



LIVED EXPERIENCE: BAXTER& WALKING – A CONTEMPLATIVE TIME FRAME

Iain Baxter&
New York, (Guess) 2010

Walking is something most people do without thinking. When caught in the act of taking a photograph, however, walking is, by the technology of photography, a visual reminder of lived experience that establishes the tangible and slightly fragmentary traced memory back to the actual moment. The photograph has had a long history of raising perplexing questions about its successful purpose in acting as a stand-in for memory. The frame edge of the photograph reminds us that beyond this enclosed line a previous journey (most often a walk performed by the photographer) took place. What we discover in the photograph, such as in Iain Baxter&'s *New York, (Guess) 2010*, is the activity of his walking, which becomes an acknowledgement of the surrounding environment as a reminder of what was, once, a real experience. Although *Guess* is the advertisement of possible fantasies, this empty intersection and cross walk of humanity, that exists beneath the sales pitch, becomes more than a reminder of a potential walk across the space of the photograph. Here, in an instantaneous moment, Baxter& implicates us in his future walk across that street.

In Iain Baxter&'s long art career one must ask, how does his observational photographic art play with the subject of memory? In their endless surprise and deadpan framing, the conceptual quality of everyday content offers us that momentary glimpse into our own subjectivity framed onto a paper substrate. His photographs are framed everyday *lived experiences* that suggest a possible inter-connected association with previous, present and future *lived experiences*. How, when a photograph allows one to continually revisit that moment in time, now long past yet consciously present, do Baxter&'s photographs take our everyday understanding of a photograph from being a grounded static image with no real progression or duration of its own, to the idea of it as a motionless duration offering a continual narrative about our relationship to our everyday experiences? In an art

practice spanning decades, the currency of Iain Baxter&'s conceptual voice has produced philosophical revelations about the everyday nature of the photograph and our experiences with it, creating unique insights on the central activity of 'taking the photograph' and escalating it to another level of meaning.



Iain Baxter&
New York, (Escalator) 2010

By using Baxter&'s slightly direct humour with the photograph, I want to open up an inquiry into how this reactive imagining of using photographs offers us, his audience, an insight into how photographs are the metaphors of one's *lived experience*, a metaphor played out on the static, yet, at the same time, moving, steps of an escalator. Photographs are like his escalator on which we can ride, all the time knowing we will come to the end, and knowing the steps of one's past will come around again just like those steps beneath our feet. Memory has a habit of returning in a circular pattern of rotation. What we are reliving in that momentary ride up or down is identical to that recalled instant of how the photograph continually cycles through our daily lives; however, it's only a fraction of what normal perception consumes.

Accepting that both perception and memory are central facets of initially defining a *lived experience*, and that they are intimately tied to the understanding that our contemporary *lived experience* can only be understood through a technological imperative, it is not surprising that Martin Heidegger's *Questions Concerning Technology* would offer up a possible answer to the question of why the photograph is now seen as the "essence of man ... framed, claimed and challenged by a power which manifests itself in the essence of technology."¹ Here is the first instance in which Baxter&'s *New York, (Escalator) 2010* keenly expresses how a simple photographic technology allows him to take such a concept of *lived experience*, a perfunctory act of our humanity, and scrutinize it within a single time frame. When we look into this frozen conveyor of potential human experience, a fascination with time's intangibility is aptly referencing St. Augustine, in his *Confessions*, where he reflected upon the conceptual paradigm of how we conceive the operation of time. Yet, we reface this

¹ Heidegger, Martin, *Philosophical and Political Writings: Martin Heidegger* Manfred Stassen ed. Continuum International Publishing: New York 2006, p.38.

very paradigm when we look into any photograph, as “we speak of a long time and a short time; but never speak this way except of time past and future... For the past is not now, and the future is not yet...” (Chapter XV, 18)

Augustine’s simple yet profound statement suggests an understanding of how time ceases to be experienced in the present, although this present is continually moving. Because we “live in the moment”, a simple act such as taking a photograph becomes a critical factor in which *lived experience* (having no past and no potential future) is visualized. This ability to both hold and project time in two discrete directions is essential to the understanding that any *lived experience*, when caught in a photograph, is conditioned to be read in the present and imagined as a past with a future pending.

