

## **One Hour: Visual Practice Exploring a Collective History.**

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The exhibition *One Hour* was comprised of 3,600 portraits extracted from digitally archived photographs held by the Hampshire Cultural Trust and corresponding to the number of seconds within an hour. The exhibition stemmed from a sustained interest in how visual expressions of time can capture a sense of engagement with the liminal spaces between periods of history, the individuals that populated those histories and the consequent sense of connectivity with and between social communities.<sup>i</sup>

Using the exhibition as a focus this paper will consider how an accumulation of imagery can prompt a responsive sense of wonder arising from the viewers empathic response to the array of multiple portraits presented to them. Here the notion of wonder is formed by an awareness of our human involvement in the multiple visual relationships created between the object and the viewer. By engaging with and considering how anonymous individuals amass, making and becoming history, we can position and understand our own lives in relation to theirs. The essay will also consider how communities and individuals have experienced an evolving relationship with photography, as subject, producer and consumer and how the archived photograph remains vital to the understanding of our own place in the world within what Sontag refers to as 'times relentless melt' (2002, 15). Reference will be made to how three earlier exhibitions, *Location* (1998), *Ubique* (1999) and *Thinking Path* (2004), respond to locations and numerical facts as measures of human involvement, and how this approach developed in to a methodology that populates each exhibition with site and subject specific imagery drawn from particular museum collections and archives.<sup>ii</sup>

*One Hour* constructed a viewing relationship between the artist, the archive and the viewer and explored how the photographic archive simultaneously encapsulates micro and macro notions of time. Archives can be understood to capture distinct products of time in that they collect and house particular objects, whilst simultaneously drawing attention to how those items are distinct within the much larger mass of human production. *One Hour's* investigation of the Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT) archive manifests this principle by focusing on the micro histories of particular communities

and the individuals that inhabit them. The singularity of each image signals the presence of the individual within the relative mass of its own archive and, in turn, the relational position of this particular collection within the context of national or global archives.

The exhibition developed an engagement with two layers of virtual time and space by using the contemporary digital archive, the current point of access to a historic past, to source, analyze and extract the individuals that once populated the world of the original photographic images. Digital media has itself developed a very particular sense of affectivity, what Mark Hansen describes as the ‘internal interval’ that prompts an awareness of one’s own virtual state (2006, 226). Suspended within the virtual but reliant on the existence of the physical original, the encounter with a digitally produced image redefines but confirms that the

experience of viewing archival photographic prints or film can have a seductive or spellbinding effect on the viewer; their material and aesthetic qualities acting as a trigger to memory, evoking a sense of time and nostalgia, or conjuring fantasies of history. (Connarty and Lanyon 2006, 7)

Artists exploration of the currency of wonder as a means to engage with the world remains contested, what Larios recently observed as a form practice where artists have ‘developed feelings but not yet learned what to do with them’ (2015, 157). However, the lure of exploring the sense of awe experienced when engaging with a world of inexorably expanding and deepening knowledge and accountability inevitably attracts artist’s attention. The museum or archive continues to act as a catalyst for reflection and can be seen in Crary’s terms as a site for the ‘observing subject who is both the historical product *and* the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions and procedures of subjectification’ (1992, 5). An entry point to the world’s account of itself, the museum is now further enabled by digital archiving processes that provide immediate, but virtual, access to multiple reserve collections and associated documentary material.

The HCT photographic archive is a resource that provides a point of visual entry to the lived experience of small semi rural communities living in and around Havant,

Winchester and Basingstoke from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The content of such archives accounts for the everyday experience of evolving communities and becomes extraordinary when we consider the depth and variety of imagery it holds. The implication of the archive becomes profound when we consider the breadth of lived experience it records and how this record unfolds, ripples outward and connects with thousands of other regional, national and global collections. The HCT archive is comprised of around 50,000 photographs and includes several large collections that capture moments deemed to be of value and significance to its community. Within this are records of individuals and groups brought together within small and large local, regional and global events – from weddings and school photographs, to business outings or military exercises. Each image reanimates the past and reinstates the individuals that populated these fragments of history within the present reminding us of the rich diversity of familiar but unique experiences. This animates Rancière’s observation of Barthes *punctum* (1982, 27), as an affective force that creates ‘the transfer of an absolute singularity, that of the represented subject, to another absolute singularity, that of the viewing subject’ (2009, 9).

