A few too many? Some considerations on the digitisation of historical photographic archives

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Michael Lesy contends that in digital culture the issue has become 'not that there are too few images, but too many' (2007, p.2). He bases this evaluation on an insistence that greater access to historical photographs does not necessarily correspond with an increased understanding of photographs or for that matter history where photographs often appear as testimony.[1] For Lesy, the ability to access any number of images does not necessitate a corresponding awareness of the discrete conditions that gave rise to the work in the first place; indeed it may frustrate it (2007, pp. 1-9). The upshot of this critique is an assertion that while we live in a culture of image-saturation, we lack critical awareness of how photography operates. This paper aims to address such a contention by focusing on the digitisation of one photographic archive. It bases its findings on research undertaken on the Larcon Albums held at the New York Public Library that can be freely accessed on that institution's digital gallery (http://nypl.org/digital).[2] It will consider both the rationale for and also the effects of digitisation of this archive by focusing firstly on the conditions under which these photographs were initially produced and for what reasons; secondly, by paying attention to how transference affects the semantic range of these photographic albums, and finally by considering how contemporaneous users are making sense of these images as an online resource and as a link for the articulation of hybrid diasporic affiliation.

Jose Van Dijick asserts that media and memory are mutually dependent rather than media leading memory or memory dictating medium (2004, p.272). In this context, photographs, potentially, more than other visual media, are mutable to the directives of context and selection. This is because by themselves photographs cannot tell us much; their meanings are always context-determined. Such processes accelerate with the passing of time where the original purpose of a photograph can easily get subsumed in new imperatives of value and meaning. When this occurs, origin and the original can

[1] Lesy's preferred use of photographs for, what he terms 'historical actuality' occurs in *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1973).

easily get discarded for the copy and a fetishisation of the access path. 'Yet, it is not the case that the images of the past have less value in our culture' (Sturken and Cartwright: 2001, 148): any familiarity with heritage culture will testify to this. It is the case, however that historical images are 'more prone to the circulation, changed contexts, and remaking that are central aspects of contemporary media culture': this 'entails a fundamental shift not only in the technology and circulation of images but also of their semiotic and social meanings' (Sturken and Cartwright: 2001, 148-9).

In this, it can be argued that historical images always operate in a profoundly modern way. In order to establish why this occurs, I will examine in what ways online access to the Larcom albums has shifted the semantic references of the original source by re-building the original context in which these photographs communicated, then consider how transference and transmission affect those meanings in order to assess how the semiotic register of these photographs is being remade and for what purposes as an online resource. In recognising that the meaning of any photograph is never stable, my concern is to determine whether it is the case that new technologies produce radical shifts in meaning-making or, whether the process is one of accrual that signals a theoretical continuum. Finally, I will conclude by returning to Lesy's critique to respond to his claim.

Production and circulation

The two albums of photographs held in the Larcom Papers at the New York Public Library pertain to prison reform and the political context of mid nineteenth-century Ireland. All the photographs were taken in Mountjoy prison, Dublin, which opened in 1850 and was considered to be Ireland's 'model prison' (Carey: 2000, p.125), and was where the first photographs of Irish prisoners were taken in 1857. Influential in the establishment of prison photography in Ireland was Sir Walter Crofton who, focusing on Mountjoy, advocated its adoption as a means of surveillance both within and without the

[2] All references to the photographic portraits adopt the Digital Gallery's cataloguing identification system.

institution. Here Mountjoy's status as a new type of prison (a panoptican)[3] where a regime of visibility was integral to the means of constructing bio-power needs to be acknowledged as well as the significance of it being a convict prison. In contrast to the county gaols Mountjoy was controlled by central government and it functioned as a holding station for convicted prisoners awaiting release or transportation to what were, then, the British colonies. Embedded in the establishment of prison photography in Ireland was the requirement that within that institutional framework the image needed to be transferable for colonial policies to be operative. In this corrective institution, then, it became not only the prisoner's corporal status that was transferable but also his visible likeness (the prison portrait).

