

# *De Se* Attitudes: Indexicality, Communication, Phenomenology

## ABSTRACT

For some, *de se* attitudes, singular thoughts about oneself “as oneself”, pose a significant philosophical problem. For others, they are an illusion, easily explained away along the same lines that traditional propositional attitudes are accounted for. This essay lifts off from the assumption that the *de se* effect is real and in need of an explanation other than the one given for traditional propositional attitudes. I begin by giving an overview of the discussion around *de se* attitudes, from John Perry’s seminal paper on the topic, which initiated much of the actual discussion, to the more recent and sophisticated views that have developed since. Next, I plan to provide a short critical assessment of Recanati’s (2016) mental file framework, García-Carpintero’s (2016, 2017) token-reflexive indexical model, and Guillot’s (2016) phenomenal model for the *de se*. I divide the discussion into two separate axis, one concerning the communication of *de se* attitudes, and another regarding their phenomenology. Ultimately, I want to argue that, while the mental file and indexical models might be well suited to account for the linguistic aspect of *de se* attitudes and their communication, an appeal to the phenomenology of thought, in particular *de se* thought, is crucial if we want to understand the nature of such attitudes.

**Keywords:** *de se* attitudes, propositional attitudes, first-person thoughts, presuppositions, mental files, modes of presentation, communication problem, phenomenology, phenomenal concepts

## 1. INTRODUCTION: THE DEBATE OVER *DE SE* ATTITUDES

### John Perry: State View

Following Castañeda’s earlier work, possibly the first modern-day formulation of the topic, John Perry wrote a seminal paper (1979) where he illustrated the problem that traditional accounts of belief face, once we take into consideration the singular thoughts that a subject might have of/about themselves while recognising that they are the object of such thoughts (we might call these “first-personal thoughts”, in order to capture their uniqueness and their departure from ordinary singular thoughts). He then provided an alternative to the traditional view, by putting forward a distinction between the content of a belief, identifiable with a traditional proposition, and the state through which the subject accesses said content. This new, “state” element in thought would thereby characterise the essential indexicality of a subject’s *de se* belief, in contrast to other subjects’ *de re* beliefs that might entertain the same content. Therefore, two subjects might share the same content in their respective beliefs, but entertain them through different states, or, conversely, entertain two different contents in (roughly) the same way.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The distinction is best illustrated in the case of mad Heimson, who believes himself to be Hume. Both he and Hume are in the same belief-state, as in both cases they are having beliefs about themselves (and they are aware of this), about being a certain person; regardless, the content of the belief is different, as Heimson believes that Heimson is Hume, while Hume believes that Hume is Hume. The converse situation is that of Heimson and his psychiatrist, whom he has convinced that he is Hume. They share the same content of belief, that Heimson is Hume; nevertheless, they apprehend it through different belief-states: Heimson’s belief is first-personal, his psychiatrist’s is third-personal.

This framework allows us to make sense of the epiphanic episode that occurs in Perry's famous messy shopper case. When chasing the messy shopper around the supermarket, Perry "has a belief about himself (under the individuating concept or mode of presentation the shopper with the torn sack) to the effect that he is making a mess" (García-Carpintero 2017, p. 258). This, however, does not lead him to rearrange the torn sack in his trolley, as he is not aware that he himself is the one making the mess; the mode in which he presents himself to himself is not yet as the shopper making the mess. This comes later, after his epiphany that he in fact is the messy shopper, and so after his producing the relevant *de se* belief as can be expressed in the utterance 'I am making a mess'. In Perry's framework, this would be explained by a change in the messy shopper's belief-state, with the content of the belief essentially staying the same. The belief-state of the messy shopper's first, non-*de se* belief would go along the lines of being about someone else (in the sense that it is not about himself), while the belief-state of his *de se* belief would be markedly first-personal in character. Perry appeals to Kaplan's own distinction of character and content to further explain the significance of belief-states in the rationalisation of action. Belief-states play the same role that the characters of indexicals play, as when the pronouns in the utterances "He is making a mess" and "I am making a mess"<sup>2</sup> have the same content but different characters (Perry 1979, p.20).

### David Lewis: Property View

Shortly after Perry's contribution, David Lewis proposed shifting the discussion about contents from propositions to properties. Having a *de se* belief (or any other *de se* attitude, for that matter) would consist in self-attributing a property: that of inhabiting, not a class of possible worlds, but a class of "centered worlds" (in Quine's terminology), centered on the subject doing the thinking (having the attitude). Entertaining the messy shopper's thought "I am making a mess" would involve locating oneself as a subject that is making a mess, not only in logical space (possible worlds), but also in regular space and time (the actual world). As he himself admits, there is a semblance between Perry's formulation and his own; he goes as far as saying that Perry's model subsumes his own, at the cost of a complexity that he deems unnecessary. Perry's belief-content element would thereby be understood as a pair of an individual and a property, while the belief-state as a function that takes a subject and delivers the belief-content object (the pair of the individual and the property). Ultimately, while Perry's model is built for any *de re* belief (any belief about any object through some state or other, not necessarily first-personal), of which the *de se* is a special case, Lewis' reduces any belief to *de se* belief, as any belief consists in a *self*-ascription of properties (properties that may then involve relations to other individuals and their properties, which is what *de re* beliefs would appear to be) (Lewis 1979, pp. 536-538).