The basis of such archives continues to fascinate us, providing a vast resource of imagery frequently used by museums and heritage centres to contextualise the material culture of particular regional communities. The relationship between regionally specific museum collections and the photographic archives that accompany them are complex and variable. Each archive acts as a record of local trades, rituals, traditions and skills and indicates the matrix, evolution, development or demise of particular communities. Recently archives, as Wells observes, have been ‘raided’ to provide generic signifiers of constructed histories where the viewer unquestioningly accepts familiar visual records of ceremonies, social gatherings and regional trades. Increasingly used as a contextual device ‘photography becomes a direct way through which our experience of the past is structured’ (2009, 64). The curatorial practice of using archival photographs to contextualize examples of material culture within museums has evolved, as photographs became more widely understood as objects in their own right that deepen our understanding of the eras from which they emerge (Katz, 2012, 324).

*One Hour* addresses these applications of photography by considering the archive itself as, in Keene's term, a 'medium' that moves beyond being a classificatory tool (2005, 116). Simultaneously, the work considers the questions posed by the symbiotic nature of historic objects, in this case photographs, disseminated through digital archives. By presenting an immersive environment sourced from a digital access point the exhibition challenges traditional modes of viewing photographic images and in this way enacts the observation that '... we depend on the evolution of ideas and ways of looking at the world as much as we do on the evolution of technology' (Ibid). Each of the 3,600 images reinstated within *One Hour* denotes and populates a second in time, accumulating here as an hour of experience constructed through the multiple identities of the local community between the mid nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By presenting each second as a unit of time inhabited by an individual, the duration of time is made visible with each occupied second reminding us of the inexorable expanse of previous, simultaneous and consequent human moments. The images are shown alongside an accompanying film that scrolls through and animates the static imagery seen on the walls a second at a time, essentially acting as a visual clock.

This approach depended on a recalibration of the viewers encounter with archival photography as documents of lived experience that might, in themselves, act as a spur to connectivity. The process of developing the exhibition questioned how a photographic collection could be used to activate itself by reinstating a populated past. Retrieved from the archive, each portrait communicates a sense of agency that acknowledges the original individual concerned as a literal source of production, enactor of ceremonies or social participant. These records of mid nineteenth century Havant draw attention to how photography can be seen as an anthropological tool that contributed to mid nineteenth century developments in the social sciences, and was increasingly used to record the role of regional skills and traditions as 'expressive culture' that contributed to the formation of communities (Boyes 1993, 7). Whilst simultaneously, the medium, scope and development of photography provided an opportunity for what Anderson describes as an awareness applying to both the historic and contemporary community, where 'substantial groups of people were in a position to think of themselves as living lives parallel to those of the other substantial groups of people - if never meeting, yet certainly proceeding along the same trajectory (1991, 188).

The resulting exhibition used the archive to remind the contemporary viewer of the relationship between a regional collection of material culture and its evolving human community, without which the associated holdings would not exist. Inhabiting a discreet space within the host museum, *One Hour* physically manifested this notion by being presented in a gallery accessed by movement through the museum's displays representing the different spheres of knowledge, skill and experience that formed its community.

The images used to populate the exhibition recorded everyday occurrences and included documentary images of schools, workplaces and public events denoting individuals and groups within particular regional histories. In addition portraits were extracted from more significant familial, formal or social events such as marriages, work outings, sports team or regimental photographic records. By retrieving and reinstating the individuals within each photograph *One Hour* manifested Pearce's observation that the object, or in this case the photograph,

...only exists if it is 'made meaningful' through somebody reacting with it; but at the same time, that somebody only exists as a social being, as he is the process of interaction (as, of course, he is most of the time). The balance is held by the object itself, with its tangible and factual content. About the nature of these, there is a consensus within each individual's community, and so the act of interpretation will bear a relationship to that consensus. Herein lies the dialectical structure of viewing. The need to decipher gives us the chance to bring out both what is in the object and what is in ourselves; it is a dynamic, complex movement which unfolds as time passes, and in the act of interpretive imagination we give form to ourselves (2006, 27).

