

# What is With Alice? Reading Alice in the National Portrait Gallery Archives.

## Introduction to my research

My research is concerned with constructions of the child in photographs attributed to Charles Dodgson (who might be better known to you as Lewis Carroll) and I want to use today to air some of my thinking about how this relates to the notion of archive, using photographs of Alice Liddell, named, variously, “Alice Liddell with Fern”, “the ‘fern’ photograph”, “Alice P Liddell and fern” and “Alice Liddell”. In doing this I will be engaging with ideas of the instability of the subject – what the relationship is between name and what is named, and some of the issues I read in the claim to a stability of the relationship between photograph and title.

The first part of the talk is engaged with readings of these ideas by Diane Waggoner in her chapter “Photographing Childhood: Lewis Carroll and Alice” in the book *Picturing Children*. Waggoner’s argument claims an engagement with the child as construction yet it is one that I read as heavily invested in ideas of the child as a stable origin to the photographs. I want to question what Waggoner produces as “the photograph” and how this differs from my reading.

I will then go on to read “Alice Liddell with Fern”, the name Waggoner gives to a photograph in her chapter, before I move on to reading photographs in the National Portrait Gallery archive held at the National Media Museum in Bradford, in particular “Alice P Liddell and Fern” and “Photographic Triptych of the Three Liddell Sisters”. In doing so I’ll be touching on ideas of the pose and on constructions of supplementation as well as claims to origin and to what constitutes a photographer. In the criticism I have read about Dodgson’s photographs the archive is only the self-evident location of the photographs and is not readable. Some critics, such as Morton N. Cohen, examine Dodgson’s photographs in a biographical approach; Roger Taylor and Edward Wakeling have compiled the most comprehensive study to date, on the Parrish Collection’s archive; Karoline Leach, on is engaged with ideas of the photographs as evidence in relation to Dodgson’s journals; and Lindsay Smith, Anne Higonnet and Diane Waggoner have an interest in the ways in which his

photographs can be read as revelatory. They *all* share a concern with where the photographs have originated from, with the scene of photography; that is, they are constantly supplementing what they read as the photograph, but these supplements are, like the photographs, always self-evident.

Some of Dodgson's photographs are widely available online, often framed differently from each other despite claims of being the 'same', and I am really interested in what these differences mean to my reading. To this end I will also be reading photographs in the National Portrait Gallery online catalogue and the archive's construction of difference.

Finally, I want to finish up by talking about the consequences of my readings for the position of glass plate negatives, an area that hasn't been considered by the current criticism. As this is all very much a work-in-progress please feel free to make suggestions, point out problems and ask questions at the end – I'll be very grateful for your thinking.

## **Waggoner reading**

Diane Waggoner begins her chapter with a discussion of a photograph that she titles "Alice Liddell with Fern" and goes on to name "this photograph of Alice" and "the 'fern' photograph" thereafter. In the title, I read the fern to be positioned as both equivalent to and other to Alice. The fern is not Alice, but is to do with Alice and it is privileged above other aspects of the photograph in the understanding of it as "Alice Liddell with Fern". It is in addition to Alice but it is also a part of the identity of "Alice Liddell" – the way in which she is understood in this photograph.

The fern of the title is also neither a definite nor an indefinite article: it is only "Fern", producing it as syntactically similar to the proper noun "Alice Liddell" to whom it is "with". The relationship between the linguistic production of the photograph in the title and its pictorial production is such for Waggoner, however, that "Fern" of the title serves only to distinguish the photograph from others of "Alice Liddell" who, as the privileged child in Waggoner's wider argument, remains for her, a constant reality, portrayed repetitively in different photographs. This is symptomatic of her argument's fixation on ideas of child in Dodgson's photographs.