### Stalnaker And The Communication Problem

However successful either of these theories appear to be in accounting for the *de se*, they eventually run into trouble. Essentially, they are ill-equipped to deal with the communication of such self-locating, or indexical, thoughts. Let us imagine, following García Carpintero (2016a), a variation of Perry's messy shopper case, in which the messy shopper's epiphany occurs only after another shopper (aptly called the "samaritan shopper") tells him that he is making a mess. The problem is now explaining the messy shopper's change in attitude as a result of the samaritan shopper's utterance. Neither Perry's Kaplanian-like belief-states, nor Lewis' self-attributed properties can be the same for the samaritan shopper and the messy shopper, but something must be shared between them, or the communicative episode would fail to make sense. Stalnaker (1981) proposed solving

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2 When "he" and "I" pick out the same person.

the problem by considering that what the messy shopper learns is “the very same content that the samaritan expressed” (García-Carpintero 2016a, p. 183), this being a single, token-reflexive content which determines a traditional proposition expressible as “the addressee of that token of ‘you’ is making a mess” (Idem)<sup>3</sup>. Perry, sensitive to this line of criticism, modified his original proposal by foregoing the characterisation of belief-states as Kaplanian characters. Stalnaker took these token-reflexive contents as the only necessary contents of our attitudes. Regardless, Perry argues that states cannot be completely disposed of. He therefore takes the token-reflexive contents Stalnaker favours as a better way of understanding the cognitive significance of belief-states, which are still necessary to make sense of episodes of *de se* thought. García-Carpintero, however, pushes Stalnaker’s criticism a step further, arguing that this move leads Perry to an “unwelcome instrumentalist stance” (Ibid, p. 185; 2017, p. 269). To explain the cognitive significance of the belief-state, Perry must introduce more, unofficial contents side by side with the *de se* belief’s official contents, which are needed for classificatory practices concerning representational states.

From this point on, different accounts have been put forward in order to explain what *de se* attitudes are all about, and to solve the different problems that arise from their existence, such as the communication problem just presented. For instance, while Stalnaker took this problem to show that neither Perry’s nor Lewis’ proposals worked, and that we need to elaborate a model for *de se* belief along traditional lines, Recanati takes a somewhat contrary position. He argues that the “belief-transfer” model of communication<sup>4</sup> which Stalnaker favours, under which communication should be understood as the replication of the speaker’s thought in the hearer’s mind (the very same content) *via* the speaker’s utterance, is ultimately flawed and in need of reparation (Recanati 2016). Recanati takes it as a fundamental feature of indexical thought (of the very existence of *de se* attitudes) that it should make communication a far more complex matter than what the Naïve Conception takes it to be. Communication must, therefore, present indexicality in the same way that thought does, when the communicated thoughts concern or involve different perspectives of the world, as Stalnaker would put it. Where to find this indexical element, whether in the speaker’s thoughts, the utterance itself, or the hearer’s thoughts, is the question that any successful candidate for an account of the *de se* must, at some point, answer.

### François Recanati: Mental Files

In a somewhat controversial vein, Recanati announces that indexicality is not to be found in any *single one* of these. To be more precise, Recanati rejects what he calls the “presupposition” of the Naïve Conception of Communication: that there is a “thought expressed by the utterance” (Ibid, p. 154). The Naïve Conception, according to him, has two main tenets which rest on said presupposition: (1) the “speech-to-mind” principle, by which the hearer’s thought is identical to the thought expressed by the utterance; and (2) the “mind-to-speech” principle, by which the thought expressed by the utterance may be identified with the hearer’s thought. While Stalnaker claimed that we should strive to preserve this model of communication, many others have tried to amend it when presenting their accounts of *de se* belief, by locating the indexical element of the belief, the centred (or uncentred, for some) content either in the speaker’s thought, the thought expressed by the utterance, or the hearer’s thought. Recanati straightforwardly rejects the idea of a thought contained in the utterance, and claims that the speaker’s thought and the hearer’s thought are different. Communication, he contends, “involves, not replication, but coordination of thoughts” (Idem).

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<sup>3</sup> A diagonal proposition, as Stalnaker calls them.

<sup>4</sup> Which he calls the Naïve Conception of Communication.

How does this coordination occur? Recanati has long been an advocate of the Mental File framework for mental representations, so mental files are a crucial aspect of his account of the *de se* and its communication. Any referential expression, for Recanati, contributes a mental file to the thought, which in turn plays the role of Frege's senses, and accounts for a subject's rational behaviour. Recanati refers to an example by Brian Loar to show how, sometimes, "understanding an utterance clearly *requires* thinking of the reference under a certain mode of presentation" (*Ibid*, p. 150), it is not enough to communicate only the truth-conditional content. Crucially, Recanati distinguishes between two sorts of modes of presentation: psychological modes of presentation, "the way the subject thinks of the reference" (*Ibid*, p. 153); and linguistic modes of presentation, "whatever information is linguistically encoded about the reference" (*Idem*). The psychological mode of presentation is the mental file deployed by the subject, which obviously varies from one subject to another. The linguistic mode of presentation, however, is constant. It is important to stress that the linguistic mode of presentation is not an ingredient of thought, it is a constraint upon it, upon the the mental files deployed, the actual constituents of thought. Recanati speaks here of the REF feature of referential expressions, an "instruction to the language user" (*Ibid*, p. 166) to mentally refer to some object. Communication, when successful, thus consists in the REF feature of the referential expression triggering, in the subjects involved, a search for a referent. The linguistic mode of presentation of the expression will constrain the mental file(s) that the subjects should ultimately land on. Finally, and for communication to be successful, the files must converge on the same object<sup>5</sup>.