This approach is underpinned by an awareness of the genealogy of photography and our changing relationship with it as a documentary tool. There has been much debate about the veracity of the medium and how it variously captures, represents and transforms momentary realities, but at its core photography can be understood as a visual record of a particular space and time. In relation to figurative images, the photograph reminds us of a lived reality and that the subject(s) of a photograph were

... at some point present in time and space. For what makes photographs distinctive is that they depend on this original presence, a referent in the material world that at some time really did exist to imprint itself on a sheet of light-sensitive paper (Batchen 1999, 212).

From 1839 onwards photography rapidly progressed as an innovative documentary tool that could capture the particular nexus of history and discovery that shaped the Victorian period. Within this hierarchically obsessed era, photography enabled the documentation, scrutiny and classification of all aspects of humanity, be it familiar or exotic, privileged or poverty stricken, domestic, urban or rural. Victorian society revelled in its newfound ability to record and therefore order its self-awareness and was confident in its ability to create taxonomies of existence. What Wells describes as 'actuality' photographs were often taken of individuals and groups that had already been 'part of a tradition of enquiry into the health, housing, education, economic condition and moral state of the poor' (2009, 75). The power of the sustained observation and accounting of society in turn developed into a form of signification that controlled as well as a recorded its subjects (Green-Lewis 1996, 5).

In addition, by capturing fragments of time the development of photography reflected the Victorian preoccupation with mortality and was seen to still the transience of existence. It provided a form of prolonged presence for a society that, whilst benefitting from a period of burgeoning knowledge, influence and power, remained paradoxically fragile and vulnerable to disease, conflict and deprivation.

The foundations of an analytical, memorial and classificatory approach is tangible across early collections and archives. The camera's objective eye freezes the predominantly somber gaze of its subject in to images that are both distant and familiar.<sup>iii</sup> The photographs themselves remain active and communicative in their ability to span time and connect with the returned gaze of the contemporary observer, confirming them as a 'physical trace of the world' they captured (Green-Lewis 1996, 25).

As the initial need for absolute stillness declined and the camera became a more transportable and flexible tool, photography acquired an increasingly peripatetic role that could be applied in every context, from the home to the battlefield, the surgery to the street. The increasingly liberated photographic process and its developing anthropological role, no longer reliant on studio facilities or static subjects, made photographers significant and familiar members of most communities. This practical mobility enabled photography to inhabit 'a new and homogeneous terrain of consumption and circulation... a crucial component of a new cultural economy of value and exchange' (Crary 1992, 13). Photography became a more frequent, expected and site-specific record of particular regional identities, capturing both the similarity and difference of communities in ever more detail. By default the process also accounted for the impact of global events with, for example, the HCT archive becoming almost devoid of images of young men as the impact of the First World War was directly felt within this relatively small regional community.

High and low culture, staged and spontaneous, documentary and reflective images continued to proliferate in private and public collections as a testament to the minutiae and magnitude of rural, urban and industrialised lives and communities. As with many such archives the HCT collection evidences the evolution of this photographic record, shifting from the static and staid to increasingly relaxed and informal images. Throughout the attentive gaze of the subject continues to respond to the cameras 'mechanical eye' which became a way to both capture the present moment and also communicate this within a proposed future (Henning 2009, 192).

