

# LAOCOONTE

RÉVISTA DE ESTÉTICA Y TEORÍA DE LAS ARTES

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## CONVERSANDO CON

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“La resistencia del documento”, Entrevista a Jorge Ribalta, por **Mar García Ranedo** y **Fernando Infante del Rosal**

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## UT PICTURA POESIS

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*Versos de amor insensato*, Poemas de **Antonio del Junco**

PANORAMA: FILOSOFÍA DE LA FOTOGRAFÍA Sección coordinada por **Zsolt Bátori**

The philosophy of photography: From ontological and epistemic status to interpretation, **Zsolt Bátori**

TEXTO INVITADO: El verdadero reto de la fotografía (como arte representacional comunicativo), de **Robert Hopkins** (Trad. **Andrés Luna**)

Is photography really limited in its capacity to communicate thought? A response to Hopkins, **Paloma Atencia-Linares**

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La “cosa étnica” ¿está de moda? Performatividad indoamericana en el discurso gráfico de Vogue (2000-2017), **Julimar Mora Silva**

Entre la fotografía documental y la fotografía callejera: marginalidad y género, **Mar García Ranedo**

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La pintura como huella: fotografía y pintura en la obra de Gerhard Richter, **Víctor Murillo Ligorred**

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## MISCELÁNEA

---

Velázquez y el origen de la modernidad filosófica, **Carlos M. Madrid Casado**

Duchamp según Jean Clair vs. Arthur Danto, a 100 años de la Fuente, **Andrea Carriquiry**

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## RESEÑAS

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EDITA

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**El golpe. Cultura del entorno**

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**Antonio Cuesta**



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EDITA

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CON LA COLABORACIÓN DE



LAOCOONTE aparece en los catálogos:



“Cuanto más penetramos en una obra de arte más pensamientos suscita ella en nosotros, y cuantos más pensamientos suscite tanto más debemos creer que estamos penetrando en ella”.

G. E. Lessing, *Laocoonte o los límites entre la pintura y la poesía*, 1766.



# LAOCOONTE

REVISTA DE ESTÉTICA Y TEORÍA DE LAS ARTES

Nº 5 • 2018

PRESENTACIÓN .....	7-8
CONVERSANDO CON .....	9
“La resistencia del documento”, Entrevista a Jorge Ribalta, por <b>Mar García Ranedo</b> y <b>Fernando Infante</b> .....	11-21
UT PICTURA POESIS .....	23
Poemas y fotografías de Laocoonte n. 45, <b>Antonio del Junco</b> .....	25-26
<i>Versos de amor insensato</i> , Poemas de <b>Antonio del Junco</b> .....	27-47

PANORAMA

## FILOSOFÍA DE LA FOTOGRAFÍA .....

The philosophy of photography: From ontological and epistemic status to interpretation, **Zsolt Batori** (Coord.) 51-55

TEXTO INVITADO .....

El verdadero reto de la fotografía (como arte representacional comunicativo), de **Robert Hopkins**.  
Traducción de **Andrés Luna Bermejo** .....

ARTÍCULOS .....

Is photography really limited in its capacity to communicate thought? A response to Hopkins,  
**Paloma Atencia-Linares** .....

What does a presentist see when she looks at photographs of dead relatives? **Guilherme Ghisoni da Silva** .....

La importancia de llamarse Aylan. Fotografía y activismo en tiempos hiperconectados, **Esther González Gea** .....

Fotografía y Post-Realidad, **Adolfo Muñoz García** y **Ana Martí Testón** .....

Poder y agencia icónica. El negro africano como víctima en la cultura visual hegemónica, **Hasan G. López Sanz** .....

La “cosa étnica” ¿está de moda? Performatividad indoamericana en el discurso gráfico de Vogue  
(2000-2017), **Julimar Mora Silva** .....

Entre la fotografía documental y la fotografía callejera: marginalidad y género, **Mar García Ranedo** .....

El asco en la fotografía documental, **Mª Jesús Godoy Domínguez** .....

Hágase con luz y con luz se hizo. El origen de la fotogramática de László Moholy-Nagy,  
**Milagros García Vázquez** .....

Una transgresión incómoda. Entre lo privado y lo público en la fotografía de familia, **Eunice Miranda Tapia** .....

A imagem-enigma na fotografia contemporânea, **Mônica Zarattinia** .....

La pintura como huella: fotografía y pintura en la obra de Gerhard Richter, **Víctor Murillo Ligorred** .....

MISCELÁNEA .....	277
En la periferia de las estéticas de lo virtual. Un análisis de la integración del cuerpo en la poética digital de Charlotte Davies, <b>Alejandro Lozano</b> .....	279-293
Invencción: arquitectura sin Arquitectura, <b>José Antonio Ruiz Suaña</b> .....	294-311
RESEÑAS .....	313
Frente a frente: los dos Cioran, <b>Joan M. Marín</b> .....	315-316
Retazos de una estética no escrita, <b>Francesc J. Hernández i Dobon</b> .....	317-319
La autonomía del diseño. Diseño como categoría estética, <b>Jorge Martínez Alcaide</b> .....	320-322
De la ficción como método de conocimiento. <b>Áurea Ortiz Villeta</b> .....	323-326
Imágenes sin mundo. Modernidad y extrañamiento, <b>César Moreno-Márquez</b> .....	327-331
Crear en tiempos digitales o cómo vivir a base de méritos, <b>Guillermo Ramírez Torres</b> .....	332-335
Ernst Friedrich y el entusiasmo por la paz, <b>Raquel Baixauli</b> .....	336-338
La Novena Elegía. Lo decible y lo indecible en Rilke, <b>Javier Castellote</b> .....	339-342
Pensar problemáticamente. Un ensayo sobre Gilles Deleuze, <b>Raimon Ribera</b> .....	343-345
Y tú, ¿por qué eres negro? <b>Carlos García Martínez</b> .....	346-350

Fotografías de **Antonio del Junco**.

Fotografía de portada de **Tamara Djermanovic** intervenida con fotografía de **Antonio del Junco**.

Fotografías de 'Conversando con': **Antonio Cuesta**.









## What does a presentist see when she looks at photographs of dead relatives? <sup>1</sup>

Guilherme Ghisoni da Silva\*

### Abstract

The objective of this paper is to bring to the foreground some metaphysical commitments present in the debate about the relation between photography and the past. I will try to answer the question: what does a presentist see when she looks at photographs of dead relatives? According to presentism, if a particular object does not exist in the present, it does not exist *simpliciter*. For this reason, in Priorian presentism, there can be no *de re* (singular) propositions about past particulars. Part of the requirement for singularity would be played by reality, which suffers metaphysical restrictions from the passage of time. After outlining the metaphysical and semantical debate about presentism, I will briefly explore some theories of photography and separate them in two groups: *de re* theories that accept that through photography we indirectly perceive the past object *itself* and *de dicto* theories that deny it. Then, I will connect those theories to the problem faced by presentism,

showing that a presentist must limit herself, in the case of objects that no longer presently exist, to a *de dicto* approach of photography. In other words, a presentist cannot accept that through photography she can indirectly see the past object *itself*. There would be nothing in the past for her to be remotely acquainted with or to demonstratively single out. I attempt to develop a presentist theory that could account for the descriptive and causal referential elements of photography using John Zeimbekis' theory coupled with Craig Bourne's presentist causal theory of reference (that jettison the Millian element of the causal theory). I will show how this theory is different from Kendall Walton's counterfactual theory (also accepted by Dominic Lopes) and explore a criticism that could be formulated from his perspective.