Coming back to our subject-matter, when communicating a *de se* belief, the subject mentally refers to himself through the SELF file, which contains all the information on himself, and so uses the first-person pronoun. The linguistic mode of presentation of the indexical 'I' then constrains the other subjects, the hearers, to mentally refer to the speaker *via* their own files on him/her.

### Manuel García-Carpintero: Presuppositional View

Recanati's formulation under the mental file framework can be seen as a *reformulation* of Perry's state view. Now, the cognitive significance of belief-states is based on the deployment of a mental file in an attempt to refer to something in the world, correctly constrained by the expressions/utterances involved. García-Carpintero (2016, 2017) provides another account which also appeals to Perry's belief-states. In his account, "the appeal to states boils down to locating propositional attitudes in a specific network of other contentful attitudes, including some that cannot be shared"<sup>6</sup> (2017, p. 257).

What are these other contentful attitudes with connection to the relevant propositional attitudes and their belief-states? These are mental presuppositions, in the same way that linguistic expressions can sometimes involve linguistic presuppositions. His account is two-tiered, it involves two distinct elements that work together to explain what *de se* attitudes are about: (1) the first tier of his proposal concerns the awareness of the phenomenal features of our conscious states; (2) The second tier of the account corresponds to a token-reflexive presuppositional account of indexicals. I will

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5 As mentioned, however, the files are different for each subject, so it follows that there is no replication of thoughts, and there is no privileged point of view, neither the speaker's nor any of the hearers'. This is one of the main points of criticism that Recanati launches against other attempts to solve the communication problem, such as Kolbel's or Torre's positions.

6 Thus preserving the idea that essential indexicality leads to the rejection of the shareability aspect of traditional propositional attitudes, not their absoluteness.

begin by discussing his second element, the presuppositions triggered in *de se* thoughts; the first element, the phenomenology of conscious states, will be further discussed in the next section<sup>7</sup>.

García-Carpintero believes that the connexion between the contents of belief Perry counted as either official or unofficial, and which led him to his problematic instrumentalism, can be correctly portrayed as a connexion between propositions and presuppositions, occurring not only in the linguistic realm, but the mental too. Considering speech acts that take place relative to a common ground of already accepted propositions, the presuppositions, he claims that such a distinction exists in the mental realm too, a distinction between occurrent mental states and relevant background beliefs. I'll begin with the linguistic case, in order to make clearer the role mental presuppositions play. García-Carpintero asks us to consider the utterance "he is hungry". He then says that

"The proposal agrees with the direct reference theorist that the asserted content is a singular proposition, *x* is hungry, for some contextual assignment to *x*. It is expressed, however, in a context in which another singular proposition is presupposed—in this case, one semantically triggered by something akin to a Kaplanian character for "he"—which we could express thus: *x* is the male picked out by the demonstration associated with he, 17 where the bold-faced "he" refers to the relevant token." (García-Carpintero, 2016, p. 187)

In the *de se* case, the proposition will concern some object *x*, while presupposing that *x* is the utterer of the proposition, and therefore of the indexical *I*. The presupposition, then, is the mechanism by which the utterances acquire reference. It is like this that the indexical *I* refers to the utterer of said indexical. Finally, as claimed above, such reference-fixing presuppositions also take place in mental acts. In the mental case, the presupposition is some piece of background information (a background belief) that is relevant in making a given judgement<sup>8</sup>. In a *de se* judgement, when one judges something about oneself, one is presupposing (one has a background belief, to the effect) that the person of whom he is predicating something is the thinker of that very judgement (*Ibid*, p. 191). This internal co-reference that presuppositions afford (this new way of understanding belief-states) deliver the cognitive significance that Perry's original states couldn't, while also preserving the idea that what we should reject is the traditional idea that beliefs must always be shareable. As García-Carpintero puts it, "although anybody can have a thought about the owner of a given mental state of mine, only I can have a thought about myself by correctly presupposing that my thought is about the owner of the very thought of which this presupposition is an ancillary constituent" (*Ibid*, 194).

### Marie Guillot: Phenomenal Model

The previous approach, García-Carpintero's token-reflexive presuppositional view, can be categorised as an *indexical model*: it aimed to capture the nature of *de se* attitudes by analogy to the nature of the indexical *I* in language. Guillot claims that the indexical model is principally motivated by what she calls the "Thinker Intuition". The Thinker Intuition is nothing other than the idea that to think of oneself as *oneself* (that is, to entertain a *de se* thought) is not just to think a thought that has oneself as the referent (what Guillot considers *simple-reflexivity*), but to also be aware of this, that oneself is the subject, and not just the object, of the thought (which Guillot calls *super-reflexivity*). More specifically, deploying the I-concept involves thinking about oneself as *the thinker of that very thought* (Guillot, 2016, p. 139). The indexical model, then, claims to afford the best and most straightforward explanation of the Thinker Intuition because, as was clear from the

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<sup>7</sup> Together with Marie Guillot's Phenomenal Model for the *de se*.