Despite this idea of the “Fern” as part of “Alice Liddell” it is not a consistently necessary distinguisher, since the same photograph can become “*this* photograph of Alice”. Here the language of the text can unproblematically point to the photograph, the photograph is something that is demonstrable. And despite multiple constructions of photograph it remains singular to Waggoner, it is “*the* ‘fern’ photograph”. In this formulation the reference to the photograph loses Alice – she is so obvious and available in Waggoner’s reading that she no longer distinguishes the photograph.

Waggoner credits “this photograph” in the list of images at the front of the book to “Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, ‘Alice Liddell with fern’, July 1860, albumen print, Christ Church Library, Oxford”, positioning it within an idea of an archive. She describes it in this way:

In an 1860 photograph, eight-year-old Alice sits, ankles crossed and hands in her lap, on a table with a striped tablecloth, a fern placed to her right (fig. 9.1). The rapt expression on Alice’s face – her gaze out at the viewer – attracts attention. Her face, a mixture of hesitancy, vulnerability, concentration, and engagement, with just the hint of the beginning of a smile, responds to the presence of Dodgson behind the photographic lens. Her look suggests an exchange with her friend, a consciousness of being looked at.

The photograph here belongs to or comes from “1860” and in this history I read a notion of grouping, that the photograph is part of a collection, since it is “*an* 1860 photograph” of which there are more than this. It is both similar to but distinct from other “1860 photograph[s]”. It is also a container, since it has an “[i]n”, so my next move is to read what, according to Waggoner, is “[i]n” the photograph. I read a repetition of a notion of history in the “eight-year-old Alice” which again appeals to an idea of arrested time, of the containment here being about fixing a moment that is both “1860” and “eight-year-old”. The former fixes the photograph, the latter something that is contained by the photograph, “Alice”. And this “Alice” is *posed* – she “sits, ankles crossed and hands in her lap” – producing the idea that she is fixed both by the idea of photograph and by the notion of pose as a constituent of the photograph. This notion of pose, which I don’t have time to discuss fully today but which I keep coming back to in my research, seems to me to be something that is in addition to Alice – that she is, again, with. There is an Alice that is knowable to Waggoner and *supplementary to this* there is a pose of sitting, “ankles crossed and hands in her lap”.

The fern, that for Waggoner's title is what Alice is with, is now "placed to her right". This "placed" brings in an idea of an agency that is other to Alice, that has positioned the fern as "to her right" so that there is an idea of another, a non-Alice, in this photograph in addition to Alice, and that this is a presence that *does* but is not seen. This agency also shifts my reading of Alice's pose. Where, previously, I had read the pose as in addition to Alice but as belonging to her, as Alice's pose, now I read a similarity between "ankles crossed" and "fern placed".

This appeal to addition can also be read in what Waggoner claims is outside of the photograph, beginning with "the viewer" whose attention Alice's "rapt expression" and "gaze" attracts. Again, I am reading a move to secure the photograph through the explanation of what is seen and the effect it has but, in doing so, I also read Waggoner as destabilising what she claims to be the fixing – of doubling what is in addition to Alice here. "The rapt expression" is "on" "Alice's face" so that Alice is atomised here, as she previously was in ankles and hands. This expression is particular to "Alice's face" – it is not any old rapt expression it is "*the* rapt expression" – but despite this it is positioned as apart from Alice: it is in addition to what Waggoner understands as Alice. It is this notion of supplementation that is itself doubled as "her gaze out at the viewer", that breaches the boundaries of "an 1860 photograph" to communicate with "the viewer". And this idea of doubling can also be read in the constitution of the photograph as "(fig. 9.1)", which seems here to be both an appeal to a self-evidential object and an idea of what is *in* the photograph.

There is another appeal to addition in Alice's face, in what the face does; according to Waggoner it also is "a mixture of hesitancy, vulnerability, concentration, and engagement, with just the hint of the beginning of a smile, [which] responds to the presence of Dodgson behind the photographic lens". This production of internal and external worries Waggoner's investment in boundary (that there can be an inside and an outside) as the idea that what is in addition to her face is something that cannot yet be fully seen, "just the hint of the beginning of a smile", questions what is there "in an 1860 photograph" to be seen by the "the viewer". This "hint" occupies a position that is in addition to "Her face", that is "with" what the face is constituted as.