Henri Bergson, in *Matter and Memory*, explains how we can overcome the stasis of time’s durationless present while, at the same time, moving in two directions when conceiving *lived experience* captured in memory as a paralleling of the photograph:

...matter resolves itself into numberless vibrations, all linked together in a uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and traveling in every direction like shivers. In short, try first to connect together the discontinuous objects of daily experience; then, resolve the motionless continuity of these qualities into vibrations, which are moving in place; finally, attach yourself to these movements, by freeing yourself from the divisible space that underlies them in order to consider only their mobility – this undivided act that your consciousness grasps the movement that you yourself execute.²



These two insights are important in helping us to understand how we “grasp”, “activate”, and then “execute” time to resolve the conundrum of the motionless continuity of the past that we see as the present. When attempting to give perceptual reconsideration to a measurement of duration, while storing memories that will be used to give credence to our *lived experience*, Baxter& furthers this grasping, activating and executing of time in photographs such as *New York (Empire) 2010*. Here, the compartmentalized horizon cityscape provides an example of Bergson’s shivering moment that is “grasp[ed]”, “activate[d]”, and then “execute[d]” in motionless time and divisible space.

Iain Baxter&
New York, (Empire) 2010

² Bergson, Henri *Matter and Memory* (reprint) Cosimo Inc: New York, NY 2007 p.276.

If one accepts St. Augustine's notion that past and future exist only in the mind and not in the physical execution of physical time itself, then we are all mind-dependent on conscious time, which can both be long and short. This perception of long and short duration is critical to memory. It is our memory (and perhaps specifically our memory of the beginning and end of an event) that allows us to form a belief about its validity and, indeed, its very reality. Although Augustine described this process as a matter of measuring something wholly in the mind, arguably, at least, it can be considered a measuring of the interval of a *lived experience* itself. In other words, the fragmenting vista in Baxter's framing through the protective wire gives us the opportunity to attempt to locate proportioned *lived experience* as a mind-independent function. In suggesting this, I am acknowledging that some cognitive acceptance must direct our understanding where the Manhattan skyline is crisscrossed into compartments of understanding (in the long and short of it), while intensely expressing how imaginative *lived experience* is a visible section of both a past time and a fleeting memory. For Baxter, the visible instant of time is not just the central diamond view, but the sectioning of *lived experiences* that we know are unfolding beneath us.

Time is seductively powerful in giving shape: in the words of Martin Heidegger, the "notion of intelligibility by using the concept of a *clearing*". Heidegger's concept of *clearing* can highlight a desirability that does spread out in "every direction" from our present. By defining the technological imperative, and its conditioning effect on our understanding of ontological historicity, Heidegger illuminates how we grasp the concept of time. How, then, can walking be considered an arbiter of *lived experience*, where memory grounds this *lived experience* as a container of durationless time?



Iain Baxter
New York, (Mall) 2010

Before I can even begin to answer this question, one must accept the idea of durational motion: when looking into any photograph, *lived experience* is frozen in the form of a distant memory, and we must retrieve and re-experience it in a paradigm of both having no time in the present and all the time in the past. Hence *New York, (Mall) 2010* is the conceptual expression of lived experience caught in a step and gesture. This moment is a reminder of L. J. M. Daguerre's first daguerreotype, depicting the view from his window down the *Boulevard du Temple, Paris*. What Daguerre captured was the first *lived experience* in durational stasis. This daguerreotype has become a cultural icon and a powerful surrogate of lived

experience elevated to public scrutiny. Its lone human subject, who stands in a *clearing* of time, becomes *enframed* by the technology that halted his conscious decision to stop his temporal duration. Unbeknownst to our subject, he becomes an isolated figure defined out of the invisible (moving) chaotic *lived experience*, typical of Paris in 1838.