*Key words:* metaphysics of time, tense operators, quantification, particulars, *de re/ de dicto*.

There have been some major developments in the philosophy of photography in the analytical tradition.<sup>2</sup> But very little has been written about photography and time – especially, photography and metaphysics of time. The objective of this paper is to bring

1 I want to thank all the students and artists that are part of the Research Laboratory of Philosophy of Photography at the Federal University of Goiás. The ideas presented in this paper are the result of long debates that arose over the last four years in this research laboratory that I coordinated. I am also thankful to FAPEG (*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Goiás*) and CNPq (*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico*) from Brazil for their financial support of the Research Laboratory.

2 The recent developments can be retraced to Nelson Goodman's seminal work from 1976. During the '80s, Roger Scruton's and Kendall Walton's papers on photography set the tone of the debate in the analytic tradition. Those papers were republished in Scott Walden's anthology in 2008. A great deal of the current focus on the analytic tradition towards photography is due to this anthology and to the works of Dominic Lopes. Lopes developed in 1996 (republished in 2004) Goodman's and Walton's ideas using Gareth Evans' theory of informational systems. He also deals with the aesthetic value of photography in his paper from 2003 and offers a thorough account of photography as art in his book from 2016.

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to the foreground some metaphysical commitments present in the debate about the relation between photography and the past. To achieve this aim, I will try to answer the question: what does a presentist see when she looks at photographs of dead relatives?

I will assume that presentism is a viable metaphysical position (albeit, there have been some strong criticisms against it).<sup>3</sup> I suspend judgment on whether presentism is the best metaphysical theory of time. It is not my aim here to argue in favor of presentism. I just want to assess which theories of photography are open for someone that supports presentism, and which are closed.

According to presentism,<sup>4</sup> only the present exists and what exists constantly changes. Particulars come in to existence and out of existence, and they only exist as part of the present. Therefore, only present tense propositions can be genuinely about *res* (things). There are no past particulars to be denoted by singular terms. Statements about the past must be *de dicto*; about propositions, formulated in an ontologically non-committed way.<sup>5</sup> Part of the requirement for singularity would be played by reality, which suffers metaphysical restrictions from the passage of time.

Consequently, for the same reasons that for a presentist there are no past *de re* (singular) propositions about non-presently existing objects, there cannot be *de re* perception of past particulars through photographs.<sup>6</sup> There would be nothing in the past with which she would be remotely acquainted. Therefore, a presentist cannot accept that through photography we can indirectly see the past object *itself*. The object no longer is part of the unrestricted domain of quantification. Using Kendall Walton's words (in a way contrary to his theory), we could say that for presentists (in relation to dead relatives) "there are no [past particulars]; so they aren't really seeing any" (Walton 2008a: 25). A presentist could only say that she *fictionally* sees her dead relative in a photograph –supporting a *de dicto* approach to photography. (I will explain this terminology later).

Photography is a *sui generis* category that combines descriptive and causal referential elements.<sup>7</sup> Presentism could easily account for the descriptive element of photography, since the existence of past particulars is not a requirement for representations of past particulars. But could a presentist account for the causal element of photography and not be forced to a purely descriptive theory of photography (and, thus, limiting herself to a weak theory of photography)? I will argue, following Craig Bourne (2006), that, if causality is conceived as a genuine relation that requires the coexistence of *relata*, presentists cannot accept causal theories of reference. Nevertheless, according to Bourne, it is possible to develop a presentist causal theory of reference that treats causality counterfactually –jettisoning the Millian element of the causal theory. To develop a presentist theory of photography that combines descriptive and causal

3 For example, Ulrich Meyer (2013) offers a very interesting critique of presentism, arguing that it is either trivially true or obviously false.

4 I will take Priorian presentism as the standard presentist theory and incorporate some ideas suggested by Craig Bourne (2006) in the paper –although I will not be herein committed to Ersatzer presentism.

5 One important element that will be later addressed is the relation between quantification and the use of past tense sentential operators. Since the problem dealt with herein is related to remote *perception* of past particulars, I will read the quantifiers in an extensional way.

6 In this paper, I will be concerned with the case of non-abstract straight photography.

7 Gareth Evans (1982: 145-51) and David Kaplan (1968: 198-9) are good examples of theories that attribute to photography this *sui generis* status, that combines descriptive and causal referential elements.

referential elements I will use John Zeimbekis' theory of photography coupled with Craig Bourne's causal theory of reference. I will later show how this counterfactual theory is different from Kendall Walton's counterfactual account of transparency –also accepted by Dominic Lopes.

I will start with some metaphysical outlines of the *tenseless* and *tensed* debate, drawing the distinction between eternalism, presentism, the growingblock theory, and maximalism. I will focus on the opposition between theories that accept the existence of past particulars and theories that deny it.

I will explore how Priorian presentism cannot accept past *de re* (singular) propositions about non-presently existing objects. I mention some presentist theories that try to avoid restricting singular propositions to the present –using abstract objects as referents of singular terms or through an Ersatz approach, like the one developed by Craig Bourne.

My next step is to briefly explore theories of photography from Roger Scruton (2008), Kendall Walton (2008a), Dominic Lopes (2003, 2004, 2010, 2016), José Luis Bermúdez (2000), and John Zeimbekis (2010). I will separate those theories into two groups: *de re* theories that accept the idea that through photography we perceive the object itself and *de dicto* theories that deny it. Then, I will connect those theories to the problem faced by presentism, showing that a presentist must limit herself, in the case of objects that no longer presently exist, to a *de dicto* approach of photography.

In the last sections, I will attempt to show how a presentist could account for the causal element of photography and explore a criticism that could be formulated from Kendall Walton's perspective.

### Setting the temporal stage from a metaphysical point of view.

Different metaphysical theories of time disagree on what exists and if reality dynamically changes.<sup>8</sup> To categorize those theories, we can separate between *i*) the ontological problem and *ii*) the dynamic problem.<sup>9</sup> From the perspective of the dynamic problem, theories can be *tensed* or *tenseless*. *Tensed* theories support the idea that reality changes dynamically and *tenseless* theories deny it. From the perspective of the ontological problem, theories attribute different ontological statuses to past, present, and future.

Eternalism is the chief tenseless theory. In this theory, time is the static order of events, ordered by succession and simultaneity.<sup>10</sup> Nothing comes into existence or out of existence. All events, particulars, and properties sempiternally exist, occupying their positions in time. If an event A is before B, it was, it is, and it will always be before B. In this theory, past, present, and future have no metaphysical significance, and they are usually considered to be relations or properties of the *subjective experience*.<sup>11</sup>

8 A thorough analyses of the tensed and tenseless debate can be found in William Craig 2000a and 2000b.

9 This distinction is suggested by Kristie Miller (2013).

10 Eternalism could also be formulated as an absolute theory of time. In this case, time would be the static order of *positions*. Bertrand Russell (1901) offers a very good argument in favor of the absolute theory of time. In this perspective, events would be non-primitive entities, resulting from the occurrence of a quality at a position. His theory in 1915 (2009), on the other hand, becomes the classical relational theory of time –offering a construction of instants out of events. Meyer (2013) offers a very good analysis of this construction. Since the distinction between absolute and relational theories is not important for this paper, I will set this distinction aside.

