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**AGENCY IN PHOTOGRAPHIC  
SELF-PORTRAITS:  
CHARLES LUTWIDGE DODGSON AND  
THE EXPOSURE OF THE CAMERA**

*Teresa Brus*

IN THIS paper I examine the photographic self-portrait as a genre which engages various modalities of identity agency. Appealing to examples of photographic portraits and self-portraits by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), I intend to show the performative function of the portrait photography in dialogue with paradigms of painting, with culturally marked identities, and with the textual modes of self-reference. In numerous verbal portraits Dodgson's narrating subjects ascribe agency to participation in acts of exposure. Yet, in photographic self-representations, Dodgson conceals his identity of a light writer. Employing photographic self-portraiture to claim a site of his personal pursuit, he lays claim to another sense of self. Dodgson foregrounds exteriority and generalizes the artistic intention informed by socially validating conventions.

**Intensifying the Self in Self-portraits**

The art of portraiture is the art of drawing forth, of revealing, of making likeness, and prolonging (*Oxford English Dictionary*).<sup>1</sup> Portraiture, and especially self-portraiture, is a form of visual life writing. The invention of photography certainly provided new ways for individuals to portray themselves, to present themselves, to assume and feel agency, also to change it, and to

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1. Susan S. Williams suggests that the portrait "not only imitates but also reveals, making manifest something hidden. It is both a public document of fact and an agent of private revelation" (1997, 6). Williams notes that the etymology of the word "portrait" points to "the Latin word *protrahere*, to draw forth, reveal, extend, or prolong," and to "the French *pourtraire*, to fashion or represent" (1997, 6).

utilize agency to claim participation in diverse collectivities. Photographic cameras have made it feasible for their users to claim control over their self-representation, to become agents. More recently, digital cameras have facilitated global dissemination of diverse acts of agency, also of diverse ways of life.

I will begin by bringing to the fore the selfie, a new sub-genre of self-portraiture, to show the unexpected potential of the genre of the self-portrait to illuminate the nature of the relationship between subjects and communication tools they use. The *carte-de-visite* photograph during the lifetime of Lewis Carroll “transformed photography into a public spectacle and popular currency,” it bore important consequences on the ways of constructing the self (Monteiro 2009, 102). Likewise, self-portraits taken with latest digital cameras inform the most excessive development in the art of taking, making and distributing self-images in the twenty-first century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century albums containing *carte-de-visite* portraits were visible on the streets, producing “an unprecedented iconographic overlap of social circles and a compression of social space” (Monteiro 2009, 110). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the iPhone self-images have become the most ubiquitous currency exposing the self as an effect of representation.

In our age of self-regard, the “complete mobility, ubiquity and connection” (2012, 203) which characterize photographs made by everyone and everywhere, the phenomenon that theorists Edgar Gomez Cruz and Eric T. Meyer identify as the fifth movement of photography, is a given (2012, 203). The selfie is a new cultural product responsible for mediation, production, and transmission of subjectivities in the global mediascapes. Celebrities, popes, politicians, and ordinary people turn their network cameras toward themselves, participating thus in a new shared practice and experience of posing, of image making, of taking a photograph “of oneself,” of making visible and of disseminating serial self-images. Selfie is “typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* thus defined the word in 2002 and, in 2013 the word “selfie” became the word of the year. If we turn to the growing archives of Instagram or to such compelling projects as *Selficity* we can get an idea of how prominent and diversified this transnational tool has become, and how many methodological questions selfies present to re-

searches. Though no thorough studies of the selfie have emerged as yet, social media researches like Elizabeth Losh observe that “selfies do much more than merely promote democratization, openness, transparency” (2014, n.p.). Framing the subject in a way which many commentators believe defies the ennobled aesthetic principles of photography, selfies reconfigure and adapt the ways the subjects represent and understand themselves. They create a new visual space of new modes of selfhood, of its certification and assertion.