<sup>8</sup> The paradigmatic case that García-Carpintero appeals to is that of internal co-reference, which is prominent in such discussions as the one about the compatibility of anti-individualism and self-knowledge.

exposition of García-Carpintero's approach, "no one can use the I-concept without thereby thinking of oneself, descriptively, as the person who is thinking the present thought" (*Ibid*, p. 140).

Guillot, however, is unhappy with the indexical model for several reasons (some of which I will discuss later). In contrast, she presents her own model to account for the *de se* and the Thinker Intuition, which she calls the *phenomenal model*, as it has our cognitive phenomenology at its core. Cognitive phenomenology, or "the phenomenology of conscious thinking" (*Ibid*, p. 144), is an ambiguous term, as Guillot herself admits. That is why, after a terminological analysis, she lands on the term "phenomenology of intellection", which, on her approach, "is present whenever we engage in in any kind of conscious intellectual activity, and forms a sort of baseline in the symphony of our cognitive life. It is present on its own when we are merely contemplating a proposition, but it is also an ingredient of the more complex phenomenal states involved in judging, doubting or denying" (*Ibid*, p. 145). The phenomenology of intellection is, therefore, ubiquitous, and not found exclusively in any particular cognitive act, but rather cuts across all our cognitive activities. Supposing that such a phenomenology of intellection exists, it must be available "as a potential phenomenal basis for the formation of a phenomenal concept in its own right, just like any other phenomenal quality" (*Ibid*, p. 146)<sup>9</sup>. The phenomenal model's core thesis, then, is that it is the I-concept, the concept of self, that is formed on the basis of our experience of thinking. Crucially, it is "by experiencing what it's like to be the thinker" (*Idem*) that we think about ourselves. The Thinker Intuition is thus accounted for, as "An awareness of our present mental activity is thus key to the required form of super-reflexivity" (*Idem*).

At this point, Guillot considers an objection to the thesis. The "wrong-kind-of-entity objection", as she calls it, claims that the self-concept must refer to an individual, the self, while, so far, the phenomenal model has been targetting a property: the property involved in the experience of thinking. Consequently, Guillot reformulates the thesis, in order not to involve a phenomenal concept, but another kind of *phenomenally-grounded* concept (*Ibid*, p. 147). The self-concept would thereby be a *phenomenal-appearance* concept (*Ibid*, p. 148), instead of a phenomenal concept, which we use, not to talk about the experience at stake, but whatever caused it, its source; a phenomenal-appearance concept targets an empirical object, not the experience of said object in our perception or cognition of it. To quote Guillot who, in turn, quotes Gertler, "As Gertler (2012) puts it, the referent of (what I call) a phenomenal-appearance concept is "the object whose presence and properties causally contribute (in an appropriate way) to the relevant aspect of how things seem to the subject", i.e. to the activation of the phenomenal template that was set up on the first encounter with the object" (*Idem*). Ultimately, then, the I-concept "is a phenomenal-appearance concept whose distinctive phenomenal basis is the phenomenology of intellection. When I use the concept of self, I use the experience in which my present thinking is manifested to refer, not to that experience itself, but to the source of that experience: namely myself, the thinker" (*Ibid*, pp. 148-149).

With the debate set, I now turn to a more critical discussion of the theories and positions just presented, specifically Recanati's mental file framework, García-Carpintero's token-reflexive presuppositional account, a sophisticated form of the indexical model, and Guillot's novel phenomenal model. My aim is to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, with the underlying idea that, while the mental file and the indexical models are well equipped to overcome the difficulties surrounding the communication of *de se* attitudes, they must make room

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9 A phenomenal concept is the conceptual representation of a subject's particular experience, which she can use to reflect on the phenomenal properties that constitute said experience (*Ibid*, p. 143). Guillot refers the reader to Gertler (2012) for further explanation on the topic of experiences, phenomenal concepts, and phenomenology more generally.

for the phenomenology of such attitudes if they wish to deliver the complete picture of the nature of these special attitudes<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. FIRST DISCUSSION: INDEXICALITY AND COMMUNICATION OF *DE SE* ATTITUDES

### Re-visiting Mental Files

As Stalnaker pointed out, in his criticism of Lewis and Perry's accounts, one of the foundational problems regarding *de se* attitudes has been that of giving a model of communication that can successfully incorporate such attitudes. Stalnaker favoured the traditional belief-transfer model of communication, but I concur with Recanati that it is in need of remodelling. I agree with Recanati and García-Carpintero in following Perry's line of thought and claiming that it is the shareability of such attitudes that we need to give up; and, as such, our model of communication ought to reflect this.

As was shown, Recanati has developed a line of argumentation rooted in the mental file framework to explain episodes of *de se* communication. To summarise, a subject who wishes to express a *de se* thought (or attitude, more generally) will have previously deployed his/her SELF file (in Recanati's terminology, a first-personal psychological mode of presentation) in thinking the I-thought, and will thereby use the indexical 'I' to express it. Posteriorly, this referential expression's REF feature will trigger in any hearer the search for a referent which is, in turn, constrained by the expression's linguistic mode of presentation. In the case of the indexical 'I', the hearer will be constrained in his deployment of a mental file so as to land on his or her mental file of the speaker in question (successful communication of singular thoughts is nothing other than the convergence of the participants' mental files on the same object/s).