Photography was envisaged as one of the "appliances" for preventing crime, which along with police supervision, written communication and the report were foreseen as the means for control (Crofton quoted in Slattery: 1992, Vol 1, p.226).[4] A commercial photographer contracted-in originally undertook the photographing of prisoners in Mountjoy and records indicate that three prints of the sitter were produced for 1 shilling with additional copies available at 4d a copy (Slattery, 1992, Vol I, p.231). Of the original prints, one copy was attached to the prisoner's record at Mountjoy, another was held by the Home Office and the third by the Irish Office, London. The location of the portrait at these sites indicates how the photograph served as a means to track the individual and monitor his actions (all the portraits in the Larcom albums are of male subjects). As Under Secretary for Ireland (1853-1869) Sir Thomas Larcom was responsible for maintaining both law and order in Ireland and also for providing information to London, the seat of British imperialism. This context explains why he would be in receipt of two albums of prison photographs of Mountjoy prisoners.

Album 1 of the Larcom Collection pertains to prison portraits made in Mountjoy in August 1857, and its significance in terms of the history of photography in that it

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[3] See Foucault (1977) for a full account of the architectural significance of the panoptican in terms of the construction of docile citizens.
[4] This conceptualisation of the use of photography clearly accords with Michael Foucalut's notion of the archive (1977).

indicates the earliest use of this type of photography in Ireland, and also pre-dates the use of prison photography in Britain. On 13 August, the directors of convict prisons (Crofton, John Lentaigne and Patrick Joseph Murray) made a request to photograph prisoners in Mountjoy gaol. Not only does the presence of Album 1 testify to the success of this request but also to the speed with which it was implemented (within the month).[5] This Album comprises of sixty-four oval portraits, mounted one to a page. Only ten of the sitters are named, with five of these having question marks after their name. This indicates that in 1857 attention was being placed on the evidential potential of the prison portrait as a means for identification but also that the procedures are not yet in place to make this viable in terms of a network of surveillance channels.

Album 2 relates to a change in the function of Mountjoy precipitated by a political crisis that occurred in Ireland during the 1860s, and this is indicated by it containing far more portraits (three hundred and forty-four in total). Dated November 1866, it comprises exclusively of those associated with the political challenge posed by the Fenian movement. These rectangular albumen prints (4 inches x 3 inches) are mounted four to a page and all carry name captions. The two distinct styles of portraiture in the Album indicate the status of tried and untried prisoners[6], with those who have not been convicted appearing in their own clothes, manifesting a range of poses and in some instances a stance of defiance. For this latter class of detainee (imprisoned as a result of the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, Ireland (1866), which made possible arrest without trial) there was no compulsion to comply with being photographed. In November 1867, after the completion of this Album, it became mandatory for all untried political prisoners to be photographed.

The uniformity of handwriting in the captions to the portraits reveals them to be the work of one individual. Of note in these captions is evidence of an acceleration of

[5] A hand-written title that appears on the front-page of this Album states that it contains: 'Some of the more Serious Offenders confined under Penal and Reformatory Discipline in Mountjoy Government Cellular Prison, Dublin'; it is signed by John Lentaigne (one of the three directors of convict prisons).

[6] In terms of the latter, Larcom would also have contact with detainees in Mountjoy through written correspondence relating to requests for release. This was the case with John Devoy (now recognised as an important Fenian organiser) whose request failed (Dooley: 2003, p.62-3).

surveillance procedures. In addition to name, identification as serving in the British army (image ID: 1111432), membership of the Fenian organisation in Ireland (image ID: 1111362) and the United States (image ID: 1111376), and current or past service in the American army (image ID: 1111369) is included on a number of occasions.[7] What this type of written textual notation indicates is both the fuller implementation of Crofton's regulatory regime and also its incursion into civic society; no doubt propelled by a colonial perspective of challenge.[8] In addition to this, notes are made indicating the use of false names; in these instances stress is being placed on connecting those individuals with political crimes. In a few instances this is achieved: as in the cross referencing of the convict portrait of Martin Hogan to an earlier portrait of him as an untried detainee where he gave the false name of William O'Brien, as was the case with James Wilson whom likewise gave a false name on arrest, that of James Thomas. What comparison between both men's 'before' and 'after' conviction portraits reveal is the lengths of the 'corrective' discipline undertaken by the state - this is underscored by the different styles of photography (image ID 1111364 and image ID 1111434; image ID 1111364 and image ID 1111434).