What is a self-portrait? Wendy Steiner argues that visual or the literary self-portrait “render[s] its subject present,” makes us feel the subject’s “actuality” and “immediacy” (1978, 5). This complex and precarious relation is the central characteristics of portraiture: “The portrait tries to ‘render present’ its subject by replacing him or by creating a necessary linkage between itself and him” (1978, 6). Spectators and interpreters expect self-portraiture to resemble its maker, they anticipate the self-portrait to evoke or suggest this exclusive linkage between the model and the artist, in semiotic terms – the indexical connection between the portrayed and the portraying. Spectators desire to establish identification with the implication that “the portrait and the subject are equivalent, that the portrait can in a sense be substitute for the subject, be a surrogate for him” (1978, 6). What assures of the presence and of veracity of the real person is often the name attached to the portrait. When it is not signed by its maker, often some third party provides the missing link, calls the representation “a portrait of x” or just “x.” The name does seem to carry the mark of authenticity.

A potential relation between the spectator and the portrait develops with the identification of the name as a sign of self-presence, of a “presentation of the self to itself” (Wilson 2012, 63). The identity of the name of the subject in the portrait and the author/maker of the portrait suggests a mode of embodied self-representation. Reflecting on the identification process, Jacques Derrida notes that the signature or the name does not belong in the “inside of the work”. It is rather an “extrinsic clue”, a “verbal event”, a “paragonal border” (1993, 64). Because of this exterior placement of the name, the identification in question is always somehow uncertain, “*probable*,” “*indirect*,” to be decided “object of culture and not of immediate or natural intuition” (1993, 64). Additionally, the measured linkage be-

tween the subject and the author in the self-portrait presents potential tensions between identity and identification. They arise from the coincidence of the dual aspects of identity, the identity of the author and of the model as perceived and understood against the received portrait schema and their recognizable content. That is one reason why “the status of the self-portrait of the self-portraitist will always remain a hypothetical character” (Derrida 1993, 64).

This indirectness of the identification of the subject and the signatory leads to other possible dissociations. The self-portrait calls for the “third to witness”, it demands cooperation, or, as Derrida says, it “appears in the reverberation of several voices” (1993, 64). A viewer may not be able to authenticate the identification but looking attentively and with respect, he may be able to localize a self-relation. For example, Philip Lejeune (2001) writes autobiographically about a particular kind of “spark of wonderment, flash of revelation”<sup>2</sup> (211) he feels arising out of the experience of facing portraits. What is catalyzed in response to the encounter is not restoration of what he sees but a performative act. Standing in front of the portrait for Lejeune is like standing in front of the mirror (2001, 211). Identified by Lejeune as the “self-portrait effect” (2001, 207), the experience is attendant on the adequate response to an uncertainty and hypothetical identification. The seeing subject relates to the framed exposure of the other, and this relation becomes an enabling measure for the possibility of self-consciousness and self-awareness, for agency. The mirror sets us here on a course Michel Beaujour identifies as “opposed to the narrative structure,” opposed to autobiography. The mirror dispels the illusion of permanence, rather it lures with “intelligibility,” “amplification,” and support of the possibility of cross-references” (1991, 27). The reflecting function of this open-ended spatial form entails the presence of this other as a model through which the “I” can seek itself.

The portrait is believed to testify to the real importance of the self and the difficulty its scrutiny presents. Despite reliance on inclusive and expansive properties of representation, despite specific physical and functional attributes of portraiture, seeing and recognition depend often on coincidence and approxima-

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2. My translation.

tion. Even photographic self-portrait, a material object, an artefact, renders visible only a more or less recognizable being, more a translation than likeness.

In case of photography the problem of reference and its perspicacity is augmented by the automatism of the process of self-portraying. This process triggers concerns about the degree of the conscious control of the maker. Dawn M. Wilson (2012) convincingly argues that automatism and agency create one of the major conflicts in the discussions of photography. Facing the camera, the photographer engages in the production of self-portraiture, an image dependent on conscious intent. The image “displays the conscious control of the artistic agent in a way that guides the viewer’s interpretation of the depicted subject” (55). The difficult relationship with the medium adds to the complexity of the dialogue between the portraying and the portrayed in the self-portrait. Furthermore, the problematic identity of the photographic medium, the automatism of photography fuels ontological anxieties. In the complex process of image creation, the competence of the camera both enhances and frustrates the efforts of the subject to take full control. As Vilém Flusser (2006) notes, the photographer controls only the external functions of the camera without really understanding what is going on inside the camera. Without having any idea of how its ever more advanced and challenging programs work full control is never possible. The act of photographing entails responding to attractions of the unknown possibilities of the non-human agent. Regardless of the level of familiarity with the photographic technology, “[n]o photographer, not even the totality of all photographers, can entirely get to the bottom of what a correctly programmed camera is up to. It is a black box” (27). Also, what the photographer operates on is not to be thought of as a tool or a machine which was something empirical and technical in industrial societies, something capable of changing the world. In post-industrial society, the camera is a mere “plaything,” a programmed apparatus capable of changing only our view of the world (2006, 25). Flusser is quite bold about the limitations technology presents to the operator. He denies the status of a creator to a photographer. A “functionary” of a “plaything,” the photographer is an operator, a kind of a game player, “not *Homo faber* but *Homo ludens*” (2006, 27). Photography in this view is a play-based medium.