Alice becomes, in this, a response to Dodgson as the photographer, a response “to the presence of Dodgson behind the photographic lens”. What the photograph contains, and what the contained does in breaching its containment, is about “the presence of Dodgson” as both outside of the photograph and also constitutive of the photograph. Without his “presence” there is no photograph, no response to him, no gazing. Dodgson occupies the position both of photographer and of viewer, tapping into the idea, that Waggoner later returns to, of Dodgson’s looking as the only looking at the photograph. The text produces the look of the photographer as the sum total of looking at Alice, excluding the look of the non-photographer looker and therefore any questioning of the availability of these lookings. The only way to view the photograph is as Dodgson and the only look from the photograph is at Dodgson. Although his presence is constructed by Alice there is no photograph and no Alice without Dodgson so that, in addition to all that Waggoner claims is with Alice, that is within and outside of the photograph, Alice is with Dodgson.

So, in moving to *fix* the photograph through a claim that it contains a moment of photographing, which acts as the photograph’s origin, Waggoner destabilises the idea of what constitutes a photograph. It is a containment of Alice, the pose – an insistence on boundaries – and it is an access to a retrievable past, as it is *also* a construction of photographer. It is about looking, viewing and gazing but it is also about what cannot be seen except through Waggoner’s narration.

In this, the photograph does not need to be read – according to Waggoner it does the work for us, it reaches out its meaning to a passive “the viewer” whose viewing is constituted by the prior looking at the scene of photography by the “presence behind the photographic lens”. Similarly “Alice” does not need to be read - she is the agent that attracts attention, it is her look that suggests exchange. These two ideas, of photograph and of Alice, are, in Waggoner’s constructions, ideas that depend both upon boundaries and on their ability to breach those boundaries.

### **Alice Liddell – NPG P991(8)**

So, taking Waggoner’s view that there is one singular photograph to read, it follows that, for her, the photograph in the National Portrait Gallery catalogued NPG P991(8) and

titled “Alice P Liddell and Fern / Albumen carte de visite, 1860” is also “the ‘fern’ photograph”. That which is singular and definite, “the” is also, then, multiple. (For the purposes of this talk the images on the slides are taken from the National Portrait Gallery Online catalogue, which I will also be discussing today. I don’t mean to suggest that these are the photographs I read in the archive – or that even if they were I would be able to demonstrate a singular and stable construction of photograph; instead I will go on to read the problems with this usage.) Differences of focus, cropping and what Waggoner understands as content, as well as framing and archival location, produce, for me, a reading of two different ideas of photographs. Here, according to the title, Alice is not “with fern”, the fern is supplementary to her in a way that suggests a relationship of equivalence: “Alice P Liddell” is not the only subject of this photograph. There is an idea in both Waggoner’s and the National Portrait Gallery’s constructions that “Alice” and “Alice P Liddell” are not sufficient on their own to name the photograph; the name needs to be supplemented in order to title the photograph. This insufficiency, to my reading, comes from an idea of repetition in photographs, as Anne Higonnet in her monograph *Pictures of Innocence* constructs it: “Charles Dodgson [...] took hundreds of photographs of little girls between the late 1850s and the late 1870s.” This notion of “little girls”, the collective by which the photographed subjects may be understood, necessitates a differentiation that is other to the “little girls”. The National Portrait Gallery photograph and the one produced by Waggoner are part of this construction of subject (the “little girls”) and therefore, in order to distinguish between “hundreds of photographs” and “the [...] photograph” some further distinction must be made. “Alice” and “Alice P Liddell” act to an extent in this way but there is still a sense that they are a part of these “hundreds of little girls” because of the addition of the pronoun-acting “fern”, that which is unusual to the understanding of the collectivity of photographs taken by Dodgson. Like “Alice P Liddell”, fern again does not need to be read – it is simply what is there to be seen.