11 One example of an eternalist theory of time that conceives past, present, and future as related to subjective

Tensed theories, on the other hand, come in different varieties, depending on the different ontological status attributed to past, present, and future. Here, I will touch briefly on only three of the main theories. According to presentism, only the present exists and what exists constantly changes. According to the growingblock theory, past and present exist, and, at each instant, a new temporal slice of what exists is added to reality. This theory is also called no-futurism (since it only denies the existence of the future) (Bourne 2006: 13). And in the theory called maximalism (Smith 2003) (or the *moving spotlight view* (Miller 2013)), past, present, and future equally exist, and presentness (as an objective property of reality) passes through each position of the series of events diachronically, constantly changing what has the properties of pastness, presentness, and futurity. This last theory is the one supported by John Ellis McTaggart, but also shown by him to be inconsistent, in his famous paradox from 1908 and 1927.

Since my topic of inquiry does not aim at the dynamic problem (if reality is tensed or tenseless), I will focus on the opposition between presentism and eternalism. The problem that I want to approach (before dealing with photography) is the opposition between a theory that accepts the existence of past particulars and a theory that denies it. In relation to this point, all that will be written here about eternalism could also be written of the growingblock theory or of maximalism (if it turns out consistent after all), since all three accept the existence of the past.

### **The temporal problem of singular propositions:**

According to presentism only the present exists, and time is dynamic. Particular objects come in to existence and out of existence, and they only exist as part of the present. Thus, at each instant the passage of time metaphysically changes the domain of what unrestrictedly (or *simpliciter*) exists. If we accept (as I have accepted in this analysis) two common views –first, that ordinary physical objects are among the particulars that make up the furniture of our reality, and, second, that there are singular propositions about particulars– presentism faces a difficult challenge. The problem faced by presentism is how to account for a singular proposition if the particular object denoted by the singular term no longer exists in the present.<sup>12</sup> If it does not exist in the present, it does not exist *simpliciter*.

One way out of this problem is to accept it and to limit the temporal scope of singular propositions to the present. Arthur Prior outlines this solution in his famous 1962 paper “Change in events and changes in things.”<sup>13</sup> The initial problem posed by Prior is how can a statement, made in 1962, be *about* Queen Anne, since she died more than 150 years ago. Prior’s solution is to treat *past* and *future* as sentential tense operators (“it was the case that” and “it will be the case that”) attached to present tense propositions, outside the scope of quantifiers. This allows Prior an ontologically

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experience can be found in Bertrand Russell’s distinction between “mental time” and “physical time” from 1913 (published in 1984). About Russell’s distinction, see Silva (2015).

12 I will favor talking about “objects” rather than “temporal-slices of objects.” Accepting a four-dimensionalist theory, we could, for example, conceive the object as the mereological sum all its temporal-slices. The reference of a singular term could be the mereological sum or one of its temporal-slices. Since four-dimensionalism is opposed to presentism, I will not take into account this kind of distinction between “objects” and “temporal-slices of objects.” For an account of four-dimensionalism see Sider (2002).

13 Republished in his book from 1968.

non-committed way of talking about past individuals (1962: 13). The ontologically committed formulation would be:

- (1) For some specific X (it was the case that (X is called “Anne,” reigns over England, etc.)).

This formulation would require in 1962 the existence of X for it to be true. Prior favors the formulation:

- (2) It was the case that (for some specific X (X is called “Anne,” reigns over England, etc.))

According to Quentim Smith, “this implies that ‘some one’ [or some specific X] does not now refer to anything (there is no past people for it to refer to), but used to refer to something, to a person who existed at the time the proposition was true” (2003: 360-61).

Smith (2003) appeals to the *de dicto/de re* distinction to further Prior’s proposal.<sup>14</sup> With the tense operator outside the scope of the quantifier, the past tense expression “it was the case that” would be a property of a *dictum*—a proposition (something like “it was true that p” or “p had the property of being true”).<sup>15</sup> When it is used *de re*, it ascribes a property (*pastness*) to a thing (or an event or another property)—for example, that “for some specific X (X has the property of pastness)”. But, since in the presentist ontology, Queen Anne is not among the particulars that exist in 1962 (or any time after her death), there is no thing to which the property of *pastness* could be ascribed. Only a *de dicto* perspective would be open for a Priorian presentist.

In this form of presentism, only present tense propositions can be singular, thus genuine about *res* (things). Statements about past particulars would be *de dicto*; about propositions, formulated in an ontologically non-committed way.

Eternalism, on the other hand, faces no difficulty talking about non-presently existing particulars (past or future ones). Since the domain of what unrestrictedly exists does not change, eternalists can have *de re* propositions about things situated in what we call “past,” “present,” and “future.” But, differently than in the maximalist theory, since eternalism is a tenseless theory, past, present, and future have no metaphysical significance. For eternalists, past, present and future are not properties of past and future individuals, but just indexicals or terms that should be analyzed token-reflexively, using the relations of succession and simultaneity. To say that “the death of Queen Anne is past,” is to say that the event of her death is *before* the utterance of this sentence (or simultaneous, if it is present, or after, if it is future).<sup>16</sup>

14 Although William Craig (2003) criticizes Smith’s use of *de dicto/de re* distinction to formulate presentism, I find Smith’s suggestion very useful.

15 In this paper I will not address the classical problem of the relation between presentism and truthmakers. Presentists might be forced to accept a form of anti-realism of the past—that “statements about the past are true whose assertion would be justified in the light of what is now the case” (DUMMETT, 1996: 366-7). Supporting the non-existence of past truthmakers, the presentist would have to abandon bivalence for past statements (although could still accept the law of the excluded middle) and would have to rethink the truth-value link of past, present, and future propositions. Another line of inquiry for a presentist would be to abandon the correspondence theory of truth and support a deflationist theory. Since I am dealing exclusively with the problem of *reference* to past particulars, I will not take a stand in relation to the problem of presentism and truthmakers. For this problem, see Dummett (1996, 2004) and Bourne (2006).

16 William Craig offers a detailed analysis of the eternalist theory of language in 2000a (pp. 3-130).

### Particulars outside the realm of what presently exists.

In the version of presentism outlined in the last section, when someone says “For some specific X (X is so and so)” the unrestricted domain of quantification would have as its extension the particular entities that presently exist, at the time of utterance. Only those particulars could be denoted by a genuine singular term. In the next instant, a particular entity could cease to exist, and its term would have afterwards as its meaning only a descriptive content, formulated in an ontologically non-committed way (using quantified propositions, preceded by the past tense operator).<sup>17</sup>

One undesirable consequence of this approach is that when a proposition about a particular is thought, the thinking subject, unaware if it still exists, would not know if her thought is singular or general. Part of the requirement for singularity would be played by reality, which suffers metaphysical restrictions from the passage of time.

One way for a presentist to avoid restricting singular propositions to the present is to take as the reference of a singular term not the actual particular (*in flesh and blood*) but an abstract object. Fitch and Nelson (2016) draw a list of options that follow this path. Instead of referring to the actual particular, the singular term in a proposition about a past particular could refer to:

- (1) its *individual essence* (using Plantinga’s concept of proper names);<sup>18</sup>
- (2) the object as a *nonconcrete object*;
- (3) a *meinongian* object (that subsists without presently existing).