A letter enclosed within the Album, written by the photographer, states that Larcom had requested these photographs of 'untried political prisoners … confined in Mountjoy' some months before. The photographer goes on to refer in sardonic terms to this "most unique 'Book of Beauty'" of portraits that he now sends. However, this Album, in addition to the untried prisoners contains portraits of those convicted of offences associated with Fenianism; some of the latter were taken as early as 1865 in connection to arrests made after the seizure of *The Irish People* (a Fenian newspaper) in September 1865. Jeremiah O'Donavon Rossa, one of the notable Fenian organisers arrested at that time, recorded his experience of being photographed in Mountjoy as a convicted prisoner (see image ID: 1111428) in his retrospective prison diary (1991, p.82). [9] His testimony indicates that as

[7] Many of the latter were veterans of the American Civil War, which ended in 1865.
[8] By August 1866 there were 320 political detainees held at Mountjoy (McConville: 2003, p.146).
[9] O'Donavon Rossa was moved to Pentonville prison on 24 December 1865 where he was not photographed. Pentonville, which was the model for Mountjoy and considered to be 'the machine to manufacture good citizens' (Carey: 2000, p.51) was, in this instance, behind its Irish counterpart in the implementation of prison photography. In the light of the Clerkenwell bombing (1867) another attempt

a convicted prisoner he had no choice in being photographed (as was the case) and also that the ordering of this Album does not follow chronologically - the convicted prisoners' portraits appear in the last seven pages (comprising twenty-four portraits) even though some of these must have been taken before the close of 1865.

The greatest number of portraits (three hundred and twenty) in this Album comprise of those arrested but awaiting trial or release. It is not only in number but also through the ordering system applied in the Album that the significance of purpose becomes apparent. To understand the ordering of the portraits it is necessary to recognise both that Larcon requested the compilation of the Album and the significance of his role as Under Secretary for Ireland. This role, in the context of the Fenian crisis, included providing photographic likenesses of suspects to the Home Office, Irish Office, London and police divisions in Ireland and Britain.[10] It was, at the time, the potentially liminal status of those who had not been convicted that posed the greatest threat to law and order. Their portraits provided an important means for tracking procedures to be operational. This context helps explain why it is this type of portrait that is given priority in this Album.

What is significant about these two Albums is that they offer evidence of the earliest use of prison photography in Ireland (Album 1) and a study of how photography becomes integral to the extension of the state's mechanisms of colonial control (Album 2). However, they also differ in that the first Album pertains solely to criminal status (felons) whereas Album 2 comprises exclusively of political prisoners (convicted and untried). Recognising the precise circumstances of production allows greater understanding of the variable stylistics deployed in both Albums. What this means is that we cannot read the two Albums in terms of a linear progression in prison photography; this is due to the unprecedented circumstances that gave rise to the compilation of Album 2. This Album offers a rare example within one artefact of what Allan Sekula has outlined as a more

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was had to photograph O'Donavon Rossa when he was incarcerated in Millbank Prison, England. For the significance of his refusal to comply see MacSuibhne and Martin (2005, p.113-115).

[10] Discharge for detainees held at Mountjoy was frequently prescribed by the condition of either emigration or return to place of origin. The prison portrait provided a mechanism to ensure that these conditions were met and facilitated a means to connect further misdemeanours with previous suspicion of, or proof of, political agitation.

general function of portraiture as a double system that operates both on an honorific and repressive register (1999, pp.343-389). The Album can only operate in this way because it is a product of a precise historical location. This was the outcome of the suspension of the Habeas Corpus in Ireland, which allowed the detention of those suspected of political crimes but also, at the date of compilation of this Album, not the compulsion to be photographed.[11] In terms of the rationale for production, it was this class of prisoner, rather than those convicted (whose portraits we would recognise now as being of some of the most famous Fenian organisers) that provided the impetus for the compilation of the Album in the form that it appears.

In rebuilding the initial context of these photographs' the exercise I have undertaken has been archaeological: it has sought to uncover both the initial operative logic of the Albums and the segmented layers of their early meaning. It has been necessary to establish this before we move on to consider the significance of their transference because: 'an object [including photographs] cannot be fully understood at any single point in its existence but should be understood as belonging to a continuing process of production, exchange, usage and meaning' (Edwards & Hart: 2004a, p.4). Bearing this in mind, we now must turn to the significance of shifts in location of the Larcom Albums.