The fern here is something that overlaps with Alice and also fades into the space around the body in the same way that Alice’s torso does, so that it is also comparable to her. In this there is also an idea of displacement that I do not read in Waggoner’s “Alice Liddell with Fern”, that Alice and fern are both unanchored in the photograph by ideas of position. The pose that Wagoner reads cannot be read here, instead the framing positions Alice and

fern as outside of an idea of location or setting, previously taken as indications of a scene of photography. In this discourse that I read to be invested in the notion of origin, ideas of first and an ability to secure position are disrupted by this reading of layer here. There is an idea that the fern is obscuring “Alice P Liddell”, that is, it is in front of or a part of what is understood as her, that they are not unproblematically distinct. The idea of equivocality that I previously read in the title is disrupted: the related positions of “Alice P Liddell” and “Fern” in the title cannot secure the photograph.

## **Triptych.**

This idea of position and relation can also be read in NPG P991 (10). On the back of the frame is written

Photographic triptych of the three Liddell sisters (Ina holding a doll, seated, Alice seated beside a potted fern, and Edith seated beside a vase of foxglove holding a hat) / Summer 1858 (Ina), July 1860 (Alice + Edith). 1870 / albumen / Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson)

In the notion of “triptych” I read a different construction of photograph that produces three scenes of photographing as one photo. This idea is not then about a singular capturing of the real, to the extent that, as I have already read, multiple versions of a photograph may be read as one single photograph, but rather a collection of photographs framed as a “Photographic triptych”. Reading in this way, the individually catalogued items in the archive may be further subdivided by the text on the frame, with NPG P991(10), a singular “triptych” that is also a notion of a group of three, being about multiple instances of photographing, that result in something that is in excess of themselves.

However I can’t only read a claim to three separate photographs united as one piece of art as two of the photographed subjects are grouped together “July 1860 (Alice + Edith)”. These images post-date the “Summer 1858 (Ina)” photograph but are also part of the same dated image, the “Photographic triptych” of “1870”. There is an idea here of a use of the photographs that is not related to the scene of photographing and that is instead to do with the notion of art, the “triptych”, positioned at a time other to the date of photographing.

It is also interesting to think about dating here, in relation to what I read in the current criticism as an investment in the idea of Dodgson’s relationship with children, to the

exclusion of a critical engagement with his other photographs. Previously I have read ideas of “Alice” as fixed by “1860” and “eight-year-old”; here Alice spans ten years – from 1860 in the construction of her as the subject of a photograph, to 1870 in the idea of the triptych. Ideas of Alice in this, then, are *not* about her relationship to the moment of photographing, but rather her endurance as the same Alice beyond this.

The parentheses in the first section produce a further idea of replication, of a doubling of what is claimed to already be photograph and also caption. NPG P991 (10) is a “[p]hotographic triptych of the three Liddell sisters” and it is “(Ina holding a doll, seated, Alice seated beside a potted fern, and Edith seated beside a vase of foxglove holding a hat)”. Similarly “Summer 1858” is also “(Ina)” and “July 1860” is also “(Alice + Edith)”. The caption captions itself with this move to secure the photograph so that, at each stage, the photograph is added to. And in doing this the ability of language to name the thing is undermined. Alice is 1860, and Alice is equivalent to Edith, and Alice is in addition to Edith. What Alice *is* is also what Alice is *with*.

It is not only the subject(s) of the photograph that are doubled but also the idea of photographer: “Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson)”. Here the securing of the photograph produces the photographer as primarily “Lewis Carroll” but also “(Charles Dodgson)”. The idea that these are directly equivalent is resisted through the parentheses that produce “(Charles Dodgson[’s])” position as the author of the photograph as subject to its relation to “Lewis Carroll”. This idea of author-photographer preoccupies much of my first chapter so I’d be very interested to hear your thoughts or questions on the consequences of reading pseudonym and parentheses here.