The smart camera is our most popular apparatus opening new possibilities of playing, making ready the production and dissemination of unlimited number of vernacular self-images. Selfies, or sweet photos, make visible where and how we are and what we look like. Disseminated globally, selfies change our views of these relations. Often more carefully orchestrated than they seem to appear, selfies frequently frame their subjects with cameras still in the process of taking the picture, with stretched hands of the subjects holding what viewers recognize as cameras. This ubiquitous presence communicates not only the increasing focus on the camera, the importance of this apparatus but also its curious symbolic binding up with our bodies.<sup>3</sup>

The prosthetic connection is a sign of a new view of life characterized by some curious urgency to take one out, to “push outward,” and to merge with the apparatus and communicate this merger according to visual patterns of the netiquette.

The presence of the camera in self-portraits as well as of the signs of circumstances of the production of self-portraits within broad experiences of the daily life emphasize the process-like qualities of this most recent vernacular kind of self-portraiture. The cameras play a central role in these processes; some self is always camera-ready. By making even the most intimate aspects visible and representational, we do not negate or question the self, we foreground it as agentic. In the age of confession, it seems, we are viewable agents of intimate images.

In digital photography, especially in the selfies, the “face” of the camera no longer stands out. It is there embedded in the manifestations of the user’s self. The camera framed with the body of the subject, as its extension, and as *other-body* is a potent source of the spectacular of the sight. In early photography, the camera was captured in the portraits as a new and alluring prosthetic trope, in the words of Niépce, “a kind of artificial eye” (qtd. in Batchen 2001, 23). In the portrait of Lewis Carroll

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3. As Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest explain, in various theories of photography “metaphors are used to stress the role of the camera as extension of the photographer, comparing it, for instance, with the lens in his or her eye or a rifle in the hand, which functions as prosthesis of the body” (2011, 191) while other theories rely on the metaphor of the mirror.

by the Swedish expatriate Oscar Gustave Rejlander,<sup>4</sup> for example, not the face of the subject but the camera is the *punctum*. This frequently reproduced portrait shows Carroll's face devoid of expression. Dodgson's eyes – the organ of truth in the nineteenth century<sup>5</sup> – appear half-closed, lowered, avoiding a contact with a viewer. It is the large bright lens of a camera held in his hand, just polished and ready to be used, which catches our eyes, which is clearly winning a tense specular duel. The open lens accentuates the impotence of natural organs<sup>6</sup> but also the externality of the machine to the self. We have no doubt we face the portrait of the photographer. The camera in the firm grip of the subject encodes his profession,<sup>7</sup> connoting capacity to see more, also to maintain perceptual contact with the world. The subject holds the apparatus; his self is thought through the tool which is both a supplement replacing eyes, but also a mechanical object capable of rendering a subject as both an agent but also a subject open to manipulation.

Geoffrey Batchen argues that the “conjunction of photographer, image, and camera produces more than just a surface reorganization of power” (2001, 23). Through the agency of photography, Rejlander renders the body in a theatrical configuration with a symbolic content. This influential photographer, according to Philip Protger, one of the most accomplished in Victorian England, renders an unconventional photographic portrait emulating, among others, compositional methods of early paintings of Sir David Wilkie (2001, 162). Rejlander stages a composition which can be read as an apology for photography, as a corrective art rendering images susceptible to illusion. Carroll knew Rejlander well, he visited his photographic studio on a number of occasions and, as Protger argues, remained under his strong influence (2009, 210). The sensibilities of the pho-

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4. Taken March 28, 1863. Currently it is to be found in Gernsheim Collection in Humanities Research Center. University of Texas, Austin. See the reproduction:

[http://www.magnoliabox.com/artist/13583/Oscar\\_Gustav\\_Rejlander/](http://www.magnoliabox.com/artist/13583/Oscar_Gustav_Rejlander/)

5. On this point see Christ and Jordan.

6. Derrida in *Memoirs of the Blind* notices that “the modern history of optics only represents or points in new ways a weakness of what is called natural sight” (1993, 70).