I believe that the biggest strength of Recanati's framework and solution to the communication problem is its simplicity in doing so. The idea that communication is the coordination, and not the replication of thoughts delivers a clear and economical picture of communication, especially in cases involving indexical expressions. In his discussion of other accounts of *de se* communication (Recanati, 2016, pp. 155-174) such as Egan's, Weber's, Kölbel's, etc., it becomes clear that, in order to preserve the idea that there is "a thought" expressed in an utterance (the presupposition that underlies the two tenets of the Naïve Conception of communication), one has to mount a complicated strategy involving the identification of such a thought either with the speaker's or the hearer's own. In turn, this requires obscure operations of centering, recentering, or uncentering the content of the expression to match those thoughts. Ultimately, if the strategies are *prima facie* successful, Recanati argues, it leads these positions to holding that one or other point of view, the speaker's or the hearer's, has to be privileged, in order to account for the indexicality involved. Why one or other point of view is the privileged one, is in need of further argumentation.

Secondly, it also straightforwardly delivers the cognitive significance of the Perrian belief-states that finally led Perry astray. Belief-states, identified with the psychological modes of presentations that mental files afford, play a vehicle role in thought. However, mental files construed as vehicles

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10 As was mentioned before, in the presentation of García-Carpintero's position in the debate, there is a second ingredient in the position which I glossed over, and which is precisely an attention to the phenomenology of *de se* thoughts. I decided to await discussing this ingredient until the critical part of this piece, as it becomes relevant now, in the ensuing discussion about phenomenology.

carry some minimal presuppositional content: enough content so as to satisfy Stalnaker's criticism of Perry that, "It can't be merely a matter of vehicle if the talk of 'essential indexicality' is to make any sense" (*Ibid*, p. 145); but not too much, as I see it, so as to raise the problem of distinguishing them from the official contents of the attitudes, or to warrant an explanation of the relation between them. The presupposition that the deployment of a mental file carries is simply the existence of the object it's supposed to track, and the obtaining of the epistemically rewarding relation that the file exploits. As such, they account for a subject's rational behaviour in his deployment of mental files in his relations to the world in a straightforward fashion.

### Re-visiting Presuppositions

I now turn to García-Carpintero's presuppositional account, and its explanatory potential regarding the communication of the *de se*. As he does not explicitly include an explanation or description of *de se* communication in his formulation of the token-reflexive presuppositional account he favours, I will proceed by presenting Emar Maier's own model for *de se* communication rooted in Discourse Representation Theory (DRT, henceforth) (Maier, 2016), to which García-Carpintero alludes in footnote 18 (García-Carpintero, 2016, p. 187), a model he considers completely compatible with his own.

Maier, as García-Carpintero, extends the presuppositional account of indexicals to mental states, in order to capture the processes of *de se* communication. His account combines the formal semantics of DRT as well as the mental file framework to represent both the speaker and hearer's mental states, as well as the common ground update that follows successful communication<sup>11</sup>. He then develops a presupposition-driven account of participant-neutral context update, before moving to his final, asymmetric model of *de se* communication. The idea is the same as García-Carpintero's; that is, to identify "a certain class of expressions as presupposition triggers" (*Ibid*, p. 231). Firstly, these expressions, when used, figure in the Discourse Representation Structures (DRS, henceforth) preliminarily as "free variables with presupposed content as conditions" (*Idem*). Next, the preliminary DRS are merged with the context and the presupposed discourse referents are bound to the global discourse referents that most plausibly match them. In the participant-neutral interpretation of DRT, indexicals are analysed in this presupposition-triggering way: 'I' is thus understood as "triggering the presupposition that there exists a unique current-speaker [...], this presupposition will always be globally bindable to the actual speaker" (*Ibid*, p. 232).

Maier, however, follows Kamp in thinking that, to accurately capture *de se* communication, we need to shift from a participant-neutral interpretation to an asymmetric model of communication, which clearly distinguishes the speaker and the hearer's positions.

The speaker's perspective: the key is "defining a mapping from parts of mental state descriptions [...] to sentences-a sentence producing algorithm" (*Ibid*, p. 234). I continue to quote, "For the speaker, proper names, but also definite descriptions and even (specific) indefinites, are the verbalizations of mental files containing certain triggering conditions" (*Ibid*, p. 237). The expression that the speaker will use is directly determined by the content of the mental file he deploys in thought (albeit possibly including further, pragmatic considerations). In the specific case of *de se* communication, there appears a special *de se* production rule, which maps the self-file to the pronoun 'I' directly, given that "one is acquainted with oneself in a direct way that does not

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11 I refer to Maier's own paper (Maier, 2016), to see the details of the formal apparatus, as a full-fledged presentation is beyond the scope of this paper.



involve any descriptive mode of presentation” (*Idem*). The root of the asymmetry between speaker and hearer is that, for the hearer, ‘I’ does not have “such a special first person *de se* status” (*Idem*).

The hearer’s perspective: here Maier brings to bear the presupposition-driven model for interpreting utterances and their update of the common ground. The first stage is kept untouched as in the participant-neutral model; the presupposition appears preliminarily as a condition. The next stage, however, differs: instead of directly binding the presupposition with its most plausible global discourse referent match, the hearer first adds this preliminary presupposition into his stack of beliefs. Finally, the hearer resolves the presupposition by binding it to his mental file on the salient referent. In the case of interpreting ‘I’, the hearer does this by “constructing a lexically specified speaker- presupposition, and binding that to some mental file representation of the current speaker” (*Ibid*, p. 238).