Here, our subject stands in for the “discontinuous objects of daily experience” (Bergson)³. The subject’s isolation in the daguerreotype is the result of a non-compositional decision, while the isolation of Baxter&’s subjects is the result of a compositional decision, yet they both exist as a simultaneously technological effect. The length of the exposure conditioned by the limited light sensitivity has resulted in the 1838 Paris *life* of the surrounding *Boulevard du Temple* becoming invisible to the camera eye; this results in his subjectivity being isolated in a barren space. Life around him has been cleared and he becomes the sole moment and perfect example of Augustine’s mediation; time in the present (his presence) is neither long nor short - it simply exists. Similarly, as we look into Baxter&’s *New York, (Mall) 2010* and imagine his version of a New York mall full of lived experience, this is another example of direct Augustinian mediation, where time in the present (Baxter&’s presence) is neither long nor short - it simply existed in that moment of technology. Baxter&’s subjects, who are caught in mid-stride, are not so far removed from the man who stopped to have his boots cleaned. In both photographs the inadvertent technology allowed their own *lived experience* to be framed. Fascinatingly, despite the ten minutes it took for Daguerre’s image to render a *lived experience* (collapsed into a single framed instance) the image itself indicates no discernable interval of this prolonged duration. Here, Heidegger’s famous deliberation on technology’s effect on human history and its essence for ‘being’, becomes an apt response to what we see as a *gathering together...of ordering, as standing-reserve*.⁴

For Heidegger, technology with its ability to shift our ontological historicity is defined as the concept of *enframing*. As a concept, *enframing* emphasizes the technological imperative for the *being* (in German, *dasien*) that both underlies and shapes our contemporary social consumer imaging networked age. His guarded nihilism on evolving *technologicalization* (that ultimately alters *being*) provides an avenue beyond a simple trajectory of what *lived experience* would be without technology. Heidegger's response to

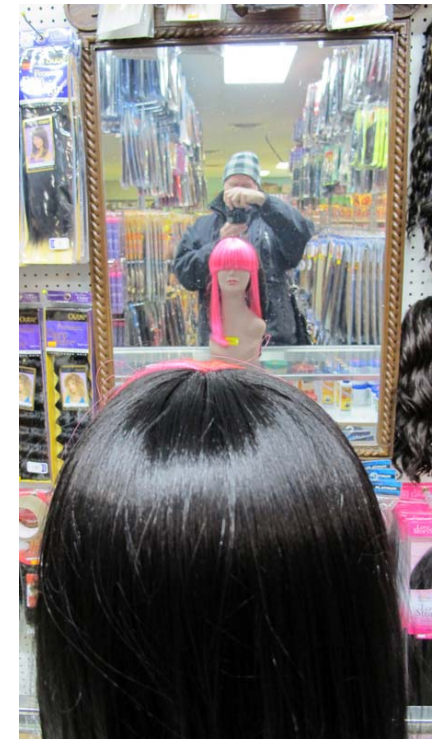
³ Bergson, Henri *Matter and Memory* (reprint) Cosimo Inc: New York, NY 2007 p.276.

⁴ Heidegger, Martin, *The Question Concerning Technology*. translation W. Lovitt, New York: Harper and Row, 1977, p.325.

the criticism that technology leads to a loss of real feeling is that a technological substitute can overcome and change these lost beliefs in the form of a revised, perhaps 2.0, “lived-experience”.⁵

It is interesting that, according to Heidegger’s aesthetics, ‘art’ would offer a reworked discourse on ontological historicity (altered by technology), whereby art could still function as it was intended, rather than merely as a “*commandeering of everything into assured availability*.”⁶ Heidegger claims the potential for art, uncontaminated by heightened aestheticism, to give an ordered understanding to the shifts in reality engineered by the workings of technology. It is not surprising to think that Baxter&’s *Untitled, (Wig) 2012* is that “mode of ordering, as standing-reserve” for the lost beliefs we all shed through our accelerated technological dependency. Caught in a mirror of reflected offerings on the technological styling of beauty, we cannot be fully prepared for the reworked ontological history being played out in the reversed framing of imitation and real.