7. Cf. a self-portrait by Hermann Krone from 1858 which presents a comparable composition and emphases.



tographer as well as his idea of photography as an interpretative art form inspired Carroll's changing vision.

Its development coincided in photography history with the emerging cult of personality,<sup>8</sup> with the growing significance of the outward appearance. Carroll, for instance, knew of Charles Darwin's important work on human expression for which Rejlander created original photographic illustrations. He himself suggested to Darwin to use some of his photographic portraits. In the nineteenth century, manifesting and asserting the personal identity through photographic portraiture was made possible on massive scale. Because of the technological changes connected with the introduction of the wet collodion process, invented in Britain in 1851, single and expensive portraits obtained in daguerreotypes were replaced by cheap *carte-de-visite* portraiture which was multiply reproducible, portable, and collectable. Monteiro argues that in Victorian Britain we observe "increasing reliance on commercial photographic portraiture in the assertion of personal identity" which "facilitated social mobility, opening new territories for the representation of the self within the changing social fabric" (2009, 109). The portraits were not only highly desired, they were more and more important in the public sphere, influencing not just a sense of self but also careers of many people.<sup>9</sup> The popularity of such images and their spectacle-like quality define the nineteenth-century culture of acute level of the visibility of the body.

Carroll responded to the appeal of this kind of portraiture, collecting *carte-de-visite* portraits of celebrities and the royal family. Despite reservations and restrictions also of an aesthetic nature, he is known to have "occasionally printed portraits in *carte-de-visite* format in deference to his sitters' wishes" (Monteiro 2009, 110). Avoiding disclosure, Dodgson himself did expose his body for public viewing. He sat for children friends, for both amateur and commercial photographers and for acclaimed photographers like Oscar Gustav Rejlander. As Mon-

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8. It is a point raised by Roger Fry in his 1926 study *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women* by Julia Margaret Cameron (9-15).

9. In Britain, the *carte-de-visite* portrait became a fashion also because of the support and enthusiasm of Queen Victoria who encouraged taking photographs, who collected albums of royal family but also was trading in photographs, presenting them as gifts. Queen Victoria's fascination with photography is well-known and important for the period (Rosenblum 2005, 64).

teiro shows, Carroll strongly resisted circulation of his portraits for fear of losing control over his identity. He did not want his likeness to integrate with the public sphere, to merge his private self with the public self; the “confusion of identity that Carroll found intolerable” (2009, 111). Clearly, for Carroll full visibility predicated on sharp illumination of appearance was threatening.

### **Taking Photographs as a Form of Agency**

Anxious as he was about being a subject of a gaze, of situations in which his body would be fixed and immobilized for others to view, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson nevertheless engaged in assisted posing in front of the camera, negotiating the relationship between autonomy and constraint, between automatism and agency. Dodgson’s derision of materialism and technology is well-documented, his fascination with camera technology, the mastery of the tool-side of the camera, and long-lasting dependence upon—a remarkable phenomenon meticulously recorded by him in the ten volumes of his diaries but also by his contemporaries and biographers. The man who wrote *Alice* no doubt changed photography and was himself changed by photography. Photography was his way of life.

Experimenting with “one recreation,” as he repetitively defines the activity in his diaries, he developed as an artist and a man. By taking photographs he was able to create, to maintain a perceptual contact, and come to possess that which he did not want to vanish. Photography and his growing status of a “minor photographic celebrity” granted him an entry to many homes, it provided opportunities to meet the famous of his times. Thanks to photography he met female children (Cohen 1995, 160). The involvement in the “fiction” of picture-taking, as he says in “The Stage and the Spirit of Reverence,” enabled a creation of a duplicate world.