I now raise my first worry, to do with Maier’s take on the hearer’s perspective. I find it counter-intuitive to say that, before binding the presupposition to his own mental file on the salient global discourse referent, the hearer first adds the presupposition into his stack of beliefs. It find this akin to saying that, before understanding what the utterance is about (its referent), the hearing subject believes the utterance, or better the proposition expressed by it. Is it not the other way round? One must surely first know what the utterance is about (identifying its referent, by binding the presupposition that the expression triggers to the necessary mental file), before moving on to believing it. If not, should we interpret the hearer as always trusting the speaker before fully identifying the content and referent(s) of his utterance? I believe this is something that warrants further clarification.

Having said this, let’s grant Maier’s model for *de se* communication. My next worry has to do with García-Carpintero’s claim that it is a model compatible with his own token-reflexive take on the *de se*. Granted that they both take presuppositions as key features of their proposals, but I think they locate them at opposite sides of the communicative episode, rendering them incompatible. As was just explained, Maier locates presuppositions in the hearer’s side of the communicative episode, as part of his understanding of referential expressions (and indexicals, more specifically). Whereas García-Carpintero locates the presuppositional element in the speaker’s thoughts and utterances. García-Carpintero’s presuppositions, let’s not forget, are triggered, in thought, as “pieces of background (mis-)information” (García-Carpintero, 2016, p. 190). In the *de se* case, the presupposition fixed the reference, in virtue of being about the thinking subject. This was analogous to the presupposition triggered, in language, by the indexical ‘I’, which fixes the referent *via the* token-reflexive rule that the referent is the utterer of ‘I’. In contrast, Maier’s speaker produces a *de se* sentence through a sentence-producing algorithm which maps the self-file to the ‘I’ pronoun directly, given the special acquaintance relation that one bears to oneself.

This is not so much an attempt at criticism of either of these positions, but rather the claim that these two positions are not as compatible as initially thought. The upshot is that we can either position ourselves in favour of Maier’s DRT asymmetric model of communication for the *de se*, or with García-Carpintero’s token-reflexive proposal for I-thoughts and utterances, but which would leave us in need of a more detailed description when it comes to their communication, or at least the interpretation of these on the hearer’s part.

### 3. SECOND DISCUSSION: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF *DE SE* ATTITUDES

#### Re-visiting The Phenomenal Model

After presenting a couple of worries about some of the proposals for the communication of *de se* attitudes, I now move to the main claim of this piece: an appeal to the phenomenology of *de se* attitudes is essential if we wish to truly understand the nature of such attitudes. Once this key feature has been apprehended, one can theorise about what it takes to communicate them; but, if one does so beforehand, it will inevitably leave something unexplained. I start by attending to the uneasiness that Guillot manifests towards the indexical model, to which I hinted at earlier but did not expand upon.

The first issue that Guillot takes up has to do with the expression “this” in the token-reflexive description “the thinker of this very thought” that the indexical model has at its core. She raises the question about how one latches onto the correct thought (Guillot, 2016, p. 141). One of the options the defender of the indexical model has, she says, is to claim “that our present thoughts are just “given” to us in a special way” (*Idem*)<sup>12</sup>. What might this special access amount to? Nothing other than the phenomenology of such thoughts: “there is something it is like to be having them, and it is thanks to this phenomenal ‘mark’ that we can focus on the right thought as it unfolds” (*Idem*). This, therefore, already seems a vindication of Guillot’s main thesis. At the very least, it would commit the indexical theorist to a hybrid model that incorporates the phenomenal features of *de se* attitudes. Put more strongly, “It would mean accepting that token-reflexive descriptions, by themselves, are not *sufficient* to secure the super-reflexivity that characterises the concept of self” (*Idem*)<sup>13</sup>.

An example of this is precisely García-Carpintero’s two-tiered account. In my summary of his account, I focused exclusively on the token-reflexive presuppositional ingredient. His (two-tiered) account, however, also includes a phenomenological element, which is there precisely to capture the subject’s first-personal awareness, and overcome the lack of such an explanation in less sophisticated indexical models. García-Carpintero, as Guillot, refers to Gertler’s acquaintance view of introspection. Under this class of views, in some introspective judgements, the phenomenal features of the mental states in question “constitutively (not merely causally) contribute to the content of the judgement” (García-Carpintero, 2017, p. 271). Furthermore, “the way things *epistemically* seem to the subject is constituted by the way they *phenomenally* seem to her” (*Idem*). This said, García-Carpintero’s analysis of the messy shopper case, combining the two ingredients of his two-tiered account, is as follows:

“[...] he is consciously aware of his thought being about himself. He is thereby consciously aware of a feature of the representing state he is in: its having a first-personal character. The referent of the first-personal concept in it is fixed by a token-reflexive rule analogous to the linguistic rule for ‘I’, which we could articulate as follows: the subject of the thought with this first-personal phenomenal feature. When the shopper makes the epiphanic judgment that his acceptance of ‘I am making a mess’ expresses, he is on this view judging a singular content, x is making a mess, with him assigned to x, and he is presupposing (in the indicated sense, i.e. as a background belief of his, relevant for the epistemic evaluation of the

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12 She considers this option after dismissing a possible appeal to the indexicality of “this”, which she argues entails the risk of leading to an infinite regress.