Transference

I have outlined why as Under Secretary for Ireland Larcom would have been in receipt of these Albums in the first place and why in that capacity he would have had an official interest in them. Photographs as artefacts are by their nature transferable and mutable to the directives of shifts in location, which in turn affect interpretation. After leaving office in 1869 (when the immediate threat of Fenianism in Ireland had dissipated) Larcom retired to Fareham, England. The albums while official documents remained in his possession; this may have been because their meaning could translate into his wider

[11] This gives rise to within the covers of one album an example of the two poles of surveillance. What distinguishes the celebrity portrait and that of the criminal is not content but the 'uses to which they are put, their role in wider systems of social classification' (Hamilton and Hargreaves: 2001, p.4). In the ordering system of Album 2 we witness an attempt to impose a use within a wider system of social classification.

scholarly interest in all things Irish or because they gained a new attraction due to a fascination with portraits of criminals that arose in the 1860s (largely as a result of the introduction of the *carte de visite* format).[12] While the reason must remain conjectural it does indicate a shift from an institutional impetus for production, and this is significant because the transfer of photographs always involves semiosis (Hartley: 1992, p.83).

It also indicates how 'through its life, the photograph, as both image and object, can potentially move across several spaces, including the sites of production, use, reproduction and preservation, and along with each change in ownership and context, new meanings are acquired' (Sassoon: 2004, p.191-2). The transference of the albums to Larcom's Private Papers indicates the first shift in the modes by which these portraits communicate; how the albums then came to be in the United States after Larcom's death in 1879 remains unclear. What is known is that they came into the hands of the writer Harriet Fyffe Richardson who donated them to Stanford University and from there they were transferred (along with some of Larcom Papers)[13] to the Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library in 1953.

Seminal debates on the photographic archive have, in large measure, been grounded in an ontological critique that is predicated on the assumption of the temporal archive (see for example Sekula: 1986; rpt in Evans and Hall: 1999, pp.181-192 on the significance of the photographic archive and Crimp: 1981; rpt in Campany: 2003, 2007, pp.215-216 for the effects of establishing the Arts, Prints, and Photographic Division at the New York Public Library). As a manuscript deposit at the New York Public Library the original photographs would have been (and still are) indirectly sourced via materials relating to Sir Thomas Aiskew Larcom. This has an impact on their currency. The records of the Manuscript Division of the Library (though incomplete) indicate that before 1999, when the Digital Gallery was established, consultation of the photographs was limited, as were

[12] As early as 1861 a claim was made 'that copies of the negatives of the prisoners' photographs were in circulation' in Dublin (Slattery, Vol 1, p.228); and if this was the case, it signalled both a breach of prison regulations and also an early indication of a wider interest in this type of photography. For a precedent for this type of interest see Edge (2004, p.20-26). The connection between interest and political affiliation, however in this instance, cannot be asserted as the copies would have pertained to Album 1 and these were of felons who were not connected to a clear political cause.

requests for copy prints, with only six requests. These requests pertained broadly to academic publications, biography and local history studies.[14] What changes with the digital archive is that issues of temporality become largely redundant and it accelerates the processes of access and use.[15] This has a profound effect on how photographs communicate.

As an institution the New York Public Library hold a public access policy, and this has relevance for how visual materials are displayed on the Digital Gallery. Its purpose is to "enable individuals to pursue learning at their own personal level of interest, preparation, ability and desire, and help ensure the free trade in ideas and the right of dissent" (http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgabout.cmf, p.1). To this end both Albums in digital format are presented in full and as the photographs appeared in the original source. Contextual information is limited to what appeared on the originals and brief factual information relevant to the collection's history. Searches can be undertaken by a number of routes including key word, links and the name of an individual for example. However, in digital format the materiality of the source (as two distinct albums) cannot be fully experienced (for the significance of the loss of materiality in the digital archive see Sassoon: 2004, p.192-3).

As a manuscript deposit the original albums' classification prioritises their provenance as deriving from their link to a public figure (Larcom and his official capacity in Ireland) whereas as an online resource their visuality is uppermost. The photographs can be downloaded for free and without the restriction of watermark. The photograph as digital image accessed on a computer screen indicates a different type of framing where correspondence can be to a number of referents. While it may be the case that 'culture is now busy reworking, combining, and analysing already accumulated media material' (Manovich: 2001, p.131) the important question to ask in terms of this study is what are