Clearly, the “black art” provided him with ample opportunities to assert an agency. To gain the capacity to access this other world, Dodgson took charge of the entire process:

If he wanted to take photographs in the open country, he had to bring with him a darkroom tent, a large box camera, numerous lenses, a tripod, bottles containing chemicals, a quantity of glass plates, numerous trays and dishes, scales and weighs, glass graduates, funnels, a pair or two, and even water for rinsing when no fresh source was available. So unwieldy were his crates and boxes, he had to hire a porter to help transport them, and he certainly needed a carriage or horse-drawn van to take him to his destination.

(Cohen 1995, 149)

Mastering the laborious new technological processes, he managed to negotiate cultural strictures about visualization of children; he also marked a change in his oppositional consciousness. Construction of portraits of children and the famous of his time was a means of escaping the adult world but also of gaining a liberating self-possession. This complex work intensified the self.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson retreated into the world of photography for 24 years, producing over 2700 photographs,<sup>10</sup> and emerged out of that world once this practice no longer activated his important dreams. A pioneer of amateur photography in Britain, Dodgson treated his hobby seriously, exploring the new technology to its fullest potential. Once he felt he could not control emerging new techniques, he abandoned photography to return to drawing and sketching. As his biographers note, Dodgson persuaded the authorities of the University of Oxford to grant him permission to build on the premises a glass-house. This extraordinary atelier held the most advanced optical instruments of his time. There he produced a surprisingly successful number of “clear, unblemished photographs in perfect focus” (1995, 149) using, for example, a very difficult wet-plate (collodion) process, a fact which confirms his technical skills and his dedication. Cohen notes that “Victorian photograph albums are often testimonials not so much to the marvels of photography as to photographic failures” (1995, 149). Dodgson though kept carefully annotated albums of his photographs, he

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10. The remaining photographs are to be found in Morris L. Parrish Collection at Princeton University. Edward Wakeling, a former chair of the Lewis Carroll Society, is currently preparing a new study of all Carroll's photography. Wakeling is also a co-editor of *Lewis Carroll, Photographer: The Princeton University Library Albums*.

also kept records of his good and bad prints. He entertained himself and his children companions looking at portraits, his micro-photographs, rough scenes, still lifes, photographs of objects. Dodgson, the amateur photographer, took and archived his photographs; he consulted prominent photographers of his time, and he worked on perfecting his skills. He neither exhibited nor sold his pictures. When he did give some away, he signed them “from the Artist” (Cohen 1995, 151).

Signing his belletristic texts, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson used the name Lewis Carroll, Dodgson for all other work. This duality was not however a question of double life. Virginia Woolf believes that Dodgson “had no life” (1968, 254). What Woolf means by this ironic statement is that Carroll did not develop into maturity, beyond “this hard block of pure childhood” (1968, 254). Because, as Woolf suggests, we progress and find it very hard to recreate the world of childhood, Lewis stands as a unique being in which childhood “lodged . . . whole and entire” and because of this he achieved what no one else could: “he could re-create it, so that we too become children again” (1968, 254). Though Carroll devoted most of his attention to cultivating the world of childhood, though he possessed and understood childhood like no one else, turning his back on the adult world, he did live most active adult life. Responding to its diaristic records, W. H. Auden concludes that it was “regular, busy life, teaching, engaging in university controversies, arguing with the illustrators of his books, attending the theatre and opera, inventing ciphers, new croquet games, a substitute for gum, a method of controlling the traffic at Covent Garden, binding books after removing their objectionable pages and so on” (2008, 416). Auden considers the details fascinating especially that he finds “nothing” obvious which would suggest that Lewis was a genius (2008, 416). Reticence and desire for invisibility which Auden detects in Dodgson’s diaries, inform his visual self-presentations.

Dodgson was fascinated with portraiture. According to Christopher Hollingsworth’s calculations, “86 per cent [of his photographs] were portrait images of some sort.” Averaging about nine to ten pictures a month, Dodgson produced “2,322 unique portrait images requiring hundreds of separate sittings,” a “miraculous” record (2009, 93), not only in

Hollingsworth's estimate. Dodgson's experiments with photographic portraits are invested in relations of intimacy; they are personal: "The friendship of children has always been a great enjoyment of life, and is very *restful* as a contrast to the society of books, or of men" (qtd. in Cohen 1995, 174). Taking portraits, Dodgson resisted the likeness and resemblance imperative; his photographic portraits are "fictions" aimed to distil ideal selves of his ideal children. They isolate and preserve his vision of the child as distinct from the adult but also as distinct from the vision of childhood present in Victorian iconography. Dodgson is not shy about his choices: "I am not omnivorous like a pig; I pick and choose" (qtd. in Cohen 1995, 174). At one point he made a list of 107 children he planned to photograph. He excluded boys, as well as rough, uncultured or unintelligent, girls. His models are aesthetically and morally remarkable; to create a sense of wonder, beauty, and freedom he experienced around them, he tried bold portrait codes. They helped release portraits which assert the conscious, rigorous control of Dodgson the artist breaking the conventions of child portraiture.