13 An analogy by Guillot is especially helpful here: “It seems quite plausible that a device of self-reference in a machine, for instance, could secure self-reference, and even necessary self-reference, while still falling short of super-reflexivity. A symbol in a computer can certainly stand for the computer itself (the little hard-drive icon on the computer’s desktop is one example), thus equipping it with simple reflexivity. [...] Yet does this amount to the system being aware of the relation of reflexivity itself?” (Guillot, 2016, p. 155)

judgment) another singular proposition about him, to the effect that he meets that condition.” (*Idem*)

It seems exactly as Guillot predicted: the token-reflexive rule (and the presuppositions involved), at the heart of the indexical model, guarantees reference, and so simple-reflexivity, but the phenomenological element is necessary to give the full picture, to guarantee super-reflexivity, the subject’s awareness that the thought is about himself.

How does a hybrid indexical approach, such as García-Carpintero’s, fare against Guillot’s problem of latching on to the correct thought? It can now overcome it, in virtue of exploiting the same phenomenal awareness the thinker has of his own thoughts as Guillot’s own phenomenal model. It can overcome it, then, precisely thanks to its inclusion of the phenomenological tier of the account.

A second worry Guillot raises against the indexical model has to do with the exclusivity of first-person thoughts; she observes, “Although anyone can think about me, no one can think of me in the way that I do when I use the I-concept” (Guillot, 2016, p. 141). The hybrid model’s only possibility of answering is by, once again, conjuring up the phenomenal ingredient: one is presumed to have a privileged access to his own phenomenal states. García-Carpintero points to this being a form of Frege and Perry’s limited accessibility doctrine, or, in other words, the abandoning of the traditional shareability feature of propositions.

One last issue that Guillot raises, and which she considers the most worrying, regards the complexity of the indexical model’s form of conceptual representation. As she puts it, “One might object that this commits the approach to an implausible form of intellectualism” (*Ibid*, p. 142), given the concepts related to thinkers and thoughts that it presupposes subjects must have. In answer to this, García-Carpintero quotes Stalnaker, “Most of what we presuppose is presupposed simply by not recognizing the possibilities in which the presuppositions are false. The explicit statement [...] is part of the theorist’s representation of the situation”<sup>14</sup>. I would object to this that presuppositions don’t appear to work this way in what García-Carpintero has said so far. In his framework, the presupposition was said to be some piece of background information (a background belief) that is relevant in making a given judgement. I believe this grants presuppositions a more “active” or “present” role in the framework than simply operating by ignoring certain possibilities. This latter option would amount to saying that an I-thought might acquire reference *via* a presupposition consisting in the subject’s ignoring all the possibilities in which he himself is not the referent, which I think sounds implausible. If anything, the presupposition involved in *de se* attitudes, that we meet the context, that we are the salient referent, when we utter ‘I’ or think an I-thought is plausible, primarily, due to its directness; something the ignorance form of a presupposition does not exhibit. Especially if, due to the account being two-tiered, this is then combined with the idea that the subject is consciously aware of the thoughts being about himself.

This last point leads me to a further observation regarding Guillot’s phenomenal model and the indexical model. Guillot raises the first two issues to show how attending to the phenomenology of *de se* attitudes is a necessary step in accounting for them; in other words, that the indexical model is not *sufficient* (unless it is a hybrid model that incorporates the aforementioned phenomenology). This last worry, however, was raised to show how it might not be *necessary* either (*Idem*). It is therefore worthwhile to consider the following possibility: might the phenomenal model not be enough to account for *de se* attitudes? Building on what was said before, the phenomenal model doesn’t just account nicely for the Thinker Intuition, as the indexical model might do,

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14 This is quoted from a talk by García-Carpintero, entitled “Token-reflexive Self-Concepts” (2019, The Metaphysics and Epistemology of the Self: What’s So Special about First-Person Thought?, Network University of Edinburgh).

“in using the I-concept, I can’t fail to be thinking of the thinker of this very thought, since the concept is designed to refer to the source of the present thinking. Furthermore, it does so through the direct phenomenal manifestation of that thinking. This enables the phenomenal model to explain The Thinker Intuition more fully, more economically and more plausibly than the indexical model does” (*Ibid*, p. 149)

The idea, then, is that the phenomenal model is all we need to explain *de se* attitudes. It’s a much simpler account than the indexical model because, as Guillot argues, it takes off from a phenomenology that the indexical model needs anyway, it then derives the first-person concept from there, “tapping the intuition that the concept’s anchoring into the characteristic experience of conscious thinking is essential to the way it works, and fleshing out the intuition by using the model of phenomenally-grounded concepts” (*Ibid*, p. 150). Therefore, she questions whether the indexical model has much more to add to the explanation. Moreover, due to the indexical model’s over-complexity, the phenomenal model seems more psychologically plausible. As Guillot puts it, it does not require the subject to grasp any complex descriptions, only “to be receptive to an *experience*” (*Idem*), the ordinary experience of thinking, at that. In any case, the question whether the phenomenal model is all it takes, or whether we need to supplement it with imports from the indexical model (or some other model not presently discussed) is an open question which I aimed to raise. More importantly, however, is the insight that, whether one favours the more simple approach of the phenomenal model, or the more complex form of the (hybrid) indexical model, an appeal to the phenomenology of *de se* thoughts is absolutely necessary in a general account of *de se* attitudes.