In those cases, quantification could be conceived *atemporally*, quantifying over the atemporal domain of those abstract entities, or *temporally* if we restrict, for example, individual essences to what is present or has been present (past). Even if a particular object ceases to exist, a proposition could still be *de re*, because the referent of the singular term would be guaranteed by the abstract object.<sup>19</sup>

Since this line of thinking (as I will briefly explain later) will not provide a satisfactory answer for the problem of reference that will be formulated herein regarding photography (hence in the case of photography we are dealing with the problem of *perception* of past particulars), I will not explore those theories. Criticism of those theories can be found in Bourne (2006: 44-5; 105-6) and Fitch and Nelson (2016).

Another option to avoid restricting singular propositions to the present is suggested by Ersatz Presentism. According to Craig Bourne’s version (2006), Ersatz Presentism is the thesis that only one time has a concrete realization. All other times are maximally consistent sets of propositions that give a complete description of what is true at that time. Those times are related to the present by the “earlier than” relation (that represents the earlier than relation of spatial-temporal objects). Metrical and topological features of time are represented in the structure of abstract objects (the order of maximally consistent sets of propositions).

17 In this section I will explore some non-descriptive approaches to the temporal problem of reference. Latter I will explore Craig Bourne’s suggestion of a causal theory of reference that could be accepted by a presentist.

18 Plantinga (1974: 71–81; 137–44; 149–63), analyzed by Bourne (2006: 44) and Fitch; Nelson (2016).

19 Another option would be to follow Nino Cocchiarella (2007: ch.2) and quantify atemporally over the domain of *being* and to use a first order predicate “E!” to express that something that has being can have (or not have) temporally the property of existence in the present “E!x.” Meyer explore Cocchiarella’s suggestion in 2013 (pp. 4-5).

Bourne argues that a presentist can have past *de re* propositions if the object we are talking about still exists in the present (2006: 59-60). We can say, for example, that the *presently existing* Queen Elizabeth II *worked* during the war.<sup>20</sup> Craig Bourne's proposal for this scenario could be dubbed as:

- For some specific X (X is called "Elizabeth II," reigns over England (it was the case that (X works during the war)

A point stressed by Bourne is that the expression "it was the case that" is not a property of a property (like suggested by Smith (2003) –that would require some form of metaphysical realism of the past– the property would have to exist to have the property of pastness) but "remains as a sentential operator operating on an open sentence [X works during the war]" (2006: 59). What is required, according to Bourne, is that the *presently existing* particular must be appropriately connected to the X that worked during the war (and he will express this connection in causal terms –formulated counterfactually (I will explore this suggestion later)).

But this form of *past tense de re (singular) proposition* has the limitation that the object we are talking about must exist *in the present* for us to be able to talk *de re* about it. This solution will not help us in cases in which the object is not part of what actually *presently* exists. For those cases, the presentist will have to stick to the *de dicto* formulation.

### Theories of photography.

It is important to notice that photography is a *sui generis* category that combines two elements that can be found in opposing theories of reference. Photographs are causally connected to the photographed objects. Photographs also represent visually the objects.

If we prioritize the causal element, photography can be understood along the lines of a causal theory of reference. There is a causal route that connects the photograph to its referent (similarly to a name in Kripke's (1980) proposal of a causal theory of reference). The denoted object is determined as the particular entity that was in front of the camera at the time the picture was taken. In this case, we assume that photography can play the logical role of a direct referential term (a demonstrative) that points to its referent through the causal route.

In the second perspective, the reference of the picture is thought to be determined by the pictorial content that describes visually the denoted object. In this case, photography is conceived along the lines of a descriptive theory of reference.

As expressed by Dominic Lopes (2004: 92-106), neither a purely descriptive nor a purely causal approach offers by itself a good theory of photography. A photograph with a back speck as content is not going to be accepted as a picture of John, even if John is the cause of the back speck. On the other hand, photographs are not used satisfactorily.<sup>21</sup> We do not take as the referent of a photo whatever satisfies its descriptive pictorial content. If that was the case, a photograph of John would also be a photograph of his identical twin brother Peter. A theory of photography must combine the causal and the descriptive elements and avoid those two extreme cases.

20 Throughout the paper, I use Prior's non-formal way of writing quantifiers. Thus, in this case, I will adapt Bourne's example.

21 An exemption can perhaps be found, for example, in contexts in which we use a photograph to determine the identity of the culprit of a crime –whose image has been caught by some CCTV.

The combination of the causal and the descriptive elements affords different levels of commitments. Those different levels, by their turn, will result in different concepts of the relation between photography and the world. In this paper, I focus on only one aspect of those differences: *i*) theories that accept that through photography we *perceive the object itself* and *ii*) theories that accept that photography gives us only *representations* of the objects (even though the representation is causally connected to its referent).

We can take as examples of the first group the theories developed by Roger Scruton (2008), Kendall Walton (2008a), and Dominic Lopes (2003, 2004, 2010, 2016). I will assume here that those authors that support the thesis that we see the object *itself* through a photography are not using just a metaphor but expressing a genuine philosophical position. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that it does not mean that for them there are no differences between seeing the object directly, without the mediation of photographs, and seeing it mediated by a photograph. Seeing an object through a photograph is an *indirect* form of seeing. Although indirect, they conceive this indirect route as a way of perceiving the object itself.

Scruton favors the causal over the intentional relation that photograph has with the denoted object (2008: 140). As a result, he conceives photography in its *ideal form* as an indexical term, that could point non-descriptively to its reference. In his own words: “The camera, then, is being used not to represent something but to point to it” (2008: 151). Although his *ideal* photograph would fall along the lines of a purely causal approach, the *actual* photographs fall short of this ideal and combine causal and intentional elements. Nevertheless, even in the case of actual photographs, according to Scruton: “looking at a photograph is a substitute for looking at the thing itself” (2008: 149).

The *de re* aspect of Scruton’s theory is well exemplified in his paper “Photography and Representation” (2008): “if a photograph is a photograph of a man, then there is some particular man of whom it is a photograph.”

As it will be later explored in this paper, Kendall Walton’s theory affords different readings. I will try to show that, from the point of view of the metaphysics of time (and the temporal *de re/de dicto* debate), those different readings are unstable. But, at face value, Kendall Walton’s position can be easily accommodated into the group that accepts that through photography we perceive the object *itself*. According to him: “With the assistance of the camera, we can see not only around corners and what is distant or small; we can also see into the past.” (2008a: 22). He even warns his readers “against watering down” his idea and expresses it in stronger terms:

I am not saying that the person looking at the dusty photographs has the impression of seeing his ancestors (...) Nor is my point that what we see –photographs– are *duplicates* or *doubles* or *reproductions* of objects, or *substitutes* or *surrogates* for them. My claim is that we *see*, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them (2008a: 22).

The reason photographs are *transparent* (allowing perception of the object itself) is that, according to him, they are counterfactually dependent on the photographed scene independently of its maker’s beliefs – whereas handmade images would be dependent. This belief-independent counterfactual dependence is the causal connectedness required for perceiving the object itself: “I would subscribe to some variety of causal theory: to see something is to have visual experiences which are caused, in a certain



manner, by what is seen” (2008a: 34).