[13] The main repository for Larcom's Papers pertaining to Ireland is the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.
[14] My thanks to William Stingone, Keeper of Manuscripts and Archives, Humanities and Social Sciences Library, New York Public Library for this information.
[15] The Larcom Albums were one of the first of the Library's photographic holdings to be digitised, and they were chosen because they afforded a discrete project (manageable in number and coherent in content). Contributory factors were also, no doubt, the Irish dimension and their relation to American history.

the affects of this for an understanding of historical photographs. 'At the most fundamental level, by its nature as a visualising medium, digitisation encourages a shift from thinking about the complexity of the material object to viewing the visual surface of an image'; the outcome being, according to Joanna Sassoon 'a focus purely on subject content' (2004, p.190). Some caution needs to be put in place here against pursuing a technically deterministic argument. For one thing, viewers bring to photographs a reservoir of associated meanings and this means that the photographic, regardless of the format, is never purely a visual experience. In addition to this, Bruno Latour warns against prioritising technologies as the source of meaning making by pointing out that 'objects carry with them a part of the operative logic characterising earlier aspects of their history as they are relocated into reconfigured networks' (Latour quoted in Bennett: 2005, p.537).

One of the things that distinguish the Internet as an archival repository is that disciplinary paradigms no longer hold dominance. Researching the history of photography or using historical photographs to support a historical argument within academic disciplines entails either acceptance of the archive as a coherent body of work or its interrogation. Lesy's response to the 'sea of information' and its potential for 'overload and saturation' that the researcher of digital archives faces is both the study of and the reproduction of photographs as sequences (2007, p.3, p.7). His own case study of the appositeness of this method is, however, based on a material and temporal photographic collection and the handling of his materials as contact sheets (the Anthony Angel Collection). Users of the Internet need not or may not wish to follow the same injunctive. In this context the digitisation of historical photographic collections 'enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content' (Jenks: 2002, rpt in Nightingale and Ross: 2003, p.280). It also means that: 'the layered organisation of information offered on the Internet supports the capacities of selectivity and interactivity as choices can be made at every level' (van Dijk: 2006, p.45). This suggests a particularly apposite interface for current diasporic hybrid formations wishing to associate themselves with an Irish register because it affords a tactical alignment through the 'instantaneity and simultaneity of multiple data flows' (van Loon: 2008, p.103) that is no longer dependent on the proof of

bloodlines. 'The making of links, jumps and associations' (van Dijk: 2006, p.193), in this context, also provides a means to overcome the linearity of traditional historical narrative.

What has changed significantly with the electronic archive is that not only temporal but also spatial relations begin to disappear; the effect being that 'the photograph's internal relation to time is offset by its distribution across a flat field' (Campany: 2003, 2007, p.21). As a consequence while 'the [electronic] archive might in theory make the writing of history possible it also frustrates it' (Campany: 2003, 2007, p.21). This indicates a significantly different relationship to photography because 'the experience of looking at a historical image on a computer screen is profoundly different in the understanding it might generate from the experience of, say, looking at the same image as an albumen print pasted in an album or a modern copy print in an archive file, for the "grammar" of both images and things is complex and shifting' (Edwards & Hart: 2004a, p.3). It bears relevance, then, to pay attention to both the terms and significance of the differing grammars that may emerge when historical photographs are accessed online, and also the needs to which users are putting these resources. Of particular importance is whether digital accessing involves the demise of photographic literacy or a new relationship with the photographic.

Re-making

The Digital Division of the Library employ Google Analytics to track user uptake of the Digital Gallery. Unsurprisingly it proves that consultation of the Larcom albums has markedly increased since digitisation (prior to 1999 only two people came to the Library to consult the albums directly). How users are employing the site and what they do with downloaded images remains less clear.[16] However, given the Irish dimension of the Albums it does not surprise that direct hits are being generated from genealogical and historical inquiries undertaken for the purpose of diasporic identification. In these

[16] Users have the option of downloading embedded images and if this choice is made the migration of the image can be tracked. However as an option this path is not being taken up by many users and it cannot fully explain how the photographs contained in the Larcom albums are circulating fully.

instances one use is to establish individual family histories (for example: William Sheedy, Fenian (http://www.genseek.net/william2.htm). The activity of online genealogical study also facilitates a shared undertaking; for example, correspondents on RootsWeb offer information on other archives and engage in creative narrativisations of emigration (see for example http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/fenians). It is useful here to recognise the difference between diasporic as 'recollection' of Ireland and its hybridised form as hyphenated identity where temporal and spatial correspondence has become redundant (Rains: 2006, p.144). An expression of this is a loose, generalised association with Irish location for which the Larcom Albums are referenced, though without downloaded images to specify a connection (http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/IRL-CLARE/2005-07/1121001751).