As technology advanced the role of the community based photographer became increasingly democratised. Photography became an expected activity where every aspect of experience and encounter was recorded and owned within families or small social groups. The resulting production of imagery generated a huge photographic heritage that reflects the human desire to account for its own existence. The product of this self-reflection has accumulated exponentially in relation to technological advances and social trends, accumulating in to huge and eclectic records of specific communities and the individuals that formed them. Crary recognizes this as something of a crisis within a century where 'perceptual modalities have been and continue to be in a state of perpetual transformation' where the transience and acceleration of digital

media becomes a key factor within ‘the delirious operations of modernization’ (2000, 13).<sup>iv</sup>

Now a part of the fabric of existence, numerous photographic collections of all types were accessioned into independent and regional museum archives. At this point the photograph shifts into an institutionalised mode that, whilst assuring its place within the historical record, paradoxically removes it from use. Consigned to physical obscurity they become a domestic equivalent to what Putnam (originally in relation to ethnographic collections) describes as “concealed histories” held within an internal cultural void (2001, 157). However contemporary archiving processes reintroduce the digitised original to a potentially global audience offering access and a renewed sense of vicarious community ownership. Democratised but entirely virtual the physical presence and haptic experience of the original photograph begins to evolve into a renewed relationship. As Freidberg observes

Virtual images have a materiality and a reality but of a different kind, a second-order materiality, liminally immaterial... the virtuality of the image does not imply direct mimesis, but a transfer – more like metaphor – from one plane of meaning and appearance to another (2006, 11).

*One Hour* addressed these viewing phenomena, by reinstating the individuals from within images and using their gaze to re-engage us within a physical environment. Each person becomes the object of our consideration, creating a series of micro relationships between the observer and the subject now reinstated within our own world of experience and awareness. The encounter reflects Prown’s description of the *deductive* phase of analysis which ‘involves the empathic linking of the material (actual) or represented world of the object with the perceiver’s world of existence and experience’ (1982, 7-8).<sup>v</sup>

Investigations into the relationship between documentary evidence and understanding within the museum environment, has its origins in earlier bodies of this author’s work such as *Location* (1998), *Ubique* (1999) and *Thinking Path* (2004).<sup>vi</sup> Each of these exhibitions developed visual methodologies that enhanced a sense of fleeting time by extracting static imagery from the sequential whole of documentary drawings,



photographic and video based source material. Developed from a particular interest in the Victorian period of colonial expansion and the abiding influence of that period within museums, each body of work developed visual strategies that sought to reflect the presence of the individual within collective histories.

*Location* (1998) responded to the Lynn Museum's unique collection of drawings by the artist and explorer Thomas Baines (1820 – 1875).<sup>vii</sup> Born and raised in Kings Lynn, Baines became known for his travels in Southern Africa during the mid nineteenth century and for his role as documentary artist during part of David Livingstone's Zambezi expedition between 1858-59. Baines' primary interest was in recording the daily life of the individuals, tribes and military personnel around him and his documentary sketches record what he saw with engaging spontaneous observation. The developing role of photography, which during the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century was poised to replace drawing as a documentary tool, was also considered in relation to his drawings. Early documentary photography brought about a seminal shift in the relationship between the observer and the subject, as the considered translation of observation through the drawn line, was replaced with the relative speed of the objective camera lens. This engagement with a now historic everyday and its review in the present reflects Robert's dialectic approach, which considers how photography contributed to 'the recovery of objects and events from the patina of official histories (either to the left or to the right), and the reassessment of objects and events from the standpoint of their contemporary significance' (1998, 12).

The work produced in response to Baines' sketches drew upon aspects of gaze theory within the museum context and engages with what can be understood as the redeveloped permission of a subjective gaze that Macdonald describes as turning its 'back upon the supposedly objective to explore its unstated assumptions and cultural-political positioning; ...arguing for a theorising which acknowledges and seeks to reflect upon subjectivity and standpoint rather than pretend their irrelevance' (2003, 5).

In the accompanying catalogue Patrizio addresses this relationship between looking and seeing where the theme of the exhibition

... became those things that are the object of another's gaze. For example, tribes people and colonials in combat; or quieter, domestic scenes where Africans are depicted under the dignified social gaze of each other; Baines himself as artist-observer. Equally in the wider context, the gaze dominates in the process of curatorial perusal of the drawings as they were accessioned into the Lynn collection; or with these works' 'rediscovery' under the eyes of a contemporary artist, Chubb; and ultimately, of course their scrutiny as they are exhibited for us today (1998, 10).