Dominic Lopes accepts Walton’s transparency thesis and extends it to also encompass handmade images.<sup>22</sup> Regarding photography, due to this acceptance, according to Lopes: “When we look at photographs we literally see the objects that they are of” (2003: 447).<sup>23</sup> His theory develops Gareth Evans’ hybrid theory of linguistic reference and takes pictures as part of information systems. According to him, “a picture represents an object only if it conveys information from it on the basis of which it can be identified” (Lopes 2004: 107). The identification of what a picture represents exploits our dynamic sub-personal ability of recognition. We can recognize people after many years unseeing and objects seen in different and strange angles. According to Lopes’ theory, it is this perceptual ability that is at play when we think of an object pictorially represented not only as “whatever was the source of this information” but we also identify it. We can recognize in pictures “features, individual objects, and kinds of objects” (2004: 137), because the pictures’ design presents us “recognizable aspects of things” (2004: 145).

According to Lopes’ theory, in a well-grounded system, when we recognize an individual in a photograph, we would have a *discriminating thought* of that object (2004: 140). We would be able to distinguish it in thought from all other objects, thinking about it as *that* object seen through the picture. This would be a form of demonstrative remote acquaintance with the object *itself*.<sup>24</sup>

José Luis Bermúdez (2000) and John Zeimbekis (2010) are two authors who deny this thesis and support the idea that photography gives us only *representations* of objects.

According to Bermúdez, cases of demonstrative identification using photographs would not be of genuine demonstrative reference (in which the object itself is demonstratively selected) but rather cases of elliptical definite descriptions. “Utterances like ‘That is my uncle’ made while pointing to a photograph of my uncle should be parsed along the lines of ‘The man [represented] in that photograph is my uncle’” (2000: 371).<sup>25</sup> Thus, using photographs in demonstrative contexts, we are not pointing to the object itself, but to a *representation* of that object.

22 Dominic Lopes challenges Walton’s idea that handmade images are not transparent (2004). Lopes argues that beliefs about an object are not required for an artist to make a handmade picture of that object. To make a handmade picture “you are required only to make marks that are recognizably of the object whose appearance is guiding your drawing movements” (2004: 185). And the artist does not need to have concepts of all design properties that she uses in the picture design. (Support for Lopes’ position can be found in cases of “apperceptive agnosia,” discussed by John Campbell, in which patients can copy complex figures without any idea of what they are drawing (2002: 72)). Thus, against Walton, Lopes supports that handmade pictures are also counterfactually dependent of the depicted scene and belief-independent. In sum, handmade pictures are also transparent, according to Walton’s transparent thesis. I agree with Lopes’ precise criticism. But I think that the success of his argument against Walton can be used for a different purpose. Instead of concluding that all images can be transparent, we can use his argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Walton’s theory. Transparency, in Walton’s formulation, is an overly broad concept, and could be set aside. A very interesting notion of transparency (different from Walton’s) is the structural transparency suggested by John Kulvicki (2006).

23 One important element of Lopes’ theory (2003, 2016) is that, although he accepts Walton’s transparency thesis, he offers a very detailed account of the aesthetic value of photography. A common criticism of the transparency thesis is that it sifts the aesthetic value from the photograph to the photographed object. An aesthetically interesting photograph would simply be cognitive access to an aesthetically interesting object. Lopes’ transparent theory avoids this kind of criticism.

24 A detailed account of Lopes’ idea that pictures *perceptually* ground demonstrative reference to depicted objects can be found in Lopes (2010). An analysis of Lopes’ theory as a form of remote acquaintance that supports *de re* thought about the recognized object can be found in Zeimbekis (2010).

25 Here I am following Dominic Lopes’ interpretation of Bermúdez (2010: 53).

John Zeimbekis (2010) uses Jane Heal's notion of "indexical predication" (1997) and also shifts (similarly to Bermúdez) the logical role of photography from the referential part to the attributive part of the thought caused by the perception of photographs. According to him, "the contents of picture perceptions do not themselves provide the kind of numerical and contextual information required for singular thought" (2010: 11). When facing a photograph of perceptually indiscernible objects (of John or of his identical twin brother Peter, for example), we cannot know, *limited to the pictorial content*, which object we have in mind. Thus, when pointing to a photograph and saying "this is so and so," since the pictorial content cannot guarantee the numerical identity of the particular, the indexical cannot be used to pick out its referent. The result is that "any thought I formulate about [the object] on the basis of my perceptual contents will have the cognitive role of a *de dicto* thought, albeit one with highly determinate descriptive content" (2010: 14).<sup>26</sup> Zeimbekis suggests that, in cases of demonstrative identifications using photographs, the indexical points to phenomenal properties *exemplified* by the photograph (2010: 17-8). Those phenomenal properties are *attributed* to the referent.

But Zeimbekis's position should not be understood as purely descriptive. He accepts the importance of the causal connection between a photograph and its referent. But the causal history of a photograph ties the photograph as *object* to the photographed *object*. This connection anchors the reference of the representational content of the photograph to one specific object. Nevertheless, the pictorial content would remain underdetermined and would only play an attributive part in the thought caused by the perception of the photograph –in a *de dicto* way.

### Presentism and photography.

As seen in the last section, there are at least four distinct philosophical approaches to photography (the *de re/de dicto* distinction will be used herein to mark the acceptance or denial of the idea that through photography we perceive the object *itself*)<sup>27</sup>:

- (1) A purely causal *de re* approach (e.g., Scruton's *ideal* photograph);
- (2) A causal/representational *de re* approach (e.g., Scruton's actual photographs and Walton's theory at face value –also accepted by Lopes);
- (3) A causal/representational *de dicto* approach (e.g., Zeimbekis' attributive by exemplification theory);
- (4) A purely descriptive *de dicto* approach.

Setting (1) and (4) aside for the reasons expressed in the last section, I will focus on (2) and (3). The question to be asked is: to which of those theories could a Priorian presentist subscribe?

26 In this passage, Zeimbekis is dealing with the case of television. But I think that regarding this point this idea could also be attributed to photography.

27 Similar distinction can be found in relation to theories of episodic memories. Bertrand Russell supports a *direct realist* approach of memory up to 1912 –in relation to remote and recent memory. According to him, "the essence of memory is not constituted by the image, but by having immediately before the mind an object which is recognized as past" (1998: 66). From 1913 to 1918, he restricts this idea of memory as acquaintance with the past to recent memory and accepts that remote memory is an *image* of something past. In 1918, he gives up the idea of acquaintance and, in 1921, develops a representational theory of memory, supporting the idea that memory is a *present image* accompanied by the feeling of pastness (2005: 131). About Russell's theory of memory see Faria (2010) and Silva (2015).

I will assume here that perception is object dependent –that an object must exist in order for someone to be able to perceive it (in the same way as in Bertrand Russell’s theory of acquaintance (1911)).<sup>28</sup> I will also assume here that we are dealing with cases of photographs in which the photographed object no longer exists in the present –as in Walton’s passage about seeing dead relatives.

The problem faced by the presentist is that, according to this metaphysical theory, there are only presently existing particulars. Particulars come in to existence and out of existence. Thus, for the same reasons that for a Priorian presentist there are no past *de re* (singular) propositions, there cannot be *de re* perception of past particulars. In the case of past objects, there would be nothing to be acquainted with or to refer to.