The fascinating implications of our ordering of our *lived experience* through a technological product such as a photograph opens up a further conduit of discussion about how memory, aided by that very technology, is now a norm, rather than an abnormality. Therefore, our *Facebook* pages are loaded with photographs, because without these standing reserves embedded or tagged next to our profiles, our *lived experience* would exist as nothing more than an empty page. Baxter&’s photographs are the past recast into the present, where time is neither long nor short, a shivering equilibrium of what ‘was once’ and ‘is now’ waiting to find its most consuming expression. The apparatus of technology with its imitative and real history allows us to give concrete reference points to re-imagine a distant past as a *lived experience*. Following Heidegger’s argument, Baxter&’s photograph allows one to coalesce and split time into (what I call) a *commodic memory*: the very rendered and manicured perception of a *lived experience* that becomes a visual product (a commodity) with its own noticeable present historicity.



Iain Baxter& *Untitled, (Wig) 2012*

⁵ *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, translated by P. Emad and K. Maly, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p.66.

⁶ Heidegger, Martin, *Poetry, Language, Thought* translated by A. Hofstadter, New York, Harper and Row, 1971 p.72.

As the photograph carries the ability to span two simultaneous directions, it functions as an arbitrator of our sense of time, continually anticipating any possible direction. An oscillation could swing in simultaneous directions: one, towards a potential future and two, from a contingent point in the past that we, always, have to yank into the *here and now*. This occurs especially when we demand it (the photograph) to be a retrievable standing reserve point for the *commodic memory*.

The distance that is experienced in the conceptual understanding of Baxter&'s simultaneous movement to mirror his present in relation to the technological wig acknowledges our own *here-and-now* as being continually reinforced through our ability to have photographs act as time tagged. This provides a safety net for articulating and reconfiguring our ontological histories. The continual oscillation between our *here-and-now* and the 'past being recalled' reminds me of Paul Ricoeur's classic observation on how a narrative structure is always the interweaving of facts and fictions into a history where the intervening of the fictive past (memory) is placed onto the real present. Baxter&'s photographic desire to make an definable reproduction of his mirrored commodic memory inadvertently captured, not the general malaise of the *electric pink wig*, but converged a real past onto a fictive present through technology, thereby reversing Pygmalion's desire and making reality art.

In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger suggested that modern subjectivism (with its counterpart *enframing* [the technological imperative]) be understood as humanity's continuing inability to accept our defining existential finitude; in other words, technology becomes a way to circumvent death. Art no longer resides in our limitless ambition of a subjectivist quest to master all reality conceptually. Art and technology combine, resulting in our affirmation of the tragic truth that technology will, henceforth, *enframe* our *lived experience*. The validity of this idea can be seen in our current obsession with social mediated experience. Yet Heidegger would further establish, in *The Age of the World Picture*, a non-nihilistic way to accept the technological imperative, with the idea that *the artwork becomes an object of lived experience, and in this way art comes to count as an expression of human life*.⁷ Rather than lead us into despair over our essential human finitude (the fact that we will never master the totality of what-is [*lived experience*]), Baxter&'s *Untitled (Wig) 2012* helps us to learn to embrace, reconfigure and historicize this tragic finitude, by reminding us of its other side, namely, the intelligible surface that will never relinquish its time. It remains possible, as Heidegger suggested, for 'being' to become continually intelligible, that is, perceived, in an ever-existing present of defining *lived experience*.

⁷ Heidegger, Martin, *The Question Concerning Technology*. W. Lovitt, trans. New York: Harper and Row, 1977, p.116.