In this way *Location* can be seen as a template for later works that considers the artist as a conduit for communicating the fluid nature, depth and complexity of everyday experience. *Location* also considered the tension between the otherness of the African subjects and our recognition of generic activities that are familiar within all communities. The original drawings were displayed in a traditional glass topped case, mimicking the curiosity cabinet's disembodied understandings intimating Western authority and knowledge, whilst the works created in response to the drawings were liberated from the case or frame creating a renewed connectivity with the audience that simultaneously directed the viewer back to the original drawings. In rediscovering these images we became more aware of our own context in relation to them.

*Ubique* (1999) was developed during a residency at the Royal Engineers Museum in Kent.<sup>viii</sup> Home to a comprehensive collection, the museum includes a vast array of objects ranging from the minutiae of artifacts generated by centuries of conflict to full scale military hardware. The residency developed a working methodology that involved significant collaboration and negotiation with curators and conservators at the museum with the resulting exhibition pushing at the boundaries of representation within this very particular museum environment. The exhibition developed a synchronic approach that challenged the extant museum environment through a body of work that reconfigured expected norms of display by juxtaposing artefacts within reflective and interdependent hybrid works. The residency context enabled the deconstruction of expected norms of display and questioned how artefacts were displayed and what might be communicated as alternative readings. Fundamental to this was a re-visioning of factual content reflecting Ames' recognition of emerging curatorial practices that reconsidered 'what kind of knowledge is deemed to be useful

– indeed, even what constitutes proper knowledge, and who has the right to control its production and dissemination’ (2004, 81).

In response to the force of encounter enabled by physical access to artifacts not normally experienced by the public, *Ubique* focused on specific items related to the battles of Isandlwana and Ulundi.<sup>ix</sup> Deaths reported at these decisive battles are recorded as 1,240 and 1,500 respectively and the exhibition manifested these figures in tangible form through the production of a series of objects and images corresponding to the number of lives lost on each battlefield. Core elements reinstated the resonance of artifacts through a process of multiple castings from two bullets, one British and one Zulu, found on the battlefields, and transformed replications of the South Africa Medal awarded for inclusion in the campaigns. In addition the exhibition included a series of photographic images recording soldiers from both sides of the conflict and initiated the practice of extracting and focusing our attention on the specificity of individuals recorded within collective images.

*Ubique* was one of a number of works that replicated large numerical facts as objects and images.<sup>x</sup> Barnett (as quoted in Jantjes 1998, 123) has discussed how Freud describes two types of repetition as a means of mastering trauma, the first a conscious attempt to discharge emotion, the second related to unconscious memory and attempts to level unresolved conflict. Within *Ubique* and other works repetition is used as a cathartic tool that communicates a sense of engagement with conflicts. Now at a physical and historical distance, repeated considerations of the individual linked to these events begins to define a relationship with the current status quo within which the work and its audience exist. *One Hour* proactively used the repetitive act of processing and displaying the full cohort of images as a means to repeatedly scrutinize the relationship between the past and the present.

A later exhibition *Thinking Path* continued to explore how site-specific work could address expansive notions of location and presence within the continuum of time.<sup>xi</sup> The exhibition re-contextualized the life of Charles Darwin through a body of work that combined imagery with historical material and artefacts related directly to the man and his theories. Comprised of three main constituents the exhibition included wall based panels, museum artefacts and edited video footage that investigated the

resonance of retracing Darwin's footsteps through the Sand-walk or Thinking Path at Darwin's home, Down House.<sup>xiii</sup> A prolonged period of research generated a systematically produced set of 1600 digitized images corresponding to the paces of Darwin's daily walk. As with previous exhibitions Thinking Path sought to establish alternative readings of Darwin and his legacy. Such a seminal figure is heavily documented in relation to numerous fields of study that predominantly articulate Darwin's effect as a catalyst for knowledge. However a consideration of our own self-awareness in relation to these contexts is less apparent. The exhibition centred on the daily environment of Darwin's family home and his acute awareness of the detail, context and relevance of his immediate rural environment to an understanding of his developing global theories. The work itself mirrors Darwin's own process of association and cross reference where his 'break with natural theology, and with the tradition of thinking in linear genealogies, could hardly have been more radical or pronounced.' (Flach, 2013, 114)