Kendall Walton touches on the problem of quantification in a non-temporal way. The temporal version of this problem is the one that haunts presentism. Walton’s idea is that we *literally* see our dead relatives when we look at photographs of them, but we only *fictionally* see unicorns in a Unicorn Tapestry. In the case of a Unicorn Tapestry, in Walton’s theory, the image serves as a prop in a game of make-believe, that is fostered by “a single experience that is both perceptual and imaginative” (Walton 2008b: 138-9). As part of a game of make-believe, the perception of the *unicorn* in the tapestry is only *fictional*. The reason for this restriction is that, according to him: “there are no unicorns; so they aren’t really [literally] seeing any” (2008a: 25). Walton accepts that photographs can also be used as props in games of make-believe. Looking at the famous fake photograph of the Loch Ness monster, we can *fictionally* see the monster (2008a: 25). Nevertheless, what we *literally* see, according to him, is the model of the monster used to make the photograph. And the reason for this is that the Loch Ness monster does not really exist. In other words, Loch Ness monsters and unicorns are not part of the unrestricted domain of quantification. But, hence, for the presentist, a particular ceases to exist when it no longer is present, using Walton’s words (contrary to his thought), we could say that (in relation to a dead relative) “there are no [past particulars]; so they aren’t really seeing any.” A presentist would only be left with the option of saying that she *fictionally* sees dead relatives in a photograph – restricting herself to the use of the photograph as a prop in a game of make-believe.

Most *de re* theories of photography approximate it to a demonstrative, that points to the object. According to Scruton, photography points to an object in such a way that “a gesturing finger would have served just as well” (2008: 151). The idea that photography plays a demonstrative role is also present in Dominic Lopes and Roland Barthes (1982). Barthes, for example, says that the essence of photography is “That-has-been” (1982: 76). Demonstratives like *this* and *that* enjoy especial status regarding the existence of its referent. For Bertrand Russell, “this exists” and “this does not exist” are senseless. Existence can only be attached to descriptions (Russell 1905). G. E. Moore (1936) develops a less restricted theory and accepts that those sentences could have meaning, but “this exists” would always be true and “this does not exist” always false. This is due to the fact that the object has to exist for the demonstrative to pick it out. Thus, photography as a form of demonstrative would also have to be object-dependent.

But it is important to notice that we are dealing with the relation between a

28 Later I will explore a possible reading of Walton’s theory in which existence would not be a requirement for an object to be indirectly perceived through photographs.

photograph and its referent *not* at the time that the picture was taken but at a future time, in which a photograph is perceived, and the object no longer exists. Thus, it is not enough to say that the object existed at the time that the picture was taken, for someone then to be able to have a *de re* perception of it through a photograph in the future. Presentists would accept that the object existed at the time that the picture was taken, but formulate it a *de dicto* way. In a presentist ontology, at the time of the perception of the photograph, there would be no past particular for us to be acquainted with or to perceive.

As already seen, presentism could avoid restricting singular propositions to the present taking as the referent of a singular term not the actual particular (*in flesh and blood*), but an abstract object. Nonetheless, since in the case of photography we are supposedly dealing with *perception* of past particulars, resorting to *individual essences*, *nonconcrete* objects, or *meinongian* objects seems not to be a viable solution. To be able to see someone's individual essence after her death would be much more a case of ghostly appearance than perception (and the same for *nonconcrete* or *meinongian* objects).

A *de re* theory of photography would require some form of metaphysical commitment to past particulars (eternalism, the growingblock theory, or maximalism). In the case of the causal/representational *de re* approach, without the metaphysical commitment to past particulars, there would be nothing at the end of the causal route for the perceiver to be connected with. In terms of information systems, we could say that, for a presentist, the source of the information does not exist anymore. Therefore, we would not be in a position to think demonstratively about the source as *that* object—since there is no object for us to demonstratively single out. In sum, it would be necessary the existence of past objects in the unrestricted domain of quantification for someone to be able to indirectly *see* it in the future (in other words, it must exist in a temporal position that is before the position in which the photograph is perceived).

But if that is case, from a temporal perspective, what does a presentist see when she looks at photographs of dead relatives?

Zeimbekis' (2010) proposal could be easily accommodated to presentism. According to Zeimbekis' theory, photographs exemplify phenomenal properties attributed to objects. The presentist could use the Priorian approach connected to Zeimbekis' shift of logical role of photography from the referential part to the attributive part. When someone says, pointing to a photograph:

(1) "*this* is so and so";

the logical form of this proposition would be

(2) "For some specific photograph, *it was the case that* [for some specific X (X has similar phenomenal property to *this* presently existing phenomenal property exemplified by the photograph)]"<sup>29</sup>

I am supposing that the photograph is a presently existing object. But the formulation would still be *de dicto* in relation to the depicted object. In this formulation, the indexical would not be pointing to the object itself (since it does not exist *simpliciter*) but to phenomenal properties exemplified in the present by the photograph, attributed in an ontologically non-committed way to the object (using Prior's past tense operator). Thus, X does not need to be an existing particular of the unrestricted domain at the time

29 A complete version, that accommodates a presentist causal theory of reference, will be suggested subsequently.

of the perception of the photograph. We are not acquainted to the object itself, only to presently existing phenomenal properties attributed to it. According to Zeimbekis, in this case, we are acquainted “with properties as opposed to particulars” (2010: 19).

This account (that combines Prior and Zeimbekis) can explain how the pictorial content of a photograph can be used to represent the past in an ontologically non-committed way. But photographs are also *causally* connected to the photographed objects (not only intentionally). Zeimbekis accepts that the causal connection of a photograph as an *object* to the photographed *object* is what anchors the reference of the representational contents of photographs (2010: 11). Could the presentist account for the causal element of photography and not be forced to a purely descriptive theory of photography (and, thus, limiting herself to a weak theory)?

### **The problem of the causal connectedness.**

At first sight, the answer to the question should be negative. Le Poidevin (1991) holds the idea that a presentist could not accept a causal theory of reference. According to him:

This theory [the causal theory of names] is simply not open to the temporal solipsist [presentist], for he denies the reality of the past states of affairs and/or individuals with which the present event –a token utterance of ‘x’– is supposed to be connected. The causal relation thus lacks a relatum (1991: 40).

Since a presentist cannot accept the existence of past events or objects to play the role of *relata* of causal relations, she would not be able to account for the causal element of photography. There are no past individuals to which a photograph would be causally connected.

Craig Bourne (2006: 103-8) argues that Le Poidevin’s criticism presupposes a concept of causality as *transtemporal genuine relation*. As a genuine relation between A and B, causality would require the coexistence of A and B. Limiting ourselves to cases of diachronic causality, the problem faced by presentism is that when the cause A is present, the effect B does not yet exist. And when the effect B is present, the cause A no longer exists. The relation would always lack a relatum. Presentists could not support a causal theory of reference if causality were a transtemporal genuine relation.

Nonetheless, according to Bourne, a counterfactual theory of causality could be accepted by a presentist.<sup>30</sup> A counterfactual theory, like the one suggested by Lewis (1973), would not conceive causality as a genuine relation (that presupposes coexistence of *relata*), but as the idea that the *nonoccurrence* of A would imply the *nonoccurrence* of B. In other words: “if A were not the case, then B would not be the case.” Since it is formulated as a relation between the *nonoccurrence* of the cause and the *nonoccurrence* of the effect, there would be no ontological commitment to past individuals (or events or properties).