To a large extent, Dodgson's portraits of children are consciously created anti-portraits comprising a highly diverse range. Highly mannered, they manipulate the appearance, they exploit the subversive use of decorative conventions and nudity; they animate alternative emanations. Dodgson often relied on borrowed costumes from Ashmolean Museum and Drury Lane pantomime. He studied portrait painting, and in his studio work tried to emulate standards of painters. He coloured some of his portraits with pastels and oil paints to enhance the highly desirable effect of handmade art. Such photomechanical and hand-painted hybrids point to a dependence on the connection with painterly codes in portraiture, they are his gestures towards established tradition but also towards public taste. His experiments with lightning produced underexposed images, "ghost pictures" characterized by spectral atmosphere and fascinating doubling effects foreshadowing strange forms and grotesque apparitions. In these images bodies are like spectral figures and reflections, as if some inner selves have slipped into a barely detectable signs or masks. Dodgson's exploration of latent images anticipates interests in the surreal aspects of the optical unconscious. In his hypnagogic images, the sitters, placed in "real" space, are half-waking and half-dreaming. Their

oneiric state emanates distance, physical and intellectual. In yet another type, in the narrative portraits, he brought the verbal, some verse or quotation which he added in his handwriting, explaining the story it was meant to tell. The use of narration encodes his concerns about the legibility of his private fantasies. Certainly, in the context of the twenty-first century moral panic, Dodgson's nude portraits of young girls remain most problematic for us. Asking the children to pose with no clothing, Dodgson was possibly harnessing photography to capture the innocent and the natural. Yet in the erotic staging of the beauty of his under-age sitters we cannot help but sense his deeply-felt sexual desires. In Victorian times, however, the erotic idealizing of children is a well-documented fact.

Charles Dodgson as Lewis Carroll also constructed numerous metaphoric portraits in photography texts which deal with the capacities of the photographic medium and in which he explores the difference between visibility and latency. Before creating *Alice*, he wrote unconventional, subversive texts encoding personal anxieties about the portrait maker and his "black art." While his photographic portraits idealize the sitters, his verbal images depict mostly the grotesque and the fantastically blurred bodies. We read about the silhouettes in his diaries recording imperfect negatives and failed photographs. These images surprise and perplex because they do reflect some fabulous surfaces and their magical qualities. For Carroll the visual and the verbal stories went apace creating alternative ludic space.

In "Photography Extraordinary" (1855),<sup>11</sup> for example, a technologically advanced camera is presented as an agent capable of recording interior reflections and "emanations" by a "mesmeric rapport" directly from the model's mind. When the photographic paper is exposed, the results are described by the narrator in terms of literary schools: "sentimental", "realistic", and "dramatic-spasmodic." (Carroll 2002, 325). The photographer, who is a scientist, produces work which the existing literary conventions can only parody. Writers can only approximate certain themes and stylistic models of photography, they cannot hope to render its mystery. In a poem "A Double Acrostic"

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<sup>11</sup> Carroll's stories and poems I will be referring to are collected in *The Complete Stories and Poems by Lewis Carroll*.