The accumulation of images mimicked Darwin's own acknowledged research methodology of 'compilation' and the way that he gathered information from an eclectic range of sources in order to enable new theories. Browne has noted how Darwin drew from a community of knowledge to inform his work and how he

...hunted down anyone that could help him on specific issues, from civil servants, army officers, diplomats, fur-trappers, horse-breeders, society ladies, Welsh hill farmers, zookeepers, pigeon-fanciers, gardeners, asylum owners, and kennel hands, through to his own elderly aunts or energetic nieces and nephews (2003,11).

Darwin himself had an ambivalent attitude to the process of compilation, however he recognized the value and significance of a range of indigenous knowledge bases as essential to the consolidation of his theories. This approach informed the structure and visual content of *Thinking Path* that combined visual material from a broad range of sources alongside site-specific video documentation of Darwin's daily walk. Filmed on the four significant anniversaries of Darwin's birth, the return of HMS Beagle to the UK, the publication of the *Origin of Species*, and the anniversary of his death, the work acknowledged the process of Darwin's own life as a metaphor for human

experience. Additional primary research incorporated visual documentation of sites of direct significance to Darwin such as the room he was born in, local churches he attended as a child, his study and home environment at Down House. These references were supplemented by contemporary and historical imagery reflecting upon the four significant themes of birth, journeying, theory and death linked to the four anniversaries above. The relationship between the incidental and the influential was key to *Thinking Path* and provided a methodological approach that continues to frame more recent and current bodies of work.

In both *Thinking Path* and *One Hour* the sequence of reading visual content held in a grid of imagery is abdicated to the viewer who is at liberty to alter the passage of connections with and between images, creating a series of fluid individual readings for each viewer that ‘like evolution, ... does not have a beginning or an end, just a constantly changing middle (Coulter-Smith in Keynes et al, 2004, 31).

The final element of *Thinking Path* was the display of the original video footage documenting the revisited walks. Edited footage was shown on small LCD screens housed within bespoke museum cases. As with the animated film accompanying *One Hour* the presentation of the film is given the status of museum object, reminding us that the contents of such institutions are part of an evolving continuum, and that we as audience, are in turn a part of that process.

These three examples indicate a growing fascination with the passage of, and relationship between, timeframes. The sense of wonder at time as a sensate reality encapsulated in our interaction with the museum artefact underpins all of this work. This approach was particularly acute within *One Hour* where the visual accounting of time was consolidated by proximity to the steady rhythm and time keeping of St. Faith’s Clock, originally installed in Havant around 1860 and now on permanent display at The Spring Arts Centre.<sup>xiii</sup> The clock, still in motion, and once heard and seen by many of the individuals featured in the photographs within the exhibition, continues to measure and account for the passage of time. Likewise the community that measured its daily existence by the clock continues to evolve, drawing the viewer into a tangible sense of inclusion that reflects Duncan’s observation of the museum as a public space that creates ‘an arena in which a community may test, examine, and

imaginatively live both older truths and possibilities for new ones... in which communities can work out the values that identify them as communities '(1995, 133).

The images within the exhibition accumulate in to a reconstituted hour of community, with the criteria for inclusion being that each original individual is looking at the camera, and now at us. The gaze becomes connective, implicating us within a myriad of watchers, exhuming the past and reinstating the original subjects and consequently ourselves in relation to them. The sequence of reading is abdicated to the scopic approach of the viewer who can meander or fixate on imagery across and between the expanse of accumulated imagery enabling a self motivated equivalent to Fuhrmann's *Kaiserpanorama* experience (Crary 2000, 135-7). Visitors are drawn into a visual dialogue with the exhibition and report making connections with particular images, seeking out similarities and considering real or imagined relationships with the array of portraits before them.