To be adequate for a presentist, this perspective would also need to jettison the “Millian” theory of names that, according to Bourne, comes normally attached to the causal theory –that “the meaning of a name is its denotation, the thing it refers to, and nothing else” (2006: 104). For a presentist, there is nothing in the past that could be the

30 Bourne offers other casual theories that could be supported by a presentist (2006: 109-35). Nevertheless, I will focus on the counterfactual theory since it provides us an important connection with Kendall Walton’s theory.

meaning of a term. Nevertheless, the use of the term could be conceived, according to Bourne, as counterfactually dependent of events and particulars that no longer exist.

Bourne writes his presentist counterfactual causal theory of reference along the following lines –using Socrates’ christening as starting point. He uses *X* as a variable ranging over people, *Y* over producers of the name, and *Z* over names:

- It was the case that (For some specific *X*, for some specific *Y*, and for some specific *Z* (*X* = Socrates and refers to (*Y*, *X*, *Z*))

According to Bourne, “in English it says: someone referred to Socrates using some name” (2006: 105).<sup>31</sup>

His next step is to express the causal element of his theory in the following terms (using the same variables):

- It was the case that [causally connected in an appropriate way (For some specific *Y* and for some specific *Z* (produces (*Y*, *Z*)), It was the case that (For some specific *X* and for some specific *Y* (causally connected in an appropriate way (*X*, *Y*)))]<sup>32</sup>

In English it says: it was the case that, causally connected in an appropriate way, someone produced a name, and it was the case that, causally connected in an appropriate way, someone named someone.

In this formulation the coexistence of the producer of the name and the christened person is not required (the baptism could have happened after her death). The important element is that, since the causal connection is conceived by Bourne in counterfactual terms and it was used a *de dicto* formulation, a presentist could subscribe to this theory.

In relation to photography, the abandonment of the Millian aspect of the causal theory would mean the abandonment of the *de re* element. In the same way that a presentist (in Bourne’s version) must abandon the idea that the meaning of a term is an object that exists in the past, she also must abandon the idea that what is perceived through a photograph is an object that exists in the past. *There is nothing in the past to be perceived or referred to*. Nevertheless, a presentist could accept (similarly to Bourne’s causal theory of reference) that the photograph is counterfactually dependent on a particular (part of an event) that *no longer exists*. To say that a photography is causally connected to its reference, in terms that the presentist could accept, means that *it was the case that* a certain object existed and if that object were visually different, then, its photograph would be visually different.<sup>33</sup>

To further this suggestion, we could combine two ideas from Craig Bourne: *i*) his counterfactual version of the causal theory of reference –also excluding the Millian aspect of the theory– and *ii*) his concept of a *de re* past tense proposition for presently existing objects. We could formulate a presentist causal theory of photography in the

31 As mentioned before, I will use throughout the paper Prior’s non-formal way of writing quantifiers. Bourne writes: “ $P(\exists x)(\exists y)(\exists z)$  ( $x$  = Socrates & refers to( $y$ ,  $x$ ,  $z$ )), where  $x$  ranges over people,  $y$  over producers of the name,  $z$  over names” (2006: 105).

32 Bourne writes: “ $P$ [causally connected in an appropriate way ( $(\exists y)(\exists z)$  (produces ( $y$ ,  $z$ )),  $P(\exists x)(\exists y)$  (causally connected in an appropriate way ( $x$ ,  $y$ )))]” (2006: 107).

33 We must take into account the limitations and the sensitivity of the photographic equipment used. Black and white films are not sensitive to hue, but only to lightness. Thus, a black and white photograph would not be counterfactually dependent of the objects color.

following way –where X ranges over people, Y over producers of photography, and Z over photographs:

- It was the case that (For some specific X, for some specific Y, and for some specific Z (produces (Y, X, Z)))<sup>34</sup>

In English it says: it was the case that someone produces a photograph of someone. The causal element could be expressed as follows (using the same variables):

- For some specific Z [It was the case that (causally connected in an appropriate way (For some specific Y and for some specific X (produces (Y, X, Z))))]

In English: for some presently existing photograph, it was the case that (causally connected in an appropriate way) someone produces the photograph of someone.

Bourne's *de re* past tense proposition for presently existing objects was used here to express the idea that the photograph is a *presently existing object* that is counterfactually dependent in an ontologically non-committed way to an event that no longer exists –of someone taking a photograph of someone.<sup>35</sup>

The main difference between this account of a presentist concept of photography and a *de re* formulation that accepts causality in counterfactual terms would be the scope of quantifiers. In order to be able to see the photographed object *itself*, the particular entity would have to exist as part of the unrestricted domain of quantification:

- For some specific X, for some specific Y, and for some specific Z [causally connected in an appropriate way (It was the case that (produces (Y, X, Z)))]

In this *de re* formulation, pastness could be conceived *not* as a sentential operator but as a property of the relation –the *property* of producing a photograph of someone by someone has the property of *pastness*. But this would presuppose that this property exists in the past (also committing oneself to this form of metaphysical realism of the past).

On the other hand, if we treat pastness not as a property of a property but as a sentential operator operating on an open sentence (“produces (Y, X, Z)”) a presentist could accept this *de re* formulation for *presently existing objects* (similarly to Bourne's *de re* past singular proposition). Supposing that the photographed person is still alive, a presentist could support the idea that for some specific photograph, for some specific photographer, and for some specific someone *that presently exists*, causally connected in an appropriate way, it was the case that a photographer produces a photograph of someone. Therefore, a presentist, in this case, could accept that through photography she *sees* that someone. Nevertheless, this option would not be open for the case that we are analyzing –when the object no longer exists in the present (the case of dead relatives). Only a *de dicto* formulation would be available for the presentist.

As seen before, Kendall Walton's causal theory is formulated in counterfactual terms. According to him: “if the scene had been different (...) the pictures would have

34 Using Bourne's notation:  $P(\exists x)(\exists y)(\exists z)$  (produces (y, x, z)).

35 A further development of this idea could be the use of John Kulvicki's distinction between *bare bones* and *flashed out* content (2006: 159-92) to argue that the bare bones of a photograph are counterfactually dependent on something that no longer exists. The flashed out content, on its turn, would be the underdetermined pictorial content that could be shifted to the attributive part of the thought caused by the perception of the photograph, in Zeimbekis' interpretation.

been different (and so would our visual experiences when we look at them)” (2008a: 37). His position would depart from a formulation that a presentist could accept, in the case of dead relatives, if we take at face value his idea that we can see past objects *themselves* in photographs. It would be a counterfactual theory about past particulars, but formulated in a *de re* way (in Bourne’s terms: he would preserve the Millian element of the causal theory).

### **Walton’s starry night and the problem of having a cake and wanting to eat it too.**

As mentioned before, Kendall Walton’s theory affords different readings. One reading is the *de re* approach previously explored. In his famous paper “Transparent Pictures,” Walton uses an example that is a common analogy for the relation between photography and the past. This analogy seems to allow a different reading of his theory. In the same way that we speak of seeing the past through photographs, according to him: “We also find ourselves speaking of observing through a telescope the explosion of a star which occurred millions of years ago” (2008a: 23).

This analogy seems to make it possible to support the idea that we can *see* a past object *itself*, although it ceased to exist millions of years ago. This analogy would open the door for a *de re* theory of photography that averts the metaphysical commitment to past particulars. It seems possible to see things even though they do not presently exist. If that was the case, presentists could support Walton’s theory. I think the analogy is a dangerous one, and that the position expressed in this paragraph is untenable.

