intimate engagement, as this facilitates an openness and nearing to being. Yet, it also requires bracketing, a phenomenological reflection on one's daily surroundings. Through an amalgamation of both, people are privileged to see how myriad interrelated parts, including their self, are woven to illuminate meaning. A photographer's use of a camera is necessary for revealing how it is involved in a mutual appropriation and constitution of world; moreover, the urge to take something, like a camera, and put it to use equally reveals that one is never in the world indifferently. Both *Augenblick* and *Ereignis*, in unification with a person's engagement with things, show an alternate path of understanding not only who they are, but also how they relate to others, as well as a path to resist technological understandings of being.

Regarding Azoulay's thesis, I acknowledge that each produced photograph is imbued with my unique being-in-the-world. It is the frame for which the subjects, their practices, and their world manifested. This reality, however, can be suitably (note, not fully) addressed by acknowledging and understanding the self as *Dasein* and its position as a dweller. While dwelling is certainly comprehended and understood from the point of view of *Dasein*, it does not definitively center *Dasein* in an ego-centric manner, given how it provides an opening for the being of those within one's relationship nexus to correspondingly manifest. This includes photographable subjects, but also the various tools that they



infer as associated with their own *Dasein* (see Fig. 8). These tools are of particular note because, even while not in use, they have potential to be used, and thus take part in the manifestation of the moment and the founding of world.



Fig. 8. (photo by Justin Michael Battin © 2022)

Empathetically speaking with the participants was also critical, as it supports the attunement of the self to a local world, which correspondingly allows for the self as *Dasein*, and its consequences, to be realized. Moreover, it better equips a photographer to distinguish whether the subjects have been showcased truthfully and ethically. Such is indicative of both care (*Sorge*) and concern for others (*Fürsorgen*). As argued by Dungey, “to care for, and be involved with, one’s life, others, and the world, are all manifestations of dwelling. As the most primordial set of activities through which our care is expressed, dwelling signifies *who* we are and the *way* of our being” (2007: 239). In the photographic moment, disregarding such considerations effectively conceals the question and meaning of being and encourages shallow representation of objects-in-space. For the subjects, their humanity is effectively truncated (Ogletree 1985: 23), reduced to objects malleable to one’s instrumental wishes. Most importantly, however, is the manner in which one can preserve this status and an appreciation for that which stands forth, manifesting out of concealment and into unconcealment.

Such is critical, as, per Edwards, “to live acknowledgement of our manifold conditions, to gather ourselves to ourselves to ourselves and others through the gathering of things, is an ethical achievement; it restores us to a more truthful condition of life, a more proper being” (2005: 466).

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR LATIN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Latin America is notable for its diverse, rich, yet tumultuous history. It is an area of the world characterized by a consistent lack of cohesion, from the indigenous era to the variance of regional modernities in the present day. Moments during rapid regime change (Cuba), brutal dictatorships (Chile), the industrialization-driven destruction of natural habitats and cultural heritage practices (Amazon), periods of drug-related violence (Colombia), tragic natural disasters (Haiti), the loss of artistic icons (Mexico), forced migrations (Honduras and Guatemala), and waves of immigration through modernization (Argentina) have been captured by countless photographers. Collectively, these moments portray a place seemingly in a forever transition. Although the region contains a range of voices communicating through photography, too frequently these depictions apply imposing narratives, many of which include traces of colonialist convictions.

In a Cuban context, specifically, this angle can be viewed through what Ogden (2021) refers to as digital imperialism. She notes that Instagram (and other digital forms of social media-based photography) documenting Havana, specifically, must be contextualized through the tourist gaze (Urry & Larsen 2011). Users frequently employ the application’s features to amend photos, specifically through ‘aging filters,’ to manufacture a nostalgic vision of the city untouched by global forces. Moreover, she notes that the use of captions and hashtags across the platform usurp those offering any political nuances; this is especially the case given the lack of access Cubanos have to both digital technologies and the internet.

Photographic scenarios such as these are indicative of Azoulay’s concerns, as those within the city are stripped of voice and agency and effectively powerless to counter their representations. Moreover, by depicting city life through a nostalgic-driven

feigned narrative, the political realities of the country are ignored and an asymmetric gaze is reinforced. These scenarios are, also, symptomatic of the technological understanding of being. In accordance with Heidegger's thesis, the things of the world, in this case the people of Havana, the classic cars, dilapidated buildings, and pulsating street life, are represented without any independence; they exist simply to be ordered and arranged depending on the wishes of the photographer (or, in this case, Instagrammer). Even if viewing the photograph, such as through one's feed, one is not prompted to consider the humanity of the people who populate these visuals, let alone their routines and relationships. As stated by Mark Blitz, with technological thinking, "we push aside, obscure, or simply cannot see, other possibilities" (2014). The pervasiveness of this thinking (and its equivalent practices) reveals why the event of photography is so critical for consideration in contemporary photographic practice and study. The event of photography, articulated here through a Heideggerian lens, stimulates the photographer to reflect on their power, the presence of the camera, as well as the motivation of their practice. While the power dynamics cannot be completely eradicated, they are reduced through a careful recognition of how the photographer exists within a spatio-temporal *event* comprised of multiple integral parts (both living and non-living), all of which, the photographer included, are active in its creation. One clear question remaining is, how does one become attuned? Attunement to *world* ought to never be framed or interpreted as an achievement, but rather an ongoing openness to conditioning. To experience the interplay of revealing and concealing is a learning process, one that involves looking, seeing, fathoming, questioning, and reflecting. In a Latin American context, the event of photography, as *original truth*, provides new opportunities to progress beyond Cartesian understandings of photography; furthermore, it opens a path for innumerable voices, histories, political relationships, and representations to manifest beyond the restraining confines of a technological understanding of being.

Justin Michael Battin  
RMIT University  
Vietnam  
RIAS Associate Editor

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Justin Michael Battin  
RMIT University  
Vietnam  
RIAS Associate Editor

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