Each portrait was equally sized and presented, responding equally to those who were the focus of attention as well as to those in the background or on the periphery of the original image. In some cases the facial features of the subject are barely discernable, appearing skeletal or simian. The act of concentrating our gaze on the otherwise unnoticed individuals that were often incidental inclusions in the original photographs, reanimates our own sense of inclusion and involved awareness of the lived experience of past lives. As Bazin has observed

Only a photographic lens can give us a kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation, a kind of decal or transfer. The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. No matter how fuzzy, distorted or discolored, no matter in how lacking in documentary value the image may be, it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model ([1960] 1980, 237).



Figure 1.1 *One Hour Detail* (2011) Photographic paper and brass pins. Spring Arts & Heritage Centre. Photograph © Bruce Williams. Original photographic images used with kind permission of Hampshire County Council/Hampshire Cultural Trust.



Figure 1.2 *One Hour* Detail (2011) Photographic paper and brass pins. Spring Arts & Heritage Centre. Photograph © Bruce Williams. Original photographic images used with kind permission of Hampshire County Council/Hampshire Cultural Trust.



Figure 1.3 *One Hour* (2011) Photographic paper and brass pins. Spring Arts & Heritage Centre. Photograph © Bruce Williams. Original photographic images used with kind permission of Hampshire County Council/Hampshire Cultural Trust.

This notion of being and re-becoming is both fractured and confirmed by *One Hour* as the process of display individualizes each extracted portrait. Each image is pinned and presented separately, with original groups mixed within a larger whole referencing the breadth and blend of individual experiences that constitute communities. Digital access to the archive allowed miniscule detail to be extracted, in Sontag's words, as 'slices' of fragmentary time (2002, 15). Each portrait preserves the unedited integrity of the original image, capturing blemishes, blurring and fading as intrinsic elements of



the visual quality of the work. The digital interface accentuates colour values making what were monotone images into a checkerboard of colour tones and shades. Within the accompanying compiled film of images each portrait lingers for one second in actual time, recording the past but seen in the present, it is a mute but populated equivalent to St. Faith's clock.

The contemporary viewer responds to the hints of social hierarchy that remain within each extracted portrait. Items such as hats, costumes and facial expressions begin to create individual narratives that the observer embellishes or questions. The mixture of images shifts our responses as we scan across genders, ages and apparent or inferred identities. We implicitly understand the nuance of differently peaked hats, feathered bonnets or lace collars, and decode individual expressions of somber attention or animated response to the camera. The design of glasses, hairstyles or jewelry further locates each subject or 'model' in a particular period. Older generations are mixed with the middle aged, adolescents or children and the gaze of each individual variously communicates assured privilege, engaged involvement or vulnerable anxiety within the presence of the camera lens. The evolution of photography discussed earlier is apparent in the different tone, granularity or clarity of images from different periods, whilst the pixilation of the digital archive interface indicates the proximity of each individual to the original camera lens. The viewer's instinctive reorganization of pictorial similarity reconstitutes relations between the fractured images, coalescing them into partial and alternative groups. The cohort of 3,600 portraits accumulated into a populated mosaic of images where each portrait itself became a pixel contributing to the whole. In this way the complete work became a further physical transformation of the pixel based digital interface used to source the images.

The methodology of downloading, extracting and reconstituting multiple portraits was used to isolate the connective gaze of each individual from the chosen images. The process itself became meaningful in the way that it both democratized and highlighted the evidence of class, status and history within each individual gaze. Closely cropped, each image was brought to the present in a way that was reminiscent of passport photographs. Fulfilling a dual purpose, this format hinted at accountability, referencing us back to earlier discussions of photography's early use as a tool of

control, whilst also attracting the viewer in to close proximity in order to analyze the detail of each subject, creating a sense of intimate connectivity.