In all of Baxter&'s photographs, this durational experience offers an insight into seeing human finitude as not something we should despair over or seek to deny. Baxter&'s use of the photograph as a visual screen memory manifests itself as an observable history in the disguise of a fictional screen-image presence. The past no longer has a time, but is being continually seen through the present unfolding through our own *lived experience*; the unmoving content of the screen image is replaying its lost time as a representation of that past event. Paul Ricoeur pointed out in his *Time and Narrative*:

[t]he empty place to be filled by the imaginary is indicated by the very nature, ... we retrace our series of three successive approximations to having-been as it once was. We then see that the role of the imaginary grows as the approximation that becomes increasingly precise.⁸

Ricoeur's consideration of "having-been as it once was" allows the viewer to view *New York, (Be Stupid) 2010*, as a past of what has been, expressed by Roland Barthes as 'that-has-been' in *Camera Lucida*. It only lives in the present as a re-walkable fiction. Ricoeur recognizes that with our innate ability to have time as a linchpin of human existence, we come to expect and to re-imagine an observed history of time in any narrative structure, such as "learning to walk out of a frame". However, this experience is only the "approximation [which] becomes increasingly precise", when we conform the image to an external narrative understanding derived from our dependency on the technologic record. We assume time begins, continues and potentially ends when we begin and end our walk inside Baxter&'s photographs and our efforts of struggling movement can accomplish this by accepting the narrative expectation for these two men. These independent successive movements are implicated in each relationship of caught *lived experience*, typified by the space separating our two subjects in *New York, (Be Stupid) 2010*. This space acts as the narrative construct to give concrete historicity to the triangular relationship between the subject(s) and Baxter&.

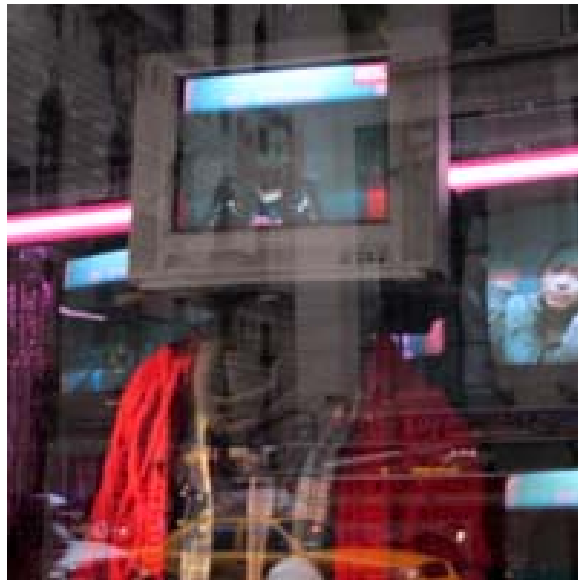


Iain Baxter&

New York, (Be Stupid) 2010

⁸ Ricoeur, Paul *Time and Narrative, Volume 1* translation Kathleen McLaughlin, David Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, 2012 p.181.

The ubiquitous photograph, as both an online presence and as a memory, forces us to embrace the initially tragic insight that *lived experience* will never be completely revealed in time. Photographs make it possible for human beings to understand that new and potentially more meaningful ways we will be replaced with a newer 2.0 version. Aptly, Heidegger's reference to the ancient ideal of Greek art is helpful in understanding the motivations of a new post-aesthetic understanding of what art, in the form of the photograph, could mean for us now and in the future.



Iain Baxter &
New York, (Television Head) 2010

If, instead of trying to obtain a kind of cognitive mastery over the content of a photograph through merely aesthetic understanding, we simply allow ourselves to stick our head inside the technology, we can experience what is happening within the photograph. With reference to Greek art, Heidegger suggested that we are able to encounter the “essential strife” in which the true work of art paradoxically “rests” and finds its “repose.” I want to suggest that the same is true of Baxter & Raisonnel’s photographs. The “motion” of *lived experience*, which paradoxically rests in the masterful “composure” of a photograph, reveals a “stability” that underlies the entire intelligible order of the still moment before us. In reality, the oscillation of two ontological tensions of time, both lived and imagined experience, is what Baxter & Raisonnel’s photographs capture when walking is the subject of art. Just like Joel Meyerowitz’s famous *Broadway and West 46 Street, New York c.1972*, which is a perfect example of the encounter with motionless continuity that is both relived and imagined, Baxter & Raisonnel’s *New York, (Television Head) 2010* is what Meyerowitz’ color field photographs capture where everything is in play. The compelling link can be made between the experiences of time and memory on a metaphysical surface between the two moments.