Online genealogical study is an important register of the 'changes in the practices of history itself … as a popular practice and a mode of ethnic performance' (Rains: 2006, p.130). In these instances the explicit context of the photographs as prison portraits is not the uppermost concern; rather it is the link they offer to negotiate current hybrid placement that is sought. For diasporic clusters now wishing to affirm Irish affiliation Ireland can be 'only understood through the consumption of narrativised images' (Rains: 2006, p.140). The primary location for such practices is the Internet and that makes the digitisation of historical photographs significant for what types of diasporic narratives can be produced. This is a somewhat different assemblage of sequentiality to the one Lesy proposes and it is better thought of as an endeavour in 'a mapping of complexity and indeterminability' that is necessarily historically fractured (van Loon: 2008, p.98). The historical photograph reproduced in digital format on websites, particularly those serving genealogical purposes, may, in this usage, be antidotal in that the activity rather than the artefact (the historicity of the photograph) provides a counterweight to the sense of loss of 'temporal anchoring' (Huyssen: 1995, 7).

Online genealogical study by its nature is archival and it follows that such activity will engage with photographic archives. Any basic Google image search will bring up a number of hits for the New York Public Library's Digital Gallery. Here the home page

image of a leaf of Album 2 that contains the convict portraits of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, Bryan Dillon, Thomas Duggan and Charles Underwood O'Connell (ID: 1111428) is frequently reproduced. However alternative paths are also available through non-source archival retrieval. For example, a keyword search on Wikimedia Commons using the term 'fenian' brings up a selection of portraits. These portraits are of James Wilson (image ID: 1111434), Michael Harrington, Robert Cranston (image ID: 1111433), Thomas Darragh (image ID: 1111432), Thomas Hassett, and Martin Hogan (image ID: 1111434); collectively they became popularly remembered for a daring escape from Fremantle convict prison (Australia) to America on the Catalpa whaling boat (1876). The portrait of John Boyle O'Reilly (image ID: 1111434), also transported to Australia who escaped in 1868, and who was instrumental (along with John Devoy) in this escape plan, is also frequently reproduced along with the six. With the exception of the portrait of Thomas Hassett[17], all of these photographs are convict portraits that have been retrieved from the Larcom Albums.

This source domain is, however, not explicit. For example by uploading the file of Thomas Darragh's portrait a summary informs the user that the photograph is of a fenian convict transported to Australia who was 'one of the six to escape during the Catalpa rescue'. The source domain Mountjoy Prison photographic collection is given (though with no link) and it is noted that that the photograph is both in open domain and that the photographer was Thomas Larcom (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas_Darragh.jpg, pp.1-3). This latter mis-appropriation is significant not only for its inaccuracy but also in how it highlights the ways in which the paths of migration change the semantic reference of the image. These photographs are serving differing ends to that of their original intentionality; namely, now that of a classic diasporic narrative of flight from oppression that feeds into two Irish diasporic histories (Irish-Australian and Irish-American). It is one that also carries overtones of a "boys-own adventure story".

[17] Hassett is the only one of this group who does not have an individual entry on Wikimedia; presumably because the source domain for his portrait has not, as yet, been located on that site.

Further searches on Wikipedia bring up the same photographs under the headings convicts (Australia), Fremantle Prison, Catalpa rescue and as individual entries; again the subject's involvement in the daring escape is uppermost in categorising the meaning of the portrait. Further authentification of this narrative is given by reference to an exhibition at Fremantle Prison (2006), which, as noted, later toured Australia. Linking to the Fremantle site brings up the same portraits all of whose original source domain (with the exception of Thomas Hassett) is again Album 2 of the Larcom Collection (http://www.fremantleprison.com.au/gallery/gallery.cfm and http://www.fremantleprison.com.au/history/history32.cfm for John Boyle O'Reilly). This site superimposes its own custodial 'ownership' on the portraits (as relating to its museum and as an exhibition put on by that institution), with no clear indication being made to the original source. In these instances the photographs are gaining value by selective and repeated exposure rather than by reference to their provenance.