Each reinstated portrait addresses what can be seen as the digital erosion of physical encounter. Although the visual interface can be seen as the problematic 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of the Benjamin's concern with 'genuineness', here the interactive potential of digital reproduction – the virtual access to images that allows the user to scrutinize, dissect or manipulate photography, provides a new form of 'aura' or wonder based on accessibility rather than the unique physicality of an original photograph (1934, 7).

This text has described how *One Hour* builds on earlier methodologies that physically manifest the metaphorical potential of contextual facts related to museum collections and significant sites. It has considered how *Location*, *Ubique* and *Thinking Path* variously used fabrication and presentation techniques to reveal existing narratives embedded within specific collections and sites, and how each body of work fused the relative cultural position of artefact, location and viewer as a hybrid whole, creating new arenas of engagement. *One Hour* developed from this base to consider how the archival source can be reconstituted in to a communicative experience. The array of images presented to the viewer, and the incommensurable individual contexts that they imply, oscillate between the past and the present, immersing the audience in the static and animated gaze of the reconstituted portraits. As the viewer engages and cross references between individual images, returning the observation of the original portrait subjects, they become aware of each individual, and consequently themselves as a form of visual synecdoche where, as Bal suggests 'an element, a small part, stands for the whole simply by virtue of its being a part of that whole' (1999, 206).

By imbuing moments of time with individual identities accumulating in to a metaphorical hour of experience, the viewer is held within a relational matrix that prompts a sense of wonder at the depth and complexity of human existence, of which they are a part.

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**Notes:**

<sup>i</sup> *One Hour* was exhibited at the Spring Arts & Heritage Centre, Havant, West Sussex. 22<sup>nd</sup> September- 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2011. A precursor to the exhibition, *One Minute*, comprised of sixty images and accompanying film was first shown at The Gallery of Wonder research facility at Newcastle University 11<sup>th</sup> January – 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2011.

<sup>ii</sup> Aspects of this text appear in Shirley Chubb’s PhD thesis (Chubb, 2007).

<sup>iii</sup> The fixed nature of many early photographs was partly dictated by the need for stillness and stability in order for the image to be captured.

<sup>iv</sup> This plethora of recorded experience has now exploded with the introduction of social media and the instant capture and communication of potentially infinite numbers of images.

<sup>v</sup> Prown refers to the three phases of analysis as *description*, *deduction* and *speculation* (1982, 7-8).

<sup>vi</sup> Discussion of *Location* and *Thinking Path* is included in Shirley Chubb’s PhD thesis (Chubb 2007).

<sup>vii</sup> *Location: Polly Binns and Shirley Chubb* was exhibited at the Fermoy Gallery, King’s Lynn. 12<sup>th</sup> September – 31<sup>st</sup> October 1998

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viii *Ubique* was exhibited at the Royal Engineers Museum, Gillingham, Kent. 10<sup>th</sup> July – 28<sup>th</sup> August 1999.

ix The battles of Isandlwana and Ulundi took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January and 4<sup>th</sup> July 1879.

x The title *Ubique*, taken from the Royal Engineers motto meaning ‘everywhere’, is also of significance, here referencing a particular source whilst also indicating rippling contexts of association that move beyond itself.

xi *Thinking Path* was originally shown at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery. 7<sup>th</sup> February - 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2004. The exhibition then toured the U.K. between 2004-5 with support from the Arts Council England National Touring Programme, and has additionally been exhibited in a variety of venues and contexts.

xii Darwin habitually walked the Sand Walk at Down House, his family home for forty years, on a daily basis. He used the walk, dubbed his ‘thinking path’ by his family, as a vehicle for reflection and meticulous long-term observations of his environment. The thinking path fuelled Darwin’s emerging theories, culminating in the *Origin of Species* (1859).

xiii The clock was originally built by J. W. Benson of London. <http://stfaith.com/turret-clock/> Accessed 07.01.15