D.N. Rodowick, making reference to Gilles Deleuze’s use of Henri Bergson’s dual of consciousness in *Matter and Memory*, sought to redefine the metaphysical condition of conscious experience as Bergson found “...‘things’ [as] luminous by themselves without anything illuminating them: all consciousness is something, it is indistinguishable from

the ‘thing’, that is from the image of light.”⁹ When applying this to *New York, (Television Head)* 2010 one begins to understand the power the instantaneous technology of the photograph has to hold up *lived experience* as a “luminous ... consciousness” where “everything is in play”.

However intriguing this may be for understanding the seductive power of the photograph in our visual culture, I am further reminded of an earlier moment in which walking reordered our understanding of *lived experience*. This can be seen in Charles Nègre’s use of improved exposure technology to instantaneously render his *Chimney Sweeps Walking*. In this famous image, Nègre was able to give us a glimpse into the progression of the present towards a future, and a future defined by the past. Here, the only obtainable analyzing of the past is now a shortened time frame, a fraction of a second, where walking towards a future is only conceived through the characters’ presence (their subjectivity) and through their continual recollection as an *enframed* past. In Nègre’s photograph, walking, now caught in a split second, becomes a technological memory of *lived experience*.

Our encounter with Iain Baxter’s *New York, 2010* series, with its sweeps of humanity, tactfully illustrates that, as Heidegger would have it, meaning does not happen solely in the objective viewing of the subject, but instead it takes place, one could say, *between* us and the static ‘objective’ memory implicitly extracted out of his photograph. This, again, Heidegger would suggest, is an *ontological* truth, and art holds true the (human) existence in general. To be *Dasein* is to be “the being of the in ‘*between*’”.¹⁰ These sweeps, like Baxter’s *Escalator, Empire, Mall, Wig, Be Stupid*, and *Television Head*, are caught in the timeless moment of both past and present: a reflection of past industrial labour and iconic technological advancement, where time has neither regressed nor moved forward. They become moments of the instance in which *lived experience* has become both art and historicity (that is, time) rendered visible. Therefore, in his perceptual re-envisioning we encounter the work of art, in the art-making sense, as a visual memory of the commodity of a *lived experience*. We find ourselves in a human “existence” through a photograph that will ultimately shift the Cartesian mind to accept the technological imperative of the instantaneous photograph as a *lived experience* (that split second caught, posted and tagged in our contemporary context), understood as a memory. The act of walking in New York recorded in Baxter’s split second, rather than in Daguerre’s ten minutes, fundamentally illustrates a transition from understanding and experiencing an objective world as a mere object of time past, to a ‘now’ being experienced and transformed by the very technology that demands that Iain Baxter is always using it to implicitly participate in the self-making-intelligible of our world.

⁹ Rodowick, D.N. *Gillies Deleuze’s Time Machine* Duke University Press: Durham, North Carolina 1997, p.33.

¹⁰ Heidegger, Martin *History of the Concept of Time*. T. Kisiel, trans. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985, p.251.

However precise we may think Baxter& records a *lived experience*, we reconfigure his photograph into an understandable representation that offers us the opportunity of interweaving our own past into our present. By accepting that Baxter&'s photographs are a *time* that spans two directions, we intrinsically accept the intervention of his photographic enframing that will forever condition our future walks forward and answers the question of *lived experience* is really nothing more than walk (neither short nor long) just in the present.

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