The photographs are also constructed in terms of the girls’ relationship with aspects of the photographs that are other to them, “Ina holding a doll, seated, Alice seated beside a potted fern, and Edith seated beside a vase of foxglove holding a hat”, so that the images become further divided. The understanding of Alice, Ina and Edith is here about their grouping in the “triptych” and her grouping in the constitutive photographs. Ina is accessibly available as “holding a doll, seated” because the caption positions it as thus (although as I have read this security of meaning is destabilised in its own claim): the caption produces an idea that this part of the art has been read and this reading recorded. This

recording and the photograph are produced as a part of a “trptych” whole, understood by a single date, a position that is undermined by the production of prior photographing and the relationship between the photographs. Recording and reading are not produced here as affecting the photograph – the photograph must still be, for this narration, an idea of the static and the fixable even as it engages in replication.

What Ina, Edith and Alice are not “with” with in these parentheses, is other ideas of each other. She may be “holding a doll”, or “seated beside a potted fern” or “foxgloves” but the relationship between the named subjects within this idea of art is only about separation, something that is contradicted by my reading of “(Alice + Edith)”. I find it helpful to think about here. The centre photograph overlaps edges over the top of both the left and right photographs and there is a frame drawn around the three. Although the illustrated frame produces the photographs as within a singular unit, this is not read by the caption, which I have read as dissecting the idea of triptych. The caption also does not read the overlap of the photographs as there is no idea of a relationship between what the three photographs are ‘of’, only in their position as a “trptych” and through the idea of dating. The “potted fern” belongs only to the caption’s reading of “Alice seated”, for example, retaining the idea that, despite my readings of division and grouping here, the caption is invested in the idea of a real scene of photographing that is visible in the photographs, regardless of how they are then constructed as in addition to each other. The understanding of the photograph is, again, a construction of it as related to the real.

This relationship between the three photographic constructions of Ina, Alice and Edith can also be read in the idea of them as, collectively, “the three Liddell sisters”, another idea of Alice as both a part from and a part of that which is supplemental to her. Edith, Ina and Alice are separate from each other – in that they are countable sisters – and a part of a whole that is in addition to them – as “three” and “sisters”. Sisters here is a category, like “trptych” to which Alice, Edith and Ina belong and in belonging to this supplement they are named by it. In this move ideas of them as distinct, as photographed separately, are rejected for a construction of Ina, Alice and Edith as alike. Despite the construction of difference between them, Alice is a part of “the three Liddell sisters” just as Ina and Edith also are.

The National Portrait Gallery does not read its own construction of caption, an absence that has consequences for my reading of what constitutes an archive and the items that are constitutive of it. The captioning and catalogue information produce readings of the photographs that the catalogues take as straightforward descriptions of the archived items, that the critics ignore, but that I read as new narrations that are supplemental to the photograph; that is, they are what the photograph is *with* in my reading and they also *constitute* the photograph, and which produce a problematic relationship of equivalence between words and images.

## **NPG Online**

Replicating ideas of photographs can also be read in the National Portrait Gallery's production of their digital archiving processes, in a section entitled "Producing images at the National Portrait Gallery" on the [npg.org](http://npg.org) website (apologies in advance for the amount of text on this slide):

The process we use for producing images from our huge archives of photographic negatives is varied. We can sometimes scan them, direct, but sometimes we need to obtain a photographic print from our specialist supplier. Although it is tempting to see printing as an unnecessary or undesirable intermediary process, this interpretative stage can also be seen as integral to the production of the final image.

It goes on to claim that,

Once an image has been created, either by our in-house team or by an external supplier, our Digitisation team checks and adjusts it before accepting it and linking it to our databases.