Finally, while one may be inclined to grant that Guillot’s phenomenal model has all the attributes that the indexical model has (albeit less economically), and maybe more, there is one final question I would like to raise with regard to the topic of communication. I have devoted part of this paper to showing how the mental file framework and the token-reflexive presuppositional account can deal, more or less successfully, with episodes of *de se* communication. But how would the phenomenal model account for it? I turn here to Guillot’s consideration of the, in my view, straightforwardly related objection that the phenomenal model has a much too narrow and minimal concept of the self to allow for more complex predications about oneself. Her answer: the concept of self can work as a repository of all sorts of information about oneself, originating from all sorts of different sources (proprioception, kinaesthesia, cognitive activity, etc.). She thus refers to Recanati’s mental file framework, and its operations of “linking” between files, when the information under different files co-refers. The self-concept, then, can work as a more basic or fundamental mental file, collecting information from other files that co-refer to oneself. From here, the story can proceed as Recanati tells it, with subjects deploying files about themselves in communicating *de se* thoughts, and exploiting the linguistic mode of presentation of the ‘I’ pronoun to constrain the hearers’ own deployment of files, or as Maier (and maybe García-Carpintero) tells it, where the self-file is mapped directly onto the first-person pronoun and which triggers a presupposition in the hearer to refer to the speaker. I would add that the phenomenal model’s import does not simply precede or combine with these latter frameworks for communication, but actually fills in an important gap: that of accounting for the speaker’s primitive and special form of access to himself which ultimately leads him to produce thoughts and utter sentences with the pronoun ‘I’. In conclusion, to ignore the phenomenology of *de se* thoughts, both in their production and later communication, is to leave the gap wide open.

## 4. CONCLUSION

In this paper I aimed to defend one basic idea: that one must attend to the phenomenology of *de se* attitudes if one aims to give a full picture of their nature. I began by presenting, at some length, some of the main proposals that have been developed in order to account for these very special attitudes.

Starting with Perry's state view, which takes propositions to be composed of two objects (content and states, the latter constituting the way in which we access the former, and which accounts for the indexicality involved in the *de se*), then moving on to Lewis' alternative property view, which takes any singular attitude to be fundamentally *de se* (that is, a self-ascription of a property, in a centred-world apparatus), and finally moving on to three, somewhat more sophisticated proposals: Recanati's mental file framework, García-Carpintero's two-tiered token-reflexive presuppositional account, and Guillot's phenomenal model.

Recanati's account appears well-suited to handle the communication problem raised by Stalnaker in his criticism of Perry and Lewis' accounts. It essentially involves distinguishing the psychological mode of presentation (a deployment of a mental file by a subject, an elaboration of Frege's senses and Perry's belief-state component), from the linguistic mode of presentation (a feature of a linguistic expression which constrains the participants of a communicative episode in their deployment of mental files). Communication, and communication of *de se* attitudes, more specifically, consists in the coordination of thoughts (at the level of the mental files involved) and the convergence on the referent. Recanati thus rejects the Naïve Conception of Communication, which took communication to be replication of thoughts, and which he deems unsuccessful when it comes to attitudes involving indexicals.

García-Carpintero appeals to mental presuppositions (construed as relevant background beliefs), analogous to linguistic presuppositions in the common ground between speakers, to explain the cognitive significance of Perry's belief-states. A subject who entertains a *de se* thought presupposes that the person of whom he is predicating something is the thinker of that very judgement, *i.e.* himself; the thought acquires reference through the mechanism of presupposition. In the context of García-Carpintero's account, I presented Maier's Discourse Representation Theory apparatus of asymmetrical communication to deal with the communication of *de se* attitudes, as he considers it compatible with his own account, and given that he does not explicitly present a complete framework for such communication. I then raised some worries both with Maier's model and the supposed compatibility between the two frameworks.

Finally, displeased with the indexical model for several reasons, Guillot follows a completely different strategy to account for the Thinker Intuition, the idea that to think of oneself *as oneself* is not just to think a thought that has oneself as the referent (simple-reflexivity), but to also be aware that oneself is the subject of the thought (super-reflexivity). She takes cognitive phenomenology, the experience involved in thinking, as the starting point. The I-concept, she argues, is grounded in a such experience; it is of a special class of concepts, a phenomenal-appearance concept. This accounts for the way in which we are presented to ourselves in thought, as the subject experiencing said thought.

My discussion of said model had me compare it with the indexical model. Guillot considers her model to be more complete and economical to the indexical model. While this question might still be open, the main claim underlies it: whatever the model one favours, it must include an appeal to the phenomenology of *de se* attitudes if it is attempting to deliver a full picture of the phenomenon.

The phenomenal model takes this observation at its core, the hybrid indexical model includes it as one ingredient of the account. Even in the discussion of the communication problem, the phenomenology of *de se* attitudes rears its head, when one appeals to the “special” or “primitive” way in which subjects are presented to themselves in thought in order to explain the communication of such thoughts through the use of the first-person pronoun ‘I’.

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