The close attention paid to the initial logic of the compilation of these Albums has revealed why they constitute different formats and the significance of this. What initially linked the two Albums was location (Mountjoy Prison, Dublin), an Irish context impacted upon by nineteenth-century imperialist policy-making, and ownership (both as a gift to and request from Larcom). Transmission, as outlined, obscures that rationale; and through the path of migration new meanings have come to be attached to these photographs. All histories of historical photographic collections reveal similar shifts in understanding but significant here is also how changes in ownership accord with transnational transference. It is the latter that furnished enhanced diasporic associations. What has changed with digitisation is that the relationship with the primary source has become largely a visual interface. In theory this suggests an even greater range of interpretative strategies because the 'weight' of the historicity of the source can be bypassed. This expectation, it has been revealed, has not been met. The limited currency of these photographs on the Web raises interesting issues that need to be addressed.

Conclusions

The Larcom Albums are of considerable value both for the history of prison photography and for the history of Ireland. It appears surprising then that greater ability to access this source is not correspondingly leading to an increased knowledge of their significance. However, by paying attention to the transfer of these Albums we can begin to map out both the accreted layers of meaning-imposition and the differing relations that digitisation promotes for photographic transference. The institutional choice to title the Collection (both in album and digital format) 'Mountjoy Prison Portraits of Irish Independence' has certain consequences; most notably it occludes two different Albums, produced under differing circumstances under the same rubric. The choice to retain contextual data (most notably naming) also has an effect on how the Albums operate now. The individualisation promoted by the retention of names (Edwards & Hart: 2004b, p.52) clearly is facilitating diasporic genealogical study and possibly restricting it to the familial register. It is clear that Album 2 pertains more readily to this type of study than Album 1 where there is limited and non-verified individualisation. The needs of diasporic genealogical study indicate why this preference may be occurring.[18]

As a resource for promoting wider collective diasporic formations the albums prove problematic in that their sedimented layers may well offer an instance where they 'disrupt the present' (Edwards & Hart: 2004b, p.49). The narrative of Fenianism, particularly the notion of 'freedom fighter' (the argument of force) sits less readily in a post Cease-Fire Irish context and a post 9/11 Western context than it used to. Cultural Irish hybrid ethnic affiliation is now not dependent on direct lineage. This allows a tactical alignment with aspects of Irishness that appeal. The associative signs of political crime in the convict portraits (Album 2) carry a reservoir of signification whose utility value, in the present climate, limits their currency while the portraits of the detainees not a specific enough visual register of an Irish connection. What this means is that there is no widespread popular narrative that the visual signs of these portraits can easily fit into. In contrast, historical Irish eviction photographs are fulfilling this function by holding fluid enough

[18] I have found only one instance where portraits from Album 1 are being reproduced: in this instance on a blog where they are being incorrectly attributed to Fenian prison photographs (http://rebeccaaisling.blogspot.com/2008/10/19th-century-fenian-brotherhood.html).

referents such as landscape and the notion of home (Baylis: 2007, pp.20-30). What we are seeing as a consequence is a limited but specific classic diasporic narrative operating by a distancing from the source context to that of the Catalpa escape. This is necessary to relocate the earlier operative logic of the Albums. This suggests that as an online resource the interface is not purely the visual subject content as Sassoon, whose argument I have already referenced (2004, p.190), proposes. The negotiations involved in how the Albums are being re-made indicate that there is retention of a trace element of their earlier operative logic. This is why there is a need to impose an intermediary significance to their status as 'political' portraits. What this makes clear is that visual images are always tied in some way to interpretative repertoires.

In addition to this, rather than reproducing photographs from the online Larcom Albums to represent the history of the Fenian leaders (most of whose portraits are contained within it) preference is still being given to representing those individuals by their honorific portraits. Finally, to return to Lesy's contention - it appears that in this instance it is not the case that there are too many images but rather too few. A new ontology of the Albums is emerging on the basis of selective repetition of a limited number of portraits that move us away from the original context and its significance. I have suggested reasons for why this is occurring. Digitisation offers the potential for millions and millions of people to see millions and millions of images. What this study reveals is that this endless array of apparently free-floating images will always be contained by the social and cultural uses to which the historical photograph can be put. In this context, as John Frow reminds us memory is not merely 'the repetition of the physical traces of the past'; rather it is a construction of the past 'under conditions and constraints determined by the present' (1997, p.228). This applies both to technologies of visualisation and to collective memory formations.

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