What constitutes the process of, as the title claims "[p]roducing images at the National Portrait Gallery" from the negative is, in this case, a choice between "direct" scanning or "obtain[ing] a photographic print". A scanned negative therefore produces a more like-the-original image than an "obtain[ed] [...] print", which is constructed as "intermediary" and "interpretative" but also "integral to the production of the final image". These ideas of a distance between "photographic negatives" and "the final image" are about the way in which the "process we use" is "seen". The "tempt[ation] to see" part of the process as "unnecessary" is in contrast to the "can also be seen". Seeing here is about potentiality, it is "tempting", possible and supplemental. These seeings are different from the visualisation

of the negative through scanning or printing, which, although potentially “interpretative”, is about a relationship of correspondence between “photographic negatives” and “the final image”.

The digitised image is further distanced from its source as the team “checks and adjusts it”. This verification and manipulation of the image permits the team’s “accepting it and linking it to our databases”. The process of digital archivization is therefore not dependent on an idea of the original but rather the image’s compatibility with the pre-existing “our databases”. The accepting and linking of the image is the end purpose of digitisation, later claimed as a project that “helps us to show images of more paintings, sculpture, prints, drawing and photographs than we are able to display on our walls”. The digital archive is therefore a supplement to the National Portrait Gallery collection. It is produced as making visible what is present but not shown, what the gallery is not “able to display”. The digital catalogue of the National Portrait Gallery produces itself in terms of a public access to seeing what the gallery already knows to be present and can now “show”, although what is seen here is a “[p]roduc[ed] image” something other to and in addition to the invisibly present. The constituents of the digital archive, therefore, are both a showing of what cannot be shown and a not showing of what is there to be shown.

In continuing to read the record, the production of what the photograph is according to the National Portrait Gallery Collections Online, I return again to ideas of doubling. The doubling that I have already read in the title of Waggoner’s and the archive’s construction of the photographs can be read in the online catalogue but in this instance the fern is absent. According to the online catalogue the item labelled NPG P991(8) is named “Alice Liddell”. So here, the result of digitisation has a name that is different from what is digitised. Despite this, however, it is still an “albumen print” with the same attributed year, “1860”, so that in this way it is *not* different. There is a move to retain the original but in a partial way, so that the name is now somehow secondary to it, rather than the recorder of what is there to be seen.

The online archive also includes information that is not included in the Bradford collection, such as the construction of size. The image is both “3 ¾ in. x 2 1/8 in.” and “(95 mm x 54 mm). That which, by the ideas I have already read today, should be evident – the

object to which the text refers, is therefore *not* evident – it requires the text to secure its size and, in this security, size is produced as something in addition to the photograph and in addition to itself. There is a claim here to being able to translate what is fixed. And despite this security of size the digital archive also affords the opportunity to manipulate this construction of photograph, to make it “larger”. This idea of “larger” is in addition to a necessary, and yet as I have read impossible, original, an appropriately sized photograph that can be made larger.

## **Reading the Negatives**

I am going to veer slightly away from my title for this last section, although continuing to think about the National Portrait Gallery archives, as, in conclusion, I want to consider the position of the negatives held in the collection, bearing in mind the ideas of repetition, origin, supplementation and a scene of photography that I have been reading today.

Both Waggoner and the National Portrait Gallery have, I have argued, an investment in notions of originality and provenance in their discussions of Dodgson’s photographs, and this is something that I read as repeated throughout Dodgson criticism – the idea that the photographs reveal the photographer and the child, and that to understand the photograph the looker must already know the photographer and the child. Despite this I have yet to encounter a reading of any of the glass negatives attributed to Dodgson, some of which are held at the National Portrait Gallery archive. The negative catalogued as NPG P991(3) is slightly smaller than the print NPG P991(4) and there are scratches on the negative that do not appear on the photograph as it is printed online and in the Bradford archive. The glass negative has Alice’s legs to the left of the frame, the print to the right. Although we may read this as a representation of the relationship between a negative and a print this is challenged in my reading of the National Portrait Gallery glass negative which can be viewed through both sides of the glass pane, which questions the possibility of a correct or original view. The writing at the top of the frame of this negative, “374 106” moves to secure the orientation of the negative but this claim relies upon an idea of the non-photographed aspects in the negative in order to read the photographed aspects. That is, I must read what is *with* the negative in order to make this claim, which necessarily positions the print as the

wrong way of looking. I may claim to 'know' which way the photographed figure 'should' face, but this is only based on a knowledge of the production of glass negatives in general, an idea of supplementing the negative with something that is other to it. The application of this knowledge here requires a construction of the negative in relation to a history of production and a claimed consistency between glass negatives that absents the idea of the individual object and the differences between the negatives. This 'should' is also not securable since in the online negative the claim is that Alice's legs should face left, and in the photograph that they should face right, an appropriateness that I read as invested in an idea of the photographic process, that produces the negative as a reversal of the scene of photography, and thus the orientation of both the negative and the print may be appropriate.

It also absents the 'incorrect' view, that is, the image that results in viewing the other side of the pane. This absence pretends that this image cannot be seen, as the reproduction of the negative in the National Portrait Gallery's digital catalogue does. Reading the two online items the negative and print are in opposition to each other. These images make claims to two supposedly secured images, the print and the negative, but in doing so produce an opposition that is not borne out when I read the glass negative in the Bradford archive. What should be a constitutive part of the print, the negative, is instead about difference; even in securing the object it is divided from itself.

Although problematic, a reading of NPG P991(3) and NPG P991(4) as part of a sequence – that 3 is followed by 4 – permits a reading of the prints and negatives as discrete objects *and* as constituents of something that relates them together – the archive. Their position as discrete objects is part of a resistance of time – their catalogue references do not allude to or align with dates. The reading of sequence constructs there otherwise discrete items as meaning something in relation to each other. "NPG P991 (3)" *means* because it relates to "NPG P991 (4)" and so on. Meaning, as I have read throughout this talk, is deferred, even in the very attempt to secure it. The archive, that which is constituted by these sequences, undermines its own claim to escape time, to give access to the past now and in the future, since it constitutes a time, a moving on from 3 to 4. In this unsuccessful escape the photograph's meaning is constituted precisely by its not being another time, of its showing of a precise moment. But, in order to show this moment it must defer to other

claims, to other moments. In order to reveal the scene of photography, to act as evidence, it must refer to what it is not.

## Conclusion

So, finally, to return to the question of my title, ‘What *is* with Alice?’”. As I have read over the last 40 minutes ideas of supplementation are both unavoidable and unread in Waggoner’s construction of “the ‘fern’ photograph” and in the construction of the National Portrait Gallery archive. The photograph is doubled, through captions, through description and through the seemingly factual recording of the photograph in the online catalogue. In this doubling what is the photograph is also that which is not the photograph, just as, I have read, what is Alice – her gaze, her look – is also that which is not her; that is, I read the record as in addition to the photograph and a part of the photograph and I read Alice as a claim to the priorly known and her gaze as in addition to this already there Alice.

What is in addition to Alice is, partly, constructions of the photograph – the process of photography, Dodgson as “the presence behind the photographic lens”, the agent that “placed” the fern, that posed Alice, the narration of the caption. And my question should perhaps not only be ‘what is with Alice?’ but also ‘what is with photograph?’ in order to speak to the idea of the National Portrait Gallery archive as both supplementing and supplementary to, for example, “Alice P Liddell and Fern”. In what I have read here today there is a resistance to Alice as whole and complete to herself – that what Alice *is* is always what she is not. But, in Waggoner’s reading and the National Portrait Gallery’s construction, this deferral stops: Alice *can* be understood by what she is not: the fern. “Alice *with* fern” and “Alice P Liddell *and* fern” so Alice is *not* fern. And the idea that permits this finite knowledge is that she is what is always known – the reason she can be “with fern” and “and fern” is because *she* is already there. As my readings have hopefully achieved today, reading the ‘that which is already known’ – that is reading ‘Alice’, ‘fern’ and ‘photograph’ – destabilises this claim, producing instead the impossibility of arresting meaning in readings of Dodgson’s photographs.