(1869), the camera is shown as a machine capable of delivering monstrous and surreal portraits. Failed negatives distort and uglify, they capture bodies as “bloodthirsty, fierce, and base” (Carroll 2002, 325). Their grotesque charm stirs imagination; the speaker suggests they can provide good entertainment. In a story “Hiawatha Photographing” (1857), a photographic session conducted by the photographic artist Hiawatha ends in an utter failure. The family members gathered to have their portraits taken move too much or not enough, constrained by their ideas of respectable, Ruskin-like Victorian poses. The only picture with some “partial likeness” taken with the help of the camera, which is “all squares and oblongs / Like a complicated figure / In the Second Book of Euclid” (Carroll 2002, 170), is rejected by the sitters because it captures unpleasant expressions. Carroll satirizes the attachment to likeness and realism of portraiture to which the middle classes are so attached; his photographer loses his “politeness and patience” (Carroll 2002, 171) and flees the scene hurriedly. In “A Photographer’s Day Out” (1860), Mr. Tubbs, the photographer, is determined to dispel the reputation of photographers as unloving and un-admiring lot. The photographer’s diary organized by picture and sitting number testifies to chance as a determining component of his practice. As in previous narratives, his portrait session lends grotesque results. They prove unsatisfactory for the viewers desiring conventional Victorian family pictures “combining the domestic with the allegorical with the secondary meaning of virtues like innocence, faith, hope, charity, wisdom” (Carroll 2002, 268). Tubbs releases unmimetic portraits which capture grimaced faces or visages with “blank indifference”. In “The Legend of Scotland” (1858), the “camera” is the “chimera”—“a fabulous and wholly incredible thing” (Carroll 2002, 261) which produces mythical monsters, images of dismembered bodies, silly apparitions. In these fantastic narratives thus, the *camera obscura* is a tool for presenting unconscious and subconscious dimensions of the “I” revealing the hidden potential of the image. The camera releases “fantastic familiars,” not a fixing and consolidation of the subject but the splitting of the subject into the other. In these texts, as Monteiro observers, we can see that Carroll went far beyond the use of photography for recording and documenting reality. Carroll was “endowing the photograph with competing elements of fantasy” (2009, 104).

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural dynamics, the photographer was a new figure, inventing a new method. For Dodgson, the photographer was a “taker of men”, “expert magician”, “necromancer”, or “sun worshipper” opening the doors to numerous “spectredom”, and providing “the stupendous addition thus made to the powers of science” (Carroll 2002, 260). Dodgson’s frivolous and subversive treatment of this agent included a characteristic potential to emancipate the spirit, to give birth to forms which foreshadow hope for escape from history and the real perceived by limited natural vision. The magical associations of his enchanted verbal portraits articulate these “haunting effects” of portraiture. Turning on a world of wonder, Dodgson’s photographer institutes an unexpected mode of agency. He claims the capacity not only to manipulate cultural strictures but also to reconfigure the world.

Examining his self-portraits, however, observers may be surprised by the quality of impenetrability emanating from them. Photographic self-representations by Dodgson do not manifest the distrusted photographer, the “half man and half machine” from his verbal portraits. In carefully-orchestrated poses, Dodgson is a venerable male situated in a web of socially well-defined activities like reading. He wants to be seen as belonging to culture; his life is made readable to others. Nothing in these poses suggests an observer susceptible to illusion or manipulation. For example, in a self-portrait dated June 1857,<sup>12</sup> delectable in the pose and presentation of his body is the quality of controlled isolation. In his diary entry Dodgson identifies the image as a compromise: “to try the lens, I took a picture of myself, for which Ina [Lorina Liddell] took off the cap, and of course considered it all her doing” (1857). The self-portrait is a work of assisted creation. It reproduces Victorian gestural pose, dramatizing the lonely activity of reading a book. The bodily identity re-inscribed in the dominant modes of respectability and seriousness, and the corpus it contemplates reinforces rather than reconfigures the impenetrability of the personality as a social category.

An image of the interplay of structure, of rule-bound conventions and of agency, the self-portrait defines a vision informed by patterns, by the *habitus* of reading understood by

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12. See: <http://press.princeton.edu/Carroll/Dodgson.html/>



Bourdieu as a way “society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions or trained capacities and structured propensities to think and act in determinant ways” (Bourdieu 1984, 170). Reading is the *habitus* Dodgson captures as a practice which defines his self for the public viewing. An image creator, Dodgson adapted photographic portrait to make radically new visual decisions, to envisage his elusive self but also to follow conventional social orders of meaning.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the photographic self-portrait as a genre which engages modalities of identity agency. In particular, the paper shows how in his self-portraits Lewis Carroll, one of the most accomplished nineteenth century photographers, tried to conceal his identity of a photographer, while in his extraordinary portraiture projects he laid claims to his multiple and, as yet, little known selves.

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