The first thing to notice is that in the case of seeing a star that exploded millions of years ago there are two spacetime frames of reference: the frame of reference near the star and the perceiver’s frame of reference (separated by millions of lightyears). As Kristie Miller points out (in relation to what the special theory of relativity taught us): “talk of existence and co-existence ought to be frame-relativized” (2013: 354). Setting aside the matter if presentism is compatible to our current best science (dealt with by Miller –this problem is beyond the scope of this paper), what is important for our purpose is to translate her idea into quantificational terms. That talk that existence and co-existence ought to be frame-relativized means that we must choose in which frame of reference we are going to quantify.

We cannot quantify simultaneously over the two spacetime frames of reference. This would mean a form of quantification from *nowhere* (existence not frame-relativized). If we quantify from nowhere we will end up ditching the principle of non-contradiction –supporting the idea that the object *does not exist* (quantifying over the frame of reference near the star– after its explosion), but *it exists* (quantifying over a frame of reference in which the light of the object is perceivable).

In relation to the perception of the star that exploded millions of years ago, there would be only two possible scenarios:

- (1) Or the star is conceived as something that exists (quantifying over the perceiver domain) and I am seeing it;
- (2) Or it no longer exists (quantifying over the frame of reference near the star –after its explosion) and I can only see (in the perceiver’s frame of reference) the effects (a *residue*) caused by the object, but not the object itself (since it does not exist *simpliciter*).

Having the cake and wanting to eat it too would be to say that the object no longer exists, but, since I can see the effects caused by the object, I see the object



itself. Using Zeimbekis' words (from a different context), if I accept that the object *no longer exists* (quantifying over the frame of reference near the star –after its explosion), “any thought I formulate about [it] on the basis of my perceptual contents will have the cognitive role of a *de dicto* thought, albeit one with highly determinate descriptive content” (2010: 14).

There is a footnote in which Walton mentions that “[s]ome find the notion of seeing the past too much to swallow and dismiss talk of seeing long-concluded events through telescopes as deviant or somehow to be explained away” (2008a: 23). This suggestion that uses Kristie Mille’s idea is a means to explain it away in terms that a presentist could accept.

But in the same footnote Walton grants even more to his interlocutor: “For any who do, however, or for any who reject the possibility of seeing the past, there is another way out. Suppose we agree that what I call ‘seeing-through-photographs’ is not a mode of *perception*. We can always find a different term” (2008a: 23). He does not suggest any term, but argues that, even if we abandon “seeing-through-photographs” as a mode of perception, photographs would still be different from handmade images: “one’s access to past events via photographs of them differs in the same way from one’s access to them via paintings” (2008a: 23). In other words, photographs would still have different statuses regarding transparency compared to handmade images.<sup>36</sup>

What is not clear in this passage is if Walton here admits the possibility of abandoning the *de re* aspect of his theory, since he allowed the possibility of accepting photography not as a mode of perception. If that was the case, a presentist could embrace Walton’s counterfactual theory, formulate it in a *de dicto* way, and still be true to Walton’s idea. But this would also mean that when he says that we can see the object *itself* through a photograph this is just *façon de parler* (a metaphor) and not a substantial philosophical thesis. And this does not seem to be what Walton has in mind when he warns his readers against watering down his ideas.

### Conclusion.

In sum, if we accept that there are only presently existing particulars and that the passage of time dynamically changes the unrestricted domain of quantification, there cannot be past *de re* (singular) propositions about objects that no longer exist. When talking about past objects, presentists would have to use a *de dicto* formulation, in an ontologically non-committed way (using, for example, Prior’s past tense operator).

In the case of photography, for the same reasons that for a Priorian presentist there are no past *de re* (singular) propositions, there cannot be *de re* perception of past particulars through photographs. A presentist could only say that she *fictionally* sees her dead relative in a photograph, because “there are no [past particulars]; so they aren’t really seeing any.”

A presentist concept of photography can be outlined following Zeimbekis’ idea that a photograph exemplifies phenomenal properties attributed to an object. This approach shifts the logical role of photography from the referential part to the attributive part of the thought caused by the perception of photographs. The presentist could formulate Zeimbekis’ idea in an ontologically non-committed conceiving “pastness”

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36 This idea, as seen in a previous footnote, is challenged by Dominic Lopes.

as a sentential operator.

Nevertheless, as mentioned before, photography is a *sui generis* category that combines descriptive and causal referential elements. Even if the resulting pictorial content is a very accurate visual description of the referent, it is still underdetermined and could also be satisfied by visually indiscernible objects. What anchors the photograph to a particular is its causal history.

If we conceive causality as a genuine relation that requires that coexistence of the *relata*, a causal theory would be beyond the presentist grasp. However, we can follow Bourne's presentist causal theory and conceive photography's causal element in counterfactual terms. But we would need to abandon the Millian theory of names that comes normally attached to the causal theory. In the same way that a presentist must abandon the idea that the meaning of a term is an object that exists in the past, she also must abandon the idea that what is perceived through a photograph is an object that exists in the past.<sup>37</sup> In a presentist perspective, to say that a photograph is causally connected to its reference means that: for some presently existing photograph, it was the case that (causally connected in an appropriate way) someone produces that photograph of someone. The photography would be counterfactually dependent on a particular (part of the photographed event) that no longer exist.

The main difference between this approach and a *de re* formulation that accepts causality in counterfactual terms (like Walton's and Lopes') would be the scope of the quantifiers. The past particular would have to exist as part of the unrestricted domain of quantification (outside the scope of the past tense operator) for us to be able to *see* it or to demonstratively identify it –we cannot demonstratively identify something that does not exist.

Nevertheless, the idea that a *de re* theory of photography would require some metaphysical commitment to past particulars seems to be easily dismissed with an analogy: we can presently see stars that exploded millions of years ago. Thus, it seems possible to support the idea that we can see past objects themselves, although they no longer exist. But, if we follow Kristie Miller's idea that talk of existence ought to be frame-relativized, we must choose in which frame of reference we are going to quantify. We cannot quantify from *nowhere* and end up having the cake and wanting to eat it too – or it does exist, and I am seeing it, or it does not exist, and I am not seeing the object itself.

In metaphorical terms, for a presentist, photography would *not* be a window to the past through which we can see the past objects themselves. Photography would be a residue in the present that is counterfactually dependent on something that no longer exists. Thus, looking at a portrait of a past relative, the presentist would see presently existing phenomenal properties, counterfactually dependent on someone that does not belong anymore to the realm of existence.<sup>38</sup>

37 Using Lopes' theory, we could say that a presentist, in this case, must abandon the idea that the recognized object is something that exists in the past and that she can demonstratively single *that* object out.

38 For the readers that may wonder whether the metaphysical analyses presented here can have implications for the practice of photography as a creative and artistic medium, I suggest visiting the website [www.ghisoni.com.br](http://www.ghisoni.com.br). In this website you will find the works that I develop as a photographer in the Research Laboratory of Philosophy of Photography at the Federal University of Goiás, in Brazil. Most of those works are motivated by metaphysical and temporal concerns. The aim of this Research Laboratory is to develop an analytical approach to the philosophy of photography and to aid artists to explore their visual works in relation to